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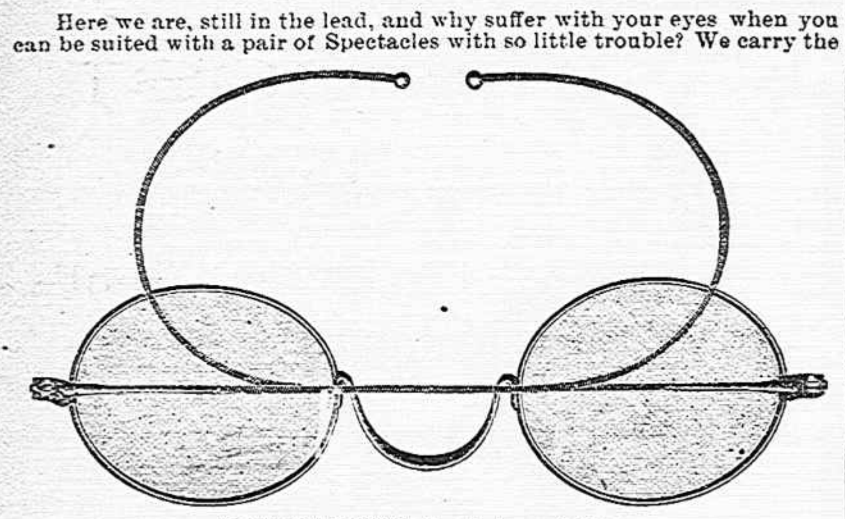

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LAZARRE

... By ...

MARY HARTWELL CATHERWOOD

(Based Upon the Mystery Surrounding the Fate of the Dauphin, Son of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette)

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CHAPTER XXV.

BUT the chief's and Skenedonk's nursing and Indian remedies brought me face earthward again, reviving the surgeon's hope. When blood and life mounted and my torn side sewed up its gap in a healthy scar, adding another to my collection, autumn was upon us. From the hunting lodges on Lake George and the Williamses of Longmeadow I went to the scorched capital of Washington. In the end the government helped me with my Indian plan, though when Skenedonk and I pushed out toward Illinois territory we had only my pay and a grant of land. Peace was not formally made until December, but the war ended that summer.

The Oneidas were ready to follow wherever I led them, and so were many families of the Iroquois federation. But the Mohawk tribe held back. However, I felt confident of material for an Indian state when the foundation should be laid.

We started lightly equipped upon the horse paths. The long journey by water and shore brought us in October to the head of Green bay.

Green Bay, or La Baye, as the fur hunters called it, was a little post almost like a New England village among its elms—one street and a few outlying houses beside the Fox river. The open world had been our tavern, or any sod or log hut cast up like a burrow of human prairie dogs or moles. We did not expect to find a tavern in Green Bay. Yet such a place was pointed out to us near the fur company's block warehouse.

Our host served us himself. His taproom was the fireplace cupboard, and it was visited while we ate our supper by men in elkskin trousers and caps and hooded capotes of blue cloth. These Canadians mixed their own drink and made a cross mark on the inside of the cupboard door, using a system of bookkeeping evidently agreed upon between themselves and the landlord.

Nightfall was very clear and fair in this northwestern territory. A man felt nearer to the sunset. The region took hold upon me, particularly when one who was neither a warehouseman nor a Canadian fur hunter hurried in and took me by the hand.

"I am Pierre Grignon," he said.

Indeed, if he had held his fiddle and tuned it upon an arm not quite so stout, I should have known without being told that he was the man who had played in the Saint-Michel cabin.

We sat and talked until the light faded. The landlord brought a candle and yelled up the loft, where Skenedonk had already stretched himself in his blanket:

"Chambermaid, light up."

"Never mind," said Pierre Grignon. "I'm going to take these travelers home with me."

"Now I know how a tavern ought to be kept," said the landlord. "But what's the use of my keeping one if Pierre Grignon carries off all the guests?"

"He is my old friend," I told the landlord.

"He's old friend to everybody that comes to Green Bay. I'll never get so much as a sign painted to hang in front of the Palace tavern."

I gave him twice his charges and he said:

"What a loss it was to enterprise in the Bay when Pierre Grignon came here and built for the whole United States!"

The Grignon house, whether built for the whole United States or not, was the largest in Green Bay. A hall divided the house through the center, and here Mme. Grignon welcomed me as if I were a long expected guest, for this was her custom, and as soon as she clearly remembered me, led me into a drawing room where a stately old lady sat making lace.

This was the grandmother of the house. Such a house would have been incomplete without a grandmother at the hearth.

Stools there were for children, and armchairs for old people were not lacking. The small yellow spinning wheel of Mme. Ursule, as I found afterward Mme. Grignon was commonly called, stood ready to revolve its golden disk wherever she sat.

The servants were Pawnee Indians, moving about their duties almost with stealth.

The little Grignon daughter who had stood lost in wonder at the dancing of Annabel de Chaumont was now a turner of heads herself, all flaxen white and contrasting with the darkness of Katarina Tank. Katarina was taken home to the Grignons after her mother's death. Both girls had been educated in Montreal.

"Poor Mme. Tank! She would have been so much more comfortable in her death if she had relieved her mind," Mme. Ursule said the first evening. "She used to speak of you often, for seeing you made a great impression upon her and she never let us forget you. I am sure she knew more about you than she ever told me. 'I have an important disclosure to make,' she says. 'Come around me; I want all of you to hear it!' Then she fell back and died without telling it."

A touch of mystery was not lacking to the house. Several times I saw the tail of a gray gown disappear through an open door. Some woman half entered and drew back.

"It's Madeleine Jordan," an inmate told me each time. "She avoids strangers."

I asked if Madeleine Jordan was a relative.

"Oh, no," Mme. Ursule replied; "but the family who brought her here went back to Canada, and of course they left her with us."

Of course, Madeleine Jordan, or anybody else who lacked a roof, would be left with the Grignons, but in that house a hermit seemed out of place, and I said so to Mme. Ursule.

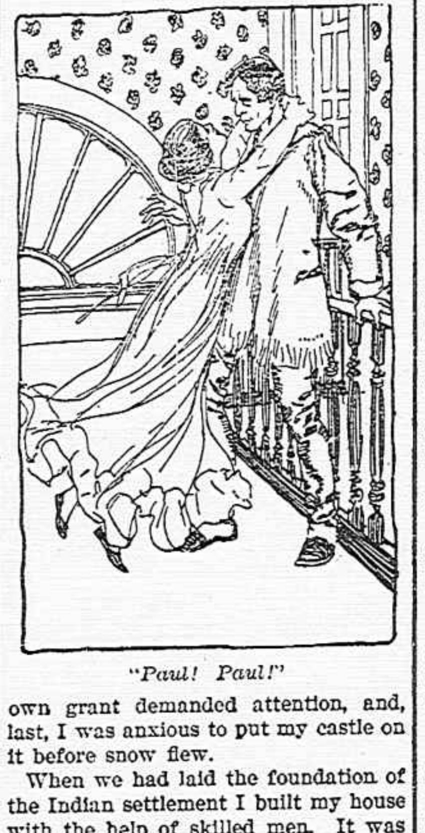
"Poor child!" she responded. "I think she likes the bustle and noise. She is not a hermit. What difference can it make to her whether people are around her or not?"

The subject of Madeleine Jordan was no doubt beyond a man's handling. I had other matters to think about, and directly plunged into them. First, the Menominees and Winnebagoes must be assembled in council. They held all the desirable land.

"We don't like your Indian scheme in Green Bay," said Pierre Grignon. "But if the tribes here are willing to sell their lands other settlers can't prevent it."

He went with me to meet the savages on the opposite side of the Fox near the stockade. There the talking and eating lasted two days. At the end of that time I had a footing for our Iroquois in the Wisconsin portion of the Illinois territory, and the savages who granted it danced a war dance in our honor. Every brave shook over his head the scalps he had taken. I saw one cap of soft long brown hair.

"Eh!" said Pierre Grignon, sitting beside me. "Their dirty trophies make you ghastly! Do your eastern tribes never dance war dances?"



"Paul! Paul!"

After the land was secured its boundaries had to be set. Then my own grant demanded attention, and, last, I was anxious to put my castle on it before snow flew.

When we had laid the foundation of the Indian settlement I built my house with the help of skilled men. It was a spacious one of hewn logs, chinked with cat and clay plaster, showing its white ribs on the hill above the Fox.

The men hewed a slab settle and stationed it beside the hearth, a thing of beauty in its rough and lichen tinted barks, though you may not believe it. My floors I would have smooth and neatly joined, of hard woods which give forth a shining for wear and polish. Stools I had, easily made, and one large round of a tree for my table, like an eastern taboret.

Before the river closed and winter shut in Skenedonk and I went back to Green Bay. I did not know how to form my household and had it in mind to consult Mme. Ursule. Pawnees could be had, and many French landholders in the territory owned black slaves. Pierre Grignon himself kept one little negro like a monkey among the stately Indians.

Dealing with acres and with people wild as flocks would have been worth while if nothing had resulted except our welcome back to Pierre Grignon's open house. The grandmother hobbled on her stick across the floor to give me her hand. Mme. Ursule reproached me with delaying, and Pierre said it was high time to seek winter quarters. The girls recounted harvest reels and even weddings, with dances following, which I had lost while away from the center of festivity.

The little negro carried my saddlebags to the guest room. Skenedonk was to sleep on the floor. Abundant preparations for the evening meal were going forward in the kitchen. As I mounted the stairway at Mme. Ursule's direction I heard a tinkle of china, her very best, which adorned racks and dressers. It was being set forth on the mahogany board.

The upper floor of Pierre Grignon's house was divided by a hall similar to the one below. I ran upstairs and halted.

Standing with her back to the fading light which came through one fan window at the hall end was a woman's figure in a gray dress. I gripped the rail.

My first thought was, "How shall I tell her about Paul?" My next was, "What is the matter with her?"

She rippled from head to foot in the shiver of rapture peculiar to her and stretched her arms to me, crying:

"Paul! Paul!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

"OH, madame!" I said, bewildered and sick as from a stab. It was no comfort that the high lady who scarcely allowed me to kiss her hand before we parted clung around my neck. She trembled against me.

"Have you come back to your mother, Paul?"

"Eagle!" I pleaded. "Don't you know me? You surely know Lazarre!"

She kissed me, pulling my head down in her arms, the velvet mouth like a baby's, and looked straight into my eyes.

"Madame, try to understand! I am Louis! If you forget Lazarre, try to remember Louis!"

She heard with attention and smiled. The pressure of my arms spoke to her. A man's passion addressed itself to a little child. All other barriers which had stood between us were nothing to this.

I held her and she could never be mine. She was not ill in body—the contours of her upturned face were round and softened with much smiling—but mind sickness robbed me of her in the moment of finding her.

"She can't be insane!" I said aloud. "Oh, God, anything but that! She was not a woman that could be so wrecked."

Like a fool I questioned and tried to get some explanation.

Eagle smoothed my arm and nestled her hand in my neck.

"My little boy! He has grown to be a man—while his mother has grown down to be a child! Do you know what I am now, Paul?"

I choked a sob in my throat and told her I did not.

"I am your cloud mother. I live in a cloud. Do you love me while I am in the cloud?"

I told her I loved her with all my strength, in the cloud or out of it.

"Will you take care of me as I used to take care of you?"

I swore to the Almighty that she should be my future care.

"I need you so! I have watched for you in the woods and on the water, Paul! You have been long coming back to me."

I heard Mme. Ursule mounting the stairs to see if my room was in order.

Who could understand the relation in which Eagle and I now stood, and the claim she made upon me? She clung to my arm when I took it away. I led her by the hand. Even this sight caused Mme. Ursule a shock at the head of the stairs.

"M's'r Williams!"

My hostess paused and looked at us.

"Did she come to you of her own accord?"

"Yes, madame."

"I never knew her to notice a stranger before."

"Madame, do you know who this is?"

"Madeleine Jordan."

"It is the Marquise de Ferrier."

"The Marquise de Ferrier?"

"Yes, madame."

"Do you know her?"

"I have known her ever since I can remember."

"The Marquise de Ferrier! But, M's'r Williams, did she know you?"

"She knows me," I asserted. "But not as myself. I am sure she knows me! But she confuses me with the child she lost! I cannot explain to you, madame, how positive I am that she recognizes me any more than I can explain why she will call me Paul. I think I ought to tell you, so you will see the position in which I am placed, that this lady is the lady I once hoped to marry."

"Saints have pity, M's'r Williams!"

"I want to ask you some questions."

"Bring her down to the fire. Come, dear child," said Mme. Ursule, coaxing Eagle. "Nobody is there. The bedrooms can never be so warm as the log fire, and this is a bitter evening."

The family room was unlighted by candles, as often happened; for such an illumination in the chimney must have quenched any paler glare. We had a few moments of brief privacy from the swarming life which constantly passed in and out.

I placed Eagle by the fire and she sat there obediently while I talked to Mme. Ursule apart.

"Was her mind in this state when she came to you?"

"She was even a little wilder than she is now. The girls have been a benefit to her."

"They were not afraid of her?"

"And who could be afraid of the dear child? She is a lady—that's plain. Ah, M's'r Williams, what she must have gone through!"

"Yet see how happy she looks!"

"She always seemed happy enough. She would come to this house. So when the Jordans went to Canada Pierre and I both said, 'Let her stay.'"

"Who were the Jordans?"

"The only family that escaped with their lives from the massacre when she lost her family. Mme. Jordan told me the whole story. They had friends among the Winnebagoes who protected them."

"Did they give her their name?"

"No, the people in La Baye did that. We knew she had another name. But I think it very likely her title was not used in the settlement where they lived. Titles are no help in pioneering."

"Did they call her Madeleine?"

"She calls herself Madeleine."

"How long has she been with your family?"

"Nearly a year."

"Did the Jordans tell you when this change came over her?"

"Yes. It was during the attack when her child was taken from her. She saw other children killed. The Indians were afraid of her. They respect demented people; not a bit of harm was done to her. They let her alone and the Jordans took care of her."

The daughter and adopted daughter of the house came in with a rush of outdoor air and, seeing Eagle first, ran to kiss her on the cheek one after the other.

"Madeleine has come down!" said Marie.

"I thought we should coax her in here some time," said Katarina.

Between them, standing slim and tall, their equal in height, she was yet like a little sister. Though their faces were unlined, hers held a divine youth.

"Paul has come," Eagle told Katarina and Marie. Holding their hands, she walked between them toward me and bade them notice my height. "I am his cloud mother," she said. "How droll it is that parents grow down little while their children grow up big!"

Mme. Ursule shook her head pitifully. But the girls really saw the droll side and laughed with my cloud mother. I left the room and was flinging myself from the house to walk in the chill wind, but she caught me.

"I will be good!" pleaded my cloud mother, her face in my breast.

Her son who had grown up big while she grew down little went back to the family room with her.

Our singular relationship was established in the house, where hospitality made room and apology for all human weakness.

Nobody of that region except the infirm stayed indoors to shiver by a fire. Eagle and the girls, in their warm capotes, breasted with me the coldest winter days. She was as happy as they were; her cheeks tingled as pink as theirs. Sometimes I thought her eyes must answer me with her old self command, their bright grayness was so natural.

I believed if her delusions were humored they would unwind from her like the cloud which she felt them to be. The family had long fallen into the habit of treating her as a child, playing some imaginary character. She seemed less demented than walking in a dream, her faculties asleep. It was somnambulism rather than madness. She had not the expression of insane people, the shifty eyes, the cunning and perverseness, the animal and torpid presence.

If I called her Mme. de Ferrier instead of my cloud mother, a strained and puzzled look replaced her usual satisfaction. I did not often use the name, nor did I try to make her repeat my own. It was my daily effort to fall in with her happiness, for if she saw any anxiety she was quick to plead:

"Don't you like me any more, Paul? Are you tired of me because I am a cloud mother?"

"No," I would answer. "Lazarre will never be tired of you."

"Do you think I am growing smaller? Will you love me if I shrink to a baby?"

"I will love you."

"I used to love you when you were so tiny, Paul, before you knew how to love me back. If I forget how"—she clutched the lapels of my coat—"will you leave me then?"

"Eagle, say this: 'Lazarre cannot leave me.'"

"Lazarre cannot leave me."

I heard her repeating this at her sewing. She boasted to Marie Grignon—"Lazarre cannot leave me!—Paul taught me that."

My cloud mother asked me to tell her the stories she used to tell me. She had forgotten them.

"I am the child now," she would say. "Tell me the stories."

I repeated mythical tribe legends, gathered from Skenedonk on our long rides, making them as eloquent as I could. She listened, holding her breath or sighing with contentment.

If any one in the household smiled when she led me about by the hand, there was a tear behind the smile.

She kept herself in perfection, bestowing unceasing care upon her dress, which was always gray.

"I have to wear gray. I am in a cloud," she had said to the family.

"We have used fine gray stuff brought from Holland and wools that Mother Ursule got from Montreal," Katarina told me. "The Pawnees dye with vegetable colors. But they cannot make the pale gray she loves."

Skenedonk was not often in the house. He took to the winter hunting and snowshoeing with vigor. Whenever he came indoors I used to see him watching Mme. de Ferrier with saturnine wistfulness. She paid no attention to him. He would stand gazing at her while she sewed, being privileged as an educated Indian and my attendant to enter the family room where the Pawnees came only to serve. They had the ample kitchen and its log fire to themselves. I wondered what was working in Skenedonk's mind, and if he repented calling one so buffeted a sorceress.

The more I thought about it the less endurable it became to have her dependent upon the Grignons. My business affairs with Pierre Grignon made it possible to transfer her obligations to my account. The hospitable man and his wife objected, but when they saw how I took it to heart gave me my way. I told them I wished her to be regarded as my wife, for I should never have another, and while it might remain impossible for her to marry me, on my part I was bound to her.

"You are young, M's'r Williams," said Mme. Ursule. "You have a long life before you. A man wants comfort in his house. And if he makes wealth he needs a hand that knows how to distribute and how to save. She could never go to your home as she is."

"I know it, madame."

"You will change your mind about a wife."

"Madame, I have not changed my mind since I first wanted her. It is not a mind that changes."

"Well, that's unusual. Young men are often fickle. You never made proposals for her?"

"I did, madame, after her husband died."

"But she was still a wife—the wife of an old man—in the Pigeon Roost settlement."

"Her father married her to a cousin nearly as old as himself when she was a child. Her husband was reported dead while she was in hiding. She herself thought, and so did her friends, that he was dead."

"I see. Eh! These girls married to old men! Mme. Jordan told me Madeleine's husband was very fretful. He kept himself like silk and scarcely let the wind blow upon him for fear of injuring his health. When other men were out toiling at the clearings he sat in his house to avoid getting chills and fever in the sun. It was well for her that she had a faithful servant. Madeleine and the servant kept the family with their garden and cornfield. They never tasted wild meat unless the other settlers brought them venison. Mme. Jordan said they always returned a present of herbs and vegetables from their garden. It grew for them better than any other garden in the settlement. Once the old man did go out with a hunting party and got lost. The men searched for him three days and found him curled up in a hollow tree, waiting to be brought in. They carried him home on a litter and he popped his head into the door and said: 'Here I am, child! You can't kill me!'"

"What did Mme. de Ferrier say?"

"Nothing. She made a child of him, as if he were her son. He was in his second childhood, no doubt. And Mme. Jordan said she appeared to hold herself accountable for the losses and crosses that made him so fretful. The children of the emigration were brought up to hardship and accepted everything as their elders could not do."

"I thought the Marquis de Ferrier a courteous gentleman."

"Did you ever see him?"

"Twice only."

"He used to tell his wife he intended to live a hundred years. And I suppose he would have done it, if he had not been tomahawked and scalped. 'You'll never get De Chaumont,' he used to say to her. 'I'll see that he never gets you!' I remember the name very well, because it was the name of that pretty creature who danced for us in the cabin on Lake George."

"De Chaumont was her father," I said. "He would have married Mme. de Ferrier and restored her estate if she had accepted him and the marquis had not come back."

"Saints have pity!" said Mme. Ursule. "And the poor old man must make everybody and himself so uncomfortable!"

"But how could he help living?"

"True enough. God's times are not ours. But see what he has made of her!"

I thought of my cloud mother walking inclosed from the world upon a height of changeless youth. She could not feel another shock. She was past both ambition and poverty. If she had ever felt the sweet anguish of love—oh, she must have understood when she kissed me and said, "I will come to you some time!"—the anguish, the hoping, waiting, expecting, receiving nothing, all were gone by. Even mother cares no longer touched her. Paul was grown. She could not be made anything that was base. Unseen forces had worked with her and would work with her still.

"You told me," I said to Mme. Ursule, "the Indians were afraid of her when they burned the settlement. Was the change so sudden?"

"Mme. Jordan's story was like this: It happened in broad daylight. Two men went into the woods hunting bee trees. The Indians caught and killed them within two miles of the clearing—some of those very Winnebagoes you treated with for your land. It was a sunshiny day in September. You could hear the poultry crowing and the children playing in the dooryards. Madeleine's little Paul was never far away from her. The Indians rushed in with yells and finished the settlement in a few minutes. Mme. Jordan and her family were protected, but she saw children dashed against trees and her neighbors struck down and scalped before she could plead for them. And little good pleading would have done. An Indian seized Paul. His father

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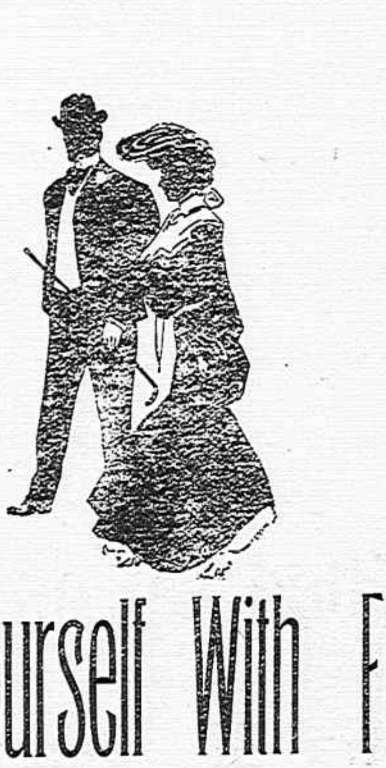

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