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THE LADY OF FORT ST. JOHN.

IV.

THE WIDOW ANTONIA.

ANTONIA sat in tense quiet, though whitened even across the lips, where all the color of her face usually appeared; and a stalwart and courtly man presented himself in the hall. Some of the best blood of the Dutch republic had evidently gone to his making. He had the vital and reliable presence of a master in affairs, and his clean-shaven face had firm mouth-*corners*. Marie rose up without pause to meet him. He was freshly and carefully dressed in clothes carried for this purpose across the wilderness, and gained favor even with Lady Dorinda, as a man bearing about him in the New World the atmosphere of Europe. He made his greeting in French, and explained that he was passing through Acadia on a journey to Montreal.

"We stand much beholden to *monsieur*," said Marie, with a quizzical face, "that he should travel so many hundred leagues out of his way to visit this poor fort. I have heard that the usual route to Montreal is that short, direct one up the lake of Champlain."

Van Corlaer's smile rested openly on Antonia as he answered, "Madame, a man's most direct route is the one that leads to his object."

"Doubtless, *monsieur*; and you are very welcome to this fort. We have cause to love the New Netherlanders."

Marie turned to deliver Antonia her

guest, but Antonia stood without word or look for him. She seemed a scared Dutch child, bending all her strength and all her inherited quiet on maintaining self-control. He approached her, searching her face with his near-sighted large eyes.

"Had Madame Bronck no expectation of seeing Arendt Van Corlaer in Acadia?"

"No, *mynheer*," whispered Antonia.

"But, since I have come, have you nothing to say to me?"

"I hope I see you well, *mynheer*."

"You might see me well," reproached Van Corlaer, "if you would look at me."

She lifted her eyes, and dropped them again.

"This Acadian air has given you a wan color," he noted.

"Did you leave Teunis and Marytje Harmentse well?" quavered Antonia, catching at any scrap.

Van Corlaer stared, and answered that Teunis and Marytje were well, and would be grateful to her for inquiring.

"For they also helped to hide this priest from the Mohawks," added Antonia, without coherence. Marie could hear her heart laboring.

"What priest?" inquired Van Corlaer, and as he looked around his eyes fell on the cassocked figure at the other table.

"Monsieur Corlaer," spoke Father Jogues, "I was but waiting fit opportunity to recall myself and your blessed charity to your memory."

Van Corlaer's baffled look changed to instant glad recognition.

"That is Father Jogues!"

He met the priest with both hands, and stood head and shoulders taller while they held each other like brothers.

"I thought to find you in Montreal, Father Jogues, and not here, where in my dim fashion I could mistake you for the chaplain of the fort."

"Monsieur Corlaer, I have not forgotten one look of yours. I was a great trouble to you, with my wounds and my hiding and fever. And what pains you took to put me on board the ship in the night! It would be better indeed to see me at Montreal than ever in such plight again at Fort Orange, Monsieur Corlaer."

"Glad would we be to have you at Fort Orange again, without pain to yourself, Father Jogues."

"And how is my friend who so much enjoyed disputing about religion?"

"Our dominie is well, and sent by my hand a hearty greeting to that very learned scholar Father Jogues. We heard you had come back from France."

Van Corlaer dropped one hand on the *donné's* shoulder and leaned down to examine his smiling face.

"It is my brother Lalande, the *donné* of this present mission," said the priest.

"My young monsieur," returned Van Corlaer, "keep Father Jogues out of the Mohawks' mouths henceforth. They have really no stomach for religion, though they will eat saints. It often puzzles a Dutchman to handle that Iroquois nation."

"Our lives are not our own," said the young Frenchman.

"We must bear the truth, whether it be received or not," added Father Jogues.

"Whatever errand brought you into Acadia," said Van Corlaer, turning back to the priest, "I am glad to find you here, for I shall now have your company back to Montreal."

"Impossible, Monsieur Corlaer, for I have set out to plant a mission among the Abenakis. They asked for a missionary. Our guides deserted us, and we have wandered off our course, and been obliged to throw away nearly all the furniture of our mission. But we now hope to make our way along the coast."

"Father Jogues, the Abenakis are all gone northward. We passed through their towns on the Penobscot."

"But they will come back?"

"Some time, though no man at Penobscot would be able to say when."

Father Jogues's perplexed brows drew together. Wanderings, hunger, and imprisonment he could bear serenely, as incidents of his journey; but to have his flock scattered before he could reach it was real calamity.

"We must make shift to follow them," he declared.

"How will you follow them without supplies, and without knowing where they may turn in the woods?"

"I see we shall have to wait for them at Penobscot," said Father Jogues.

"Take a heretic's advice instead; for I speak not as the enemy of your religion when I urge you to journey with me back to Montreal. You can make another and better start to establish this mission."

The priest shook his head. "I do not see my way; but my way will be shown to me, or word will come sending me back."

Some sign from the lady of the fortress recalled Van Corlaer to his duty as a guest. The supper grew cold while he parleyed. So he turned quickly to take the chair she had set for him, and saw that Antonia was gone.

"Madame Bronck will return," said Marie, pitying his chagrin, and searching her own mind for Antonia's excuse. "We brought a half-starved baby home from our last expedition, and it lies dead upstairs. Women have soft hearts,

monsieur; they cannot see such sights unmoved. She hath lost command of herself to-night."

Van Corlaer's face lightened with tenderness. Bachelor though he was, he had held infants in his hands for baptism, and not only the children of Fort Orange, but dark broods of the Mohawks, often rubbed about his knees.

"You brought your men into the fort, Monsieur Corlaer?"

"No, madame. I sent them back to camp by the falls. We are well provisioned. There was no need for them to come within the walls."

"If you lack anything, I hope you will command it of us."

"Madame, you are already too bounteous, and we lack nothing."

"The Sieur de la Tour being away, the conduct and honor of this fort are left in my hands. He has ever been friendly to the people of the colonies."

"That is well known, madame."

Soft waxlight, the ample shine of the fire, trained service, housing from the chill spring night, and abundant food and flask, all failed to bring up the spirits of Van Corlaer. Antonia did not return to the table. The servingmen went and came betwixt hall and cook-house. Every time one of them opened the door the world of darkness peered in, and over the night quiet of the fort could be heard the tidal up-rush of the river.

"The men can now bring our ship to anchor," observed Marie.

Father Jogues and his *donné*, eating with the habitual self-denial of men who must inure themselves to hunger, still spoke with Van Corlaer about their mission; but during all his talk he furtively watched the stairway.

The dwarf sat on her accustomed stool beside her lady, picking up bits from a well-heaped silver platter on her knees; and she watched Van Corlaer's discomfiture when Lady Dorinda took him in hand and Antonia yet remained away.

V.

JONAS BRONCK'S HAND.

The guests had deserted the hall fire and a sentinel was set for the night before Madame La Tour knocked at Antonia's door.

Antonia was slow to open it. But she finally let Marie into her chamber, where the fire had died on the hearth, and retired again behind the screen to continue dabbing her face with water. The candle was also behind the screen, and it threw out Antonia's shadow, and showed her disordered flax-white hair flung free of its cap and falling to its length. Marie sat down in the little world of shadow outside the screen. The joists directly above Antonia flickered with the flickering light. One window high in the wall showed the misty darkness which lay upon Fundy Bay. The room was chilly.

"Monsieur Corlaer is gone, Antonia," said Marie.

Antonia's shadow leaped, magnifying the young Dutchwoman's start.

"Madame, you have not sent him off on his journey in the night?"

"I sent him not. I begged him to remain. But he had such cold welcome from his own countrywoman that he chose the woods rather than the hospitality of Fort St. John."

Much as Antonia stirred and clinked flasks, her sobs grew audible behind the screen. She ran out with her arms extended, and threw herself on the floor at Marie's knees, transformed by anguish. Marie in full compassion drew the girlish creature to her breast, repenting herself while Antonia wept and shook.

"I was cruel to say Monsieur Corlaer is gone. He has only left the fortress to camp with his men at the falls. He will be here two more days, and to-morrow you must urge him to stay our guest."

"Madame, I dare not see him at all!"

"But why should you not see Monsieur Corlaer?"

Antonia settled to the floor, resting her head and arms on her friend's lap.

"For you love him."

"Oh, madame, I did not show that I loved him? No. It would be horrible for me to love him."

"What has he done? It is plain he has come to court you."

"He has long courted me, madame."

"And you met him as a stranger, and fled from him as a wolf, — this Hollandais gentleman who hath saved our French people, even priests, from the savages!"

"All New Amsterdam and Fort Orange hold him in esteem," said Antonia, betraying pride. "I have heard he can do more with the Iroquois tribes than any other man of the New World." She uselessly wiped her eyes. She was weak from long crying.

"Then why do you run from him?"

"Because he hath too witching a power on me, madame. I cannot spin or knit or sew when he is by; I must needs watch every motion of his if he once fastens my eyes."

"I have noticed he draws one's heart," laughed Marie.

"He does. It is like witchcraft. He sets me afloat so that I lose my feet and have scarce any will of my own. I never was so disturbed by my husband, Jonas Bronck," complained Antonia.

"Did you love your husband?" inquired Marie.

"We always love our husbands, madame. Mynheer Bronck was very good to me."

"You have never told me much of Monsieur Bronck, Antonia."

"I don't like to speak of him now, madame. It makes me shiver."

"You are not afraid of the dead?"

"I was never afraid of him living. I regarded him as a father."

"But one's husband is not to be regarded as a father."

"He was old enough to be my father, madame. I was not more than sixteen, besides being an orphan, and Mynheer Bronck was above fifty; yet he married me, and became the best husband in the colony. He was far from putting me in such states as Mynheer Van Corlaer does."

"The difference is that you love Monsieur Corlaer."

"Do not speak that word, madame."

"Would you have him marry another woman?"

"Yes," spoke Antonia in a stoical voice, "if that pleased him best. I should then be driven to no more voyages. He followed me to New Amsterdam; and I ventured on a long journey to Boston, where I had kinspeople, as you know. But there I must have broken down, madame, if I had not met you. It was fortunate for me that the English captain brought you out of your course, for mynheer set out to follow me there. And now he has come across the wilderness even to this fort."

"Confess," said Marie, giving her a little shake, "how pleased you are with such a determined lover."

But instead of doing this, Antonia burst again into frenzied sobbing, and hugged her comforter.

"Oh, madame, you are the only person I dare love in the world!"

Marie smoothed the young widow's damp hair with the quieting stroke which calms children.

"Let mother help thee," she said; and neither of them remembered that she was scarcely as old as Antonia. In love and motherhood, in military peril and contact with riper civilizations, to say nothing of inherited experience, the lady of St. John had lived far beyond Antonia Bronck.

"Your husband made you take an oath not to wed again, — is it so?"

"No, madame, he never did."

"Yet you told me he left you his money?"

"Yes. He was very good to me, for I had neither father nor mother."

"And he bound you by no promise?"

"None at all, madame."

"What then can you find to break your heart upon in the suit of Monsieur Corlaer? You are free; even as my lord, if I were dead, would be free to marry any one, not excepting D'Aulnay's widow." Marie smiled at that improbable union.

"No, I do not feel free." Antonia shivered close to her friend's knees. "Madame, I cannot tell you; but I will show you the token."

"Show me the token, therefore. A sound token it must be, to hold you wedded to a dead man whom in life you regarded as a father."

Antonia rose upon her feet, but stood dreading the task before her.

"I have to look at it once every month," she explained, "and I have looked at it once this month already."

The dim, chill room, with its one eye fixed on darkness, was an eddy in which a single human mind resisted that century's current of superstition. Marie sat ready to judge and destroy whatever spell the cunning old Hollandais had left on a girl to whom he represented law and family.

Antonia beckoned her behind the screen, and took from some ready hiding-place a small oak box studded with nails, which Marie had never before seen. How alien to the simple and open life of the Dutch widow was this secret coffer! Her face changed while she looked at it; grieved girlhood passed into sunken age. Her lips turned wax-white, and drooped at the corners. She set the box on a dressing-table, beside the candle, unlocked it and turned back the lid. Marie was repelled by a faint odor aside from its breath of dead spices.

Antonia unfolded a linen cloth and showed a pallid human hand, its stump concealed by a napkin. It was cun-

ningly preserved, and shrunken only by the countless lines which denote approaching age. It was the right hand of a man who must have had imagination. The fingers were sensitively slim, with shapely blue nails, and without knobs or swollen joints. It was a crafty, firm-possessing hand, ready to spring from its nest to seize and eternally hold you.

The lady of St. John had seen human fragments scattered by cannon, and sword and bullet had done their work before her sight; but a faintness beyond the touch of peril made her grasp the table and turn from that ghastly hand.

"It cannot be, Antonia" —

"Yes, it is Mynheer Bronck's hand," whispered Antonia, subduing herself to take admonition from the grim digits.

"Lock it up, and come directly away from it. Come out of this room. You have opened a grave here."

VI.

THE MENDING.

But Antonia delayed to set in order her hair and cap. When Jonas Bronck's hand was snugly locked in its case and no longer obliged her to look at it, she took a pensive pleasure in the relic, bred of usage to its company. She came out of her chamber erect and calm. Marie was at the stairs, speaking to the soldier stationed in the hall below. He had just piled up his fire, and its homely splendor sent back to remoteness all human dreads. He hurried up the stairway to his lady.

"Go knock at the door of the priest Father Jogues and demand his cassock," she said.

The man halted, and asked, "What shall I do with it?"

"Bring it hither to me."

"But if he refuse to have it brought?"

"The good man will not refuse. Yet

if he ask why," returned Madame La Tour, smiling, "tell him it is the custom of the house to take away at night the cassock of any priest who stays here."

"Yes, madame."

The soldier kept to himself his opinion of meddling with black gowns, and after some parleying at the door of Father Jogues's apartment received the garment and brought it to his lady.

"We will take our needles and sit by the hall fire," said Marie to Antonia. "Did you note the raggedness of Father Jogues's cassock? I am an enemy to papists, especially D'Aulnay de Charnisay; but who can harden her heart against a saint because he patters prayers on a rosary? Thou and I will mend his black gown. I cannot see even a transient member of my household uncomfortable."

The soldier put two waxlights on the table by the hearth, and withdrew to the stairway. He was there to guard as prisoner the priest for whom his lady set herself to work. She drew her chair to Antonia's, and they spread the cassock between them. It had been neatly beaten and picked clear of burs, but the rents in it were astonishing. Even within the sumptuous fireshine the black cloth taxed sight; and Marie paused sometimes to curtain her eyes with her hand, but Antonia worked on with Dutch steadiness. The touch of a needle within a woman's fingers cools all her fevers. She stitches herself fast to the race. There are safety and saneness in needlework.

"This spot wants a patch," remarked Antonia.

"Weave it together with stitches," said Marie. "Daughter of presumption! would you add to the gown of a Roman priest?"

"Priest or dominie," commented Antonia, biting a fresh thread, "he would be none the worse for a stout piece of cloth to his garment."

"But we have naught to match with

it. I should like to set in a little heresy cut from one of the Sieur de la Tour's good Huguenot doublets."

The girlish faces, bent over the work, grew placid with domestic interest. Marie's cheeks ripened by the fire, but the whiter Hollandaise warmed only through the lips. The hall's glow made more endurable the image of Jonas Bronck's hand.

"When was it cut off?" murmured Marie, stopping to thread a needle.

The perceptible blight again fell over Antonia's face, as she replied, "After he had been one day dead."

"Then he did not grimly lop it off himself?"

"Oh, no," whispered Antonia, with deep sighing. "Mynheer the doctor did that, on his oath to my husband. He was the most learned, cunning man in medicine that ever came to our colony. He kept the hand a month in his furnace before it was ready to send to me."

"Did Monsieur Bronck, before he died, tell you his intention to do this?" pressed Marie, feeling less interest in the Dutch embalmer's method than in the sinuous motive of a man who could leave such a bequest.

"Yes, madame."

"I do marvel at such an act," said the lady of St. John, challenging Jonas Bronck's loyal widow to take up his instant defense.

"Madame, he was obliged to do it by a dream he had."

"He dreamed that his hand would keep off intruders?" smiled Marie.

"Yes," responded Antonia innocently, "and all manner of evil fortune. I have to look at it once a month as long as I live, and carry it with me everywhere. If it should be lost or destroyed, trouble and ruin would fall not only on me, but on every one who loved me."

The woman of larger knowledge did not argue against this credulity. Antonia was of the provinces, bred out of

their darkest hours of superstition and savage danger. But it was easy to see how Jonas Bronck's hand must hold his widow from a second marriage. What lover could she ask to share her monthly gaze upon it, and thus half realize the continued fleshly existence of Jonas Bronck? The rite was in its nature a secret one. Shame, gratitude, the former usages of her life, and a thousand other influences were yet in the grip of that rigid hand. If she lost or destroyed it, nameless and weird calamity, foreseen by a dying man, must light upon the very lover who undertook to separate her from her ghastly company.

"The crafty old Hollandais!" reflected Marie. "He was cunning in his knowledge of Antonia. But he hath made up this fist at a younger Hollandais who will scarce stop for dead hands."

The Dutch gentlewoman snuffed both waxlights. Her lips were drawn in grieved lines. Marie glanced up at one of the portraits on the wall, and said:—

"The agonies which men inflict on the beings they love best must occasion perpetual astonishment in heaven. Look at the Sieur Claude de la Tour, a noble of France, who could stoop to become the first English knight of Acadia, forcing his own son to take up arms against him."

The elder La Tour frowned and flickered in his frame.

"Yet he had a gracious presence," said Antonia. "Lady Dorinda says he was the handsomest man at the English court."

"I doubt it not; the La Tours are a beautiful race. It was that very graciousness which made him a weak prisoner in the hands of the English. They married him to one of the queen's ladies, and granted him all Acadia, and he had only to demand from his son that he should turn it over to England and declare himself an English

subject. I can yet see his ships as they rounded Cape Sable, and the face of my lord when he read his father's summons to surrender the claims of France. We were to be loaded with honors. France had driven us out on account of our faith; England opened her arms. We should be enriched, and live forever a happy and united family, sole lords of Acadia."

Marie broke off another thread.

"The king of France, who has outlawed my husband and delivered him to his enemy, should have seen him then, Antonia. Sieur Claude La Tour put both arms around him and pleaded. It was, 'My little Charles, do not disgrace me by refusal;' and 'My father, I love you, but here I represent the rights of France.' 'The king of France is no friend of ours,' says Sieur Claude. 'Whether he rewards or punishes me,' says Charles, 'this province belongs to my country, and I will hold it while I have life to defend it.' And he was obliged to turn his cannon against his own father; and the ships were disabled and driven off."

"Was the old mynheer killed?"

"His pride was killed. He could never hold up his head in England again, and he had betrayed France. My lord built him a house outside our fort, yet neither could he endure Acadia. He died in England. You know I brought his widow thence with me last year. She should have her dower of lands here, if we can hold them against D'Aulnay de Charnisay."

The lady of the fort shook out Father Jogues's cassock and rose from the mending. Antonia picked up their implements, and flicked bits of thread from her skirt.

"I am glad it is done, madame, for you look heavy-eyed, as any one ought after tossing two nights on Fundy Bay, and sewing on a black gown until midnight cockcrow of the third."

"I am not now fit to face a siege," owned Marie. "We must get to bed;

though first I crave one more look at the dead baby Zélie hath in charge. There is a soft weakness in me which mothers even the outcast young of my enemy."

VII.

A FRONTIER GRAVEYARD.

The next morning was gray and transparent; a hemisphere of mist filled with light; a world of vapor palpitating with some indwelling spirit. That lonesome lap of country opposite Fort St. John could scarcely be defined. Scraps of its dawning spring color showed through the mobile winding and ascending veil. Trees rose out of the lowlands between the fort and the falls.

Van Corlaer was in the gorge, watching that miracle worked every day in St. John River. The tide was racing inland. The steep rapids within their throat of rock were clear of fog. Foam is the flower of water; and white petal after white petal was swept under by the driving waves. As the tide rose the tumult of falls ceased. The channel filled. All rocks were drowned. For a brief time another ship could have passed up that natural lock, as La Tour's ship had passed on the cream-smooth current at flood tide the day before.

Van Corlaer could not see its ragged sails around the breast of rock, but the hammering of its repairers had been in his ears since dawn; and through the subsiding wash of water he now heard men's voices.

The Indians whose village he had joined were that morning breaking up camp, to begin their spring pilgrimage down the coast along various fishing-haunts; for agriculture was a thing unknown to these savages. They were a seafaring people in canoes. At that time invading Europeans had gained little mastery of the soil. Camp and fortress were on the same side of the

river. Lounging braves watched indifferently some figures wading through the fog from the fort; perhaps bringing them a farewell word, perhaps forbidding their departure. The Indian often humored his invader's feudal airs, but he never owned the mastery of any white man. Squaws took down cone-shaped tents, while their half-naked babies sprawled in play upon the ashes of last winter's fires. Van Corlaer's men sauntered through the vanishing town, trying at times to strike some spark of information from Dutch and Etehemian jargon.

Near the river bank, between camp and fort, was an alluvial spot in which the shovel found no rock. A rough line of piled stones severed it from surrounding lands, and a few trees stood there, promising summer shade, though, darkly moist along every budded twig, they now swayed in tuneless nakedness. Here the dead of Fort St. John were buried; and those approaching figures entered a gap of the inclosure instead of going on to the camp. Three of La Tour's soldiers, with Father Jogues and his *donné*, had come to bury the outcast baby. One of the men was Zélie's husband, and she walked beside him. Marguerite lay sulking in the barracks. The lady had asked Father Jogues to consecrate with the rites of his church the burial of this little victim, probably born into his faith. But he would have followed it in any case, with that instinct which impelled him to baptize dying Indian children with raindrops, and to attempt to pluck converts from the tortures of the stake.

"Has this child been baptized?" he inquired of Zélie, on the path down from the fort.

She answered, shedding tears of resentment against Marguerite, and with fervor she could not restrain: "I'll warrant *mé* it never had so much as a drop of water on its head, and but little to its body, before my lady took it."

"But hath it not believing parents?"

"Our Swiss says," stated Zélie, with a respectful heretic's sparing of this priest, "that it is the child of D'Aulnay de Charnisay." And she added no comment.

The soldiers set their spades to last year's sod, cut an oblong wound, and soon had the earth heaped out and a grave made. Father Jogues, perplexed, and heavy of heart for the sins of his enlightened as well as his savage children, concluded to consecrate the baby's bed. The Huguenot soldiers stood sullenly by while a Romish service went on. They or their fathers had been driven out of France by the bitterness of that very religion which Father Jogues expressed in sweetness. They had not the broad sympathy of their lady, who could excuse and even stoop to mend a priest's cassock; and they made their pause as brief as possible.

While the spat and clink of spades built up one child's hillock, Zélie was on her knees beside another, some distance from it, scraping away dead leaves. Her lady had bid her look how this grave fared, and she noticed fondly that fern was beginning to curl above the buried lad's head. The heir of the La Tours lay with his feet toward the outcast of the Charnisays, but this was a chance arrangement. Soldiers and servants of the house were scattered about the frontier burial ground, and Zélie noted to report to her lady that winter had partly effaced and driven below the surface some recent graves. Instead of being marked by a cross, each earthen door had a narrow frame of river stones built around it.

Van Corlaer left the drowned falls and passed his own tents, and waited outside the knee-high inclosure for Father Jogues. The missionary, in his usual halo of prayer, dwelt upon the open breviary. Many a tree along the Mohawk Valley yet bore the name

"Jesu" which he had carved in its bark, as well as rude crosses. Such marks helped him to turn the woods into one wide oratory. But unconverted savages, tearing with their teeth the hands lifted up in supplication for them, had scarcely taxed his heart as heretics and sinful believers taxed it now. The soldiers, having finished, took up their tools, and Van Corlaer joined the priest as the party came out of the cemetery.

The day was brightening. Some sea birds were spreading their white breasts and wing-linings like flashes of silver against shifting vapor. The party descended to a wrinkle in the land which would be dry at ebb tide. Now it held a stream flowing inland upon grass, — unshriveled long grass bowed flat and sleeked to this daily service. It gave beholders a delicious sensation to see the clean water rushing up so verdant a course. A log, which would seem a misplaced and useless footbridge when the tide was out, was crossed by one after another; and as Van Corlaer fell back to step beside Father Jogues, he said: —

"The Abenakis take to the woods and desert their fishing, and these Etchemins leave the woods and take to the coast. You never know where to have your savage. Did you note that the village was moving?"

"Yes, I saw that, Monsieur Corlaer; and I must now take leave of the lady of the fort and join myself to them."

"If you do, you will give deep offense to La Tour," said the Dutchman, pushing back some strands of light hair which had fallen over his forehead, and turning his great near-sighted eyes on his friend. "These Indians are called Protestant. They are in La Tour's grant. Thou knowest that he and D'Aulnay de Charnisay have enough to quarrel about without drawing churchmen into their broil."

Father Jogues trod on gently. He knew he could not travel with any benighted soul and not try to convert it.

These poor Etchemins appealed to his conscience; but so did the gracious lady of the fort. "If I could mend the rents in her faith," he sighed, "as she hath mended the rents in my cassock!"

Two of the soldiers turned aside with their spades to a slope behind the fortress, where there was a stable for the ponies and horned cattle, and where last year's garden beds lay blackened under last year's refuse growth. Having planted the immortal seed, their next duty was to prepare for the trivial resurrections of the summer. Frenchmen love green messes in their soup. The garden might be trampled by besiegers, but there were other chances that it would yield something. Zélie's husband climbed the height to escort the priest and report to his lady, but he had his wife to chatter beside him. Father Jogues's *donné* walked behind Van Corlaer, and he alone overheard the Dutchman's talk.

"This lady of Fort St. John, Father Jogues, so housed, and so ground between the millstones of La Tour and D'Aulnay, she hath wrought up my mind until I could not forbear this journey. It is well known through the colonies that La Tour can no longer get help, and is outlawed by his king. This fortress will be sacked. La Tour would best stay at home to defend his own. But what can any other man do? I am here to defend my own; and I will take it and defend it."

Van Corlaer looked up at the walls, and his chest swelled with a large breath of regret.

"God knoweth why so sweet a lady is set here to bear the brunts of a frontier fortress, where no man can aid her without espousing her husband's quarrel, while hundreds of evil women degrade the courts of Europe. But I can only do mine errand and go. And you will best mend your own expedition at this time by a new start from Montreal, Father Jogues."

The priest turned around on the ascent and looked toward the vanishing Indian camp. He was examining as self-indulgence his strong and gentlemanly desire not to involve Madame La Tour in further troubles by proselyting her people.

"Whatever way is pointed out to me, Monsieur Corlaer," he answered, "that way I must take. For the mending of an expedition rests not in the hands of the poor instrument that attempts it."

Their soldier signaled for the gates to be opened, and they entered the fort. Marie was on her morning round of inspection. She had just given back to a guard the key of the powder magazine. Well, store-house, fuel-house, barracks, were in military readiness. But refuse stuff had been thrown in spots which her people were now severely cleaning. She greeted her returning guests, and heard the report of Zélie's husband. A lace mantle was drawn over her head and fastened under the chin, throwing out from its blackness the warm brown beauty of her face.

"So our Indians are leaving the falls already?" she repeated, fixing Zélie's husband with a serious eye.

"Yes, madame," witnessed Zélie.

"I myself saw women packing tents."

"Have they heard any rumor which scared them off early, — our good, lazy Etchemins, who hate fighting?"

"No, madame," Van Corlaer answered, being the only person who came directly from the camp, "I think not, though their language is not clear to me like our western tongues. It is simply an early spring calling them out."

"They have always waited until Pâques week heretofore," she remembered. But the wandering forth of an irresponsible village had little to do with the state of her fort. She was going on the walls to look at the cannon, and asked her guests to go with her.

The priest and his *donné* and Van Corlaer ascended a ladder, and Madame La Tour followed.

"I do not often climb like a sailor," she said, when Van Corlaer gave her his hand at the top. "There is a flight of steps from mine own chamber to the level of the walls; and here Madame Bronck and I have taken the air on winter days when we felt sure of its not blowing us away. But you need not look sad over our pleasures, *monsieur*. We have had many a sally out of this fort, and *monsieur* the priest will tell you there is great freedom on snowshoes."

"Madame Bronck has allowed herself little freedom since I came to Fort St. John," observed Van Corlaer.

They all walked the walls from bastion to bastion, and Marie examined the guns and spoke with her soldiers. On the way back, Father Jogues and Lalonde paused to watch the Etchemins trail away, and to commune on what their duty directed them to do. Marie walked on with Van Corlaer toward the towered bastion, talking quickly, and ungloving her right hand to help his imagination with it. A bar of sunlight rested with a long slant through vapor on the fortress. Far blue distances were opened on the bay. The rippling full river had already begun to subside, and sink line by line from its island. Van Corlaer gave no attention to the beautiful world. He listened to Madame La Tour with a broadening humorous face, and the invincible port of a man who knows nothing of defeat. The sentinel trod back and forth without disturbing this intent conference, but other feet came rushing up the stone steps which led from Marie's room to the level of the wall.

"Madame! madame!" exclaimed Antonia Bronck; but her flaxen head was arrested in ascent beside Van Corlaer's feet, and her distressed eyes met in his a whimsical look which stung her through with suspicion and resentment.

VIII.

VAN CORLAER.

"What is it, Antonia?" demanded Marie.

"Madame, it is nothing."

Antonia owned her suitor's baring of his head, and turned upon the stairs.

"But some alarm drove you out." Marie leaned over the cell inclosing the stone steps. It was not easy to judge from Antonia's erect bearing what had so startled her. Her friend followed her to the door below, and the voices of the two women hummed indistinctly in that vaultlike hollow.

"You have told him!" accused Antonia directly. "He is laughing about Mynheer Bronck's hand!"

"He does take a cheerful view of the matter," conceded the lady of the fort.

Antonia looked at her with all the asperity which could be expressed in a fair Dutch face. "As long as I kept my trouble to myself I could bear it; but I show it to another and the worst befalls me."

"Is that hand lost, Antonia?"

"I cannot find it, or even the box which held it."

"Never accuse me with your eye," said Marie, with droll pathos. "If it were lost or destroyed by accident, I could bear without a groan to see you so bereaved. But the slightest thing shall not be filched in Fort St. John. When did you first miss it?"

"A half hour since. I left the box on my table last night instead of replacing it in my chest, being so disturbed."

"Every room shall be searched," declared Marie. "Where is Le Rosignol?"

"She went after breakfast to call her swan to the fort."

"I saw her not. And I have neglected to send her to the turret for her punishment. That little creature has

a magpie's fondness for plunder. Perhaps she has carried off your box. I will send for her."

Marie left the room. Antonia lingered to glance through a small square pane in the door, — an eye which the commandants of the fort kept on their battlements. It had an inner tapestry, but this remained as Marie had pushed it aside that morning to take her early look at the walls. Van Corlaer was waiting on the steps, and as he detected Antonia in the guilty act of peeping at him his compelling voice reached her in Dutch. She returned into the small stone cell formed by the stairs, and closed the door, submitting defiantly to the interview.

"Will you sit here?" suggested Van Corlaer, taking off his cloak, and making for her a cushion upon the stone.

Antonia reflected that he would be chilly, and therefore hold brief talk, so she made no objection, and sat down on one end of the step, while he sat down on the other. They spoke Dutch; with their formal French fell away the formal phases of this meeting in Acadia. The sentinel's walk moved almost overhead, and died away along the wall, and returned again, but noises within the fort scarcely intruded to their rocky cell. They did not hear even the voices of Lalande and Father Jogues descending the ladder.

"We have never had any satisfactory talk together, Antonia," began Van Corlaer.

"No, mynheer," breathed the girl'sh relict of Bronck, feeling her heart labor as she faced his eyes.

"It is hard for a man to speak his mind to you."

"It hath seemed easy enough for Mynheer Van Corlaer, seeing how many times he hath done so," observed Antonia, drawing her mufflings around her neck.

"No. I speak always with such folly that you will not hear me. It is not so when I talk among men or work

on the minds of savages. Let us now begin reasonably. I do believe you like me, Antonia."

"A most reasonable beginning," observed Antonia, biting her lips.

"Now I am a man in the stress and fury of mid-life, hard to turn from my purpose, and you well know my purpose. Your denials and puttings-off and flights have pleased me. But your own safety may waste no more good time in further play. I have not come into Acadia to tinkle a song under your window, but to wed you and carry you back to Fort Orange with me."

Antonia stirred, to hide her trembling.

"Are you cold?" inquired Van Corlaer.

"No, mynheer."

"If the air chills you, I will warm your hands in mine."

"My hands are well muffled, mynheer."

He adjusted his back against the wall, and again opened the conversation.

"I brought a young dominie with me. He wished to see Montreal. And I took care he should have with him such papers as might be necessary to the marriage."

"He had best get my leave," observed Madame Bronck.

"That is no part of his duty. But set your mind at rest; he is a young dominie of credit. When I was in Boston I saw a rich sedan chair made for the viceroy of Mexico, but brought to the colonies for sale. It put a thought in my head, and I set skilled fellows to work, and they made, and we have carried through the woods, the smallest, most cunning-fashioned sedan chair that woman ever stepped into. I brought it for the comfortable journeying of Madame Van Corlaer."

"That unknown lady will have much satisfaction in it," murmured Antonia.

"I hope so; and be better known than she was as Jonas Bronck's wife."

She colored, but hid a smile within

her muffings. Her good-humored suit-or leaned toward her, resting his arms upon his knees.

"Touching a matter which has never been mentioned between us, — was the curing of Bronck's hand well approved by you?"

"Mynheer, I am angry at Madame La Tour. Or did he," gasped Antonia, not daring to accuse by name the colonial doctor who had managed her dark secret, — "did he show that to you?"

"Would the boldest chemist out of Amsterdam cut off and salt the member of any honest burgher without leave of the patroon?" suggested Van Corlaer. "Besides, my skill was needed, for I was once learned in chemistry."

It was so surprising to see this man override her terror that Antonia stared at him.

"Mynheer, had you no dread of the sight?"

"No; and had I known you would dread it, the hand had spoiled in the curing. I thought the less of Jonas Bronck that he could bequeath a morsel of himself like dried venison."

"Mynheer Bronck was a very good man," asserted Antonia severely.

"But thou knowest in thy heart that I am a better one," laughed Van Corlaer.

"He was the best of husbands," she insisted, trembling with a woman's anxiety to be loyal to affection which she has not too well rewarded. "It was on my account that he had his hand cut off."

"I will outdo Bronck," declared Van Corlaer. "I will have myself skinned, at my death, and spread out as a rug to your feet. So good a house-keeper as Antonia will beat my pelt full often, and so be obliged to think on me."

Afloat in his large personality as she always was in his presence, she yet tried to resist him.

"The relic that you joke about, Myn-

heer Van Corlaer, I have done worse with: I have lost it."

"Bronck's hand?"

"Yes. It hath been stolen."

"Why, I commend the taste of the thief!"

"And misfortune is sure to follow."

"Well, let misfortune and the hand go together."

"It was not so said." She looked furtively at Bronck's powerful rival, loath to reveal to him the sick old man's prophecies.

"I have heard of the hearts of heroes being sealed in coffers and treasured in the cities from which they sprang," said Van Corlaer, taking his hat from the step and holding it to shield his eyes from the mounting light.

"But Jonas was no hero. And I have heard of papists venerating little pieces of saints' bones. Father Jogues might do so, and I could behold him without smiling; but a Protestant woman should have no superstition for relics."

"What I cannot help dreading," confessed Antonia, moving her hands nervously in their wrapping, "is what may follow this loss."

"Nay, let the hand go! What should follow its loss?"

"Some trouble might befall the people who are kindest to me."

"Because Bronck's hand has been mislaid?" inquired Van Corlaer, with shrewd light in his eyes.

"Yes, mynheer," hesitated Antonia.

He burst into laughter, and Antonia looked at him as if he had spoken against religion. She sighed.

"It was my duty to open the box once every month."

Van Corlaer threw his hat down again on the step above.

"Are you cold, mynheer?" inquired Antonia considerately.

"No. I am fired like a man in mid-battle. Will nothing move you to show me a little love, madame? Why, look you, there were Frenchwomen among captives ransomed from the Mohawks

who shed tears on these hands of mine. Strangers and alien people have some movement of feeling, but you have none."

"Mynheer," pleaded Antonia, goaded to inconsistent and trembling asperity, "you make my case very hard. I could not tell you why I dare not wed again, but since you know, why do you cruelly blame me? A woman does not weep the night away without some movement of feeling. Yes, mynheer, you have taunted me, and I will tell you the worst. I have thought of you more than of any other person in the world, and felt such satisfaction in your presence that I could hardly forego it. Yet holding me thus bound to

you, you are by no means satisfied," sobbed Antonia.

Van Corlaer glowed over her a moment with some smiling compunction, and irresistibly took her in his arms. From the instant that Antonia found herself there unstartled, her point of view was changed. She looked at her limitations no longer alone, but through Van Corlaer's eyes, and beheld them disappearing. The sentinel, glancing down from time to time with a furtive cast of his eye, saw Antonia nodding or shaking her flaxen head in complete unison with Van Corlaer's nods and negations, and caught the sweet monotone of her voice repeating over and over, "Yes, mynheer. Yes, mynheer."

Mary Hartwell Catherwood.

A DISPUTED CORRESPONDENCE

"LUCIUS ANNÆUS SENECA, a native of Cordova, disciple of Sotion the Stoic and uncle of the poet Lucan, was a man of most continent life. I should not, however, place him in the catalogue of the saints, were it not for those letters of Paul to Seneca, and Seneca to Paul, which many persons are now reading. In these letters, written when Seneca was Nero's tutor and the most powerful man of the time, he says that he would gladly hold the same place among his own people that Paul held among the Christians. Two years before Peter and Paul received the crown of martyrdom, Seneca was put to death by Nero."

So wrote St. Jerome in his notes on the ecclesiastical authors; and a little later, St. Augustine, when urging upon one Macedonius the duty of charity to sinners, appeals to a maxim of the Roman philosopher: "Rightly says Seneca, who lived in the time of the Apostles, and certain of whose letters to St. Paul are in circulation, 'He who hates evil-doers hates every one.'"

Certainly no imaginable correspondence in the Latin tongue could have a deeper interest than one in which these two men might be seen reasoning together. Fourteen letters purporting to have passed between them exist, but their authenticity, scarcely questioned in the church until near the time of the Reformation, has been warmly debated ever since. Before, however, recapitulating the arguments on either side, and before even referring to the text of the correspondence, it will be well briefly to review the events of Seneca's life up to the time when personal relations between him and St. Paul first became possible, — the year, that is to say, when the latter, having invoked his rights as a Roman citizen, was brought to Rome to stand trial.

L. Annæus Seneca was born very near the beginning of the Christian era, being the second of the three sons of Marcus Annæus Seneca and his wife Helvia. Of his two brothers, the elder, Marcus Novatus, received by adoption