

Honoré Beaugrand

Fantastic tales



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Du même auteur, à la Bibliothèque :

La chasse-galerie : légendes canadiennes

Jeanne la fileuse

Anita : souvenirs d'un contre-guérillas

La chasse-galerie

This narrative is founded on a popular superstition dating back to the days of the *coureurs des bois*, under the French régime, and perpetuated among the voyageurs in the Canadian Northwest. The shantymen of a later date have taken up the tradition, and it is in the French settlements, bordering the St. Lawrence River, that the legends of *la chasse-galerie* are specially well known at the present time. The writer has met many an old *voyageur* who affirmed most positively that he had seen bark canoes traveling in mid-air, full of men paddling and singing away, under the protection of Beelzebub, on their way from the timber camps of the Ottawa to pay a flying visit to their sweethearts at home.

It is hardly necessary to apologize for having used in the narrative expressions typical of the rude life and character of the men whose language and superstition it is the intention of the writer to portray.

I

“Well, then, since you seem to desire it so very much, I will tell you a roarin’ story that ought to be a lesson to all of you. If there is among the crowd any renegade who intends to run *la chasse-galerie* or the *loup-garou*, he had better skip and go outside to see whether the owls are screeching in the storm, in converse with Old Nick himself, because I intend to begin my story by making a big sign of the cross. That will be a regular set-back to *le diable*, who always tries, at this time, to snatch a poor shantyman’s soul by promising him all kinds of nonsense. I have had enough of that in my young days to understand his tricks.”

Not a man moved. On the contrary, all gathered closer round the fireplace, where the cook had dragged the provision-chest, and upon which he had taken his seat on a camp-stool, preparatory to relating his experience under the wiles of the *mauvais esprit*.

It was on New Year’s eve of the year 1858, in the depth of the forest, in the Ross timber camp, at the head of the Gatineau River. The winter had fairly set in, and the snow outside had already piled up to the roof of the shanty. The boss, according to custom, had ordered the

distribution of the contents of a small barrel of Jamaica rum among the men, and the cook had terminated early his preparations of a succulent *ragout* of pig's feet and of a large tin full of *glissantes* for the New Year's dinner. A big kettle, half full of molasses, was already simmering on the fire, as there was to be a candy-pull to finish the evening's entertainment.

Every man had filled his pipe with good, strong Canadian tobacco, and a thick cloud of smoke darkened the interior of the shanty. A few pine-branches thrown at intervals on the fire produced a reddish glare that illuminated the rude faces of the men with curious effects of *clair-obscur*.

Joe, the cook, was a homely little man who laughed at his own physical defects, and who did not take offense when his comrades chaffed him on the subject, and called him *le bossu*, the hunchback. He had worked in the shanties for the last forty years, and his experience was only equaled by the facility with which he could relate his adventures when he had taken a glass of *bonne vieille Jamaïque*.

“I was telling you,” said Joe, “that I was a *pendard* in my youth, but it is long since I mended my ways, and now I never joke about religious matters. I go to confession regularly every year, and what I am about to relate took place years and years ago, when I feared *ni*

Dieu, ni diable. It was on a night like this, a New Year's eve, thirty-four or thirty-five years ago. Gathered round the fireplace with all the *camarades*, we made merry ; and if it is true, as we say in French, that 'small rivulets make large rivers' it is just as true that small drinks empty large barrels. And in those days, people drank more than to-day, and evenings of this kind generally ended in a boxing-match, outside, in the snow. The *rhum* was no better than it is to-night, but it was *bougrement bon*, I can assure you. I will be frank with you and tell you that about eleven o'clock my head began to feel dizzy, and I lay down on my buffalo-robe to take a nap, while waiting for the midnight jump that we always take over the head of a pork-barrel, from the old year into the new one. We will repeat the same thing to-night before we go to visit the neighboring camps to wish them the compliments of the season.

II

I had slept for quite a while, when I was rudely awakened by a second boss, Baptiste Durand, who said to me : 'Joe, it is past midnight, and you are late for the barrel-jump. The *camarades* have gone to the other

camps, and I am going to Lavaltrie to see my sweetheart. Will you come with me ?

“To Lavaltrie,” said I, “are you crazy ? We are three hundred miles away from there, and you could not travel the distance in two months, through the forest, when there are no roads beaten in the snow. And what about our work the day after to-morrow ?”

“*Imbécile !* don’t you understand me ? We will travel in our bark canoe, and to-morrow morning at six o’clock we will be back here for breakfast.”

“I understood. Baptiste Durand proposed that I should join him and run *la chasse-galerie* ; risk the salvation of my soul for the fun of going to give a New Year’s kiss to my *blonde* at Lavaltrie. That was a little too much for me. It was true that I was a *mauvais sujet*, that I did not practise *la religion*, and that I took a drink too much now and then ; but between that and the fact of selling my soul to *le diable* there was a big difference, and I said : ‘No, siree ! *Pas un tonnerre !*’

“Oh, you are a regular old woman”, answered Baptiste tauntingly. “There is no danger whatever. We can go to Lavaltrie and back in six hours. Don’t you know that with *la chasse-galerie* we can travel 150 miles an hour, when one can handle the paddles as well as we all do. All there is to it is that we must not pronounce *le nom du bon Dieu* during the voyage, and

that we must be careful not to touch the crosses on the steeples when we travel. That's easy enough, and, to be all right, all a man has to do is to look where he goes, think about what he says, and not touch a drop of liquor on the way. I have made the trip five times, and *le diable* has not got me yet. Come, *mon vieux*, stiffen up your courage, and in two hours we will be at Lavaltrie. Think of Liza Guimbette, and the pleasure you will have in kissing her "a happy New Year." There are already seven of us to make the trip, but we must be two, four, six, or eight, to make up the crew of the canoe."

"Yes, that's all right, but you must make an engagement with *le diable*, and he is not the kind of a *bourgeois* that I want to make any bargain with."

"A simple formality if we are careful where we go and not to drink. A man is not a child, *pardieu!* Come on! The *camarades* are waiting outside, and the canoe is already in the clearing. Come, come!"

And I was led outside of the shanty, where I saw the six men who were awaiting us, paddle in hand. The large canoe was lying on a snowbank, and before I had time to think twice about it, I was seated in the bow, awaiting the signal to go. I must say that my mind was somewhat confused, but Baptiste Durand, who was a hard customer, – for, it was said, he had not been to

confession for seven years, – gave me no time for reflection. He was standing in the stern, and exclaimed in a ringing voice :

“Are you ready ?”

“Ready.”

“Repeat after me.”

And we repeated together :

“*Satan ! king of the infernal regions, we promise to sell you our souls, if within the following six hours we pronounce *le nom du bon Dieu*, your master and ours, or if we touch a cross on the voyage. On that condition you will transport us through the air, wherever we may want to go, and bring us back sound and safe to the shanty. *Acabris, Acabras, Acabram ! Fais nous voyager par-dessus les montagnes !*”*

III

The last words were hardly pronounced, when we felt the canoe rising in the air to a height of five or six hundred feet. I felt as light as a feather, and at Baptiste’s command, we commenced paddling like sorcerers that we were. At the first stroke of the paddle

the canoe shot out like an arrow, and off we went under the protecting wing of *le diable* himself. It fairly took my breath away, and I could hear the bow of the canoe whizzing through the crisp air of the night.

We went faster than the wind, and during the first fifteen minutes we sailed over the forest without perceiving anything else than the dark heads of the great pines. It was a beautiful night, and a full moon lighted up the sky like the midday sun. It was terribly cold though, and our mustaches were fairly frozen, while our bodies were all in a perspiration. We were paddling like demons at work in the lower regions. We soon perceived a bright, glistening belt of clear ice, that shone like a mirror. That was the Gatineau River ; and then the lights in the farm-houses, which were mostly lit up on New Year's eve. We began passing the tin-covered steeples as quickly as telegraph-poles fly past in a railway-train, and the spires shone in the air like the bayonets of the soldiers drilling on the Champ de Mars, in Montréal. On we went like *tous les diables*, passing over forests, rivers, towns, villages, and leaving behind us a trail of sparks. It was Baptiste Durand, the *possédé*, who steered the canoe because he knew the route, and we soon came to the Ottawa River, which we followed down to the *Lac des Deux montagnes* !

“Look out there,” said Baptiste ; “we will just skim

over Montréal and frighten some of the fellows who may be out at this hour of the night. Joe, clear your whistle and get ready to sing your best canoe-song, “*Canot d’écorce*,” my boy.

The excitement of the trip had braced me up, and I was ready for anything. Already we could see the lights of the great city, and with an adroit stroke of his paddle, Baptiste brought us down on a level with the summit of the towers of Notre-Dame. I cleared my throat and sang “*Canot d’écorce*,” while my *camarades* joined heartily in the chorus.

*Mon père n’avait fille que moi,
Canot d’écorce qui va voler,
Et dessus la mer il m’envoie :
Canot d’écorce qui vole, qui vole,
Canot d’écorce qui va voler ! etc.*

IV

Although it was well on toward tho o’clock in the morning, we saw some groups of men who stopped in the middle of the street to watch us go by, but we went

so fast that in a twinkle we had passed Montréal and its suburbs. We were nearing the end of our voyage, and we commenced counting the steeples, – Longue Pointe, Pointe-aux-Trembles, Repentigny, St. Sulpice, – and at last we saw the two shining spires of Lavaltrie that gleamed among the dark-green pines of the domain.

“Look out over there !” shouted Baptiste. We will land on the edge of the wood, in the field of my godfather, Jean-Jean-Gabriel. From there we will proceed on foot to go and surprise our acquaintances in some *fricot* or dance in the neighborhood.”

We did as directed, and five minutes later our canoe lay in a snowbank, at the edge of the wood of Jean-Jean-Gabriel. It was no small job, because the snow reached to our waists and there was no trace of any kind of a road. Baptiste, who was the most daring of the crowd, went and knocked at the door of his godfather’s house, where we could see a light, but there was no one there except a servant, who told us that the old folks had gone to a *snaque* at old man Robillard’s place, and that the young people of the village – boys and girls – were across the St. Lawrence at Batissette Augé’s, at the *Petite Misère*, below Contrecoeur, where there was a New Year’s hop.

“Let us go to the dance at Batissette Augé’s,” said Baptiste ; “we are sure to find our sweethearts over

there.”

“Let us go to Batissette Augé’s !”

And we returned to our canoe, while cautioning one another against the great danger that there was in pronouncing certain words, in touching anything in the shape of a cross, and especially in drinking liquor of any kind. We had only four hours before us, and we must return to the shanty before six o’clock in the morning, if we wanted to escape from the clutches of Old Nick, with whom we had made such a desperate bargain. And we all knew that he was not the kind of a customer to let us off, in the event of any delay on our part.

“*Acabris, Acabras, Acabram ! Fais nous voyager par-dessus les montagnes !*” shouted Baptiste once more.

And off we went again, paddling through the air, like renegades that we were, every one of us. We crossed the river in less time than it requires to tell it, and we descended in a snow-bank close to Batissette Augé’s house, where we could hear the laughter of the dancers, and see their shadows through the bright windows.

We dragged our canoe on the riverside, to hide it among the hummocks produced by the ice-shove.

“Now,” said Baptiste, in a last warning, “no nonsense ! Do you hear ? Dance as much as you can, but not a single glass of rum or whisky. And at the first sign, follow me out without attracting attention. We can’t be too careful !”

And we went and knocked at the door.

V

Old Batissette came and opened the door himself, and we were received with open arms by the guests, who knew us all.

“Where do you come from ?”

“I thought you were in the *chantiers*, up the Gatineau ?”

“What makes you come so late ?”

“Come and take a smile.”

Baptiste came to the rescue by saying : “First and foremost, let us take our coats off, and give us a chance to dance. That’s what we came here for, and if you still feel curious in the morning, I will answer all your questions.”

For my part, I had already spied Liza Guimbette, who was chatting away with little Boisjoli of Lanoraie. I made my *révérence* in due style, and at once asked for the favor of the next dance, which was a four-handed reel. She accepted with a smile that made me forget that I had risked the salvation of my soul to have the pleasure of pressing her soft white hand in mine and of cutting pigeonwings as her partner. During two hours the dancing went on without stopping, and, if I do say so myself, we shanty fellows cut a shine in the dance that made the hayseeds tired before morning. I was so busy with my partner that at first I did not notice that Baptiste was visiting the *buffet* rather often with some of the other boys, and once I caught him lifting his elbow in rather a suspicious manner. But I had no idea that the fellow would get tipsy, after all the lecturing he had given us on the road. When four o'clock struck, all the members of our crew began to edge out of the house without attracting attention, but I had to drag Baptiste before he would consent to go. At last we were all out, with just two hours before us to reach the camp, and three hundred miles to ride in our canoe, under the protection of Beelzebub. We had left the dance like wild Indians without saying good-by to anybody, not even to Liza Guimbette, whom I had invited for the next *cotillon*. I always thought that she bore me a grudge for that, because when I reached home the next

summer she was Madame Boisjoli.

We found our canoe all right in the hummocks, but I need hardly tell you that we were all put out when we found that Baptiste Durand had been drinking. He was to steer the boat, and we had no time to lose in humoring the fancies of a drunken man. The moon was not quite so bright as when we started from the camp, and it was not without misgivings that I took my place in the bow of the canoe, well decided to keep a sharp lookout ahead for accidents. Before starting I said to Baptiste :

“Look out, Baptiste, old fellow ! Steer straight for the mountain of Montréal, as soon as you can get a glimpse of it.”

“I know my business,” answered Baptiste sharply, “and you had better mind yours.”

What could I do ? And before I had time for further reflections :

“Acabris ! Acabras ! Acabram ! Fais nous voyager par-dessus les montagnes !”

VI

And up we went again like lightning, steering southwest, in the wild way in which Baptiste managed our boat could be called steering. We passed over the steeple of the church at Contrecoeur, coming pretty close to it, but instead of going west Baptiste made us take a sheer toward the Richelieu River. A few minutes later we were skimming over Beloeil Mountain, and we came within ten feet of striking the big cross that the Bishop of Quebec planted there, during a temperance picnic held a few years before by the clergy of his diocese.

“To the right, Baptiste ! steer to the right, or else you will send us all to *le diable* if you keep on going that way.”

And Baptiste did instinctively turn to the right, and we steered straight for the mountain of Montréal, which we could perceive in the distance by the dim lights of the city. I must say that I was becoming frightened, because if Baptiste kept on steering as he had done, we would never reach the Gatineau alive, and *le diable* was probably smacking his lips, as I supposed, at the bare idea of making a New Year’s mess of us. And I can tell

you that the disaster was not long in coming. While we were passing over the city, Baptiste Durand uttered a yell, and, flourishing his paddle over his head, gave it a twist that sent us plunging into a snow-drift, in a clearing on the mountain-side. Luckily the snow was soft, and none of us were hurt, nor was the canoe injured in any way. But Baptiste got out and declared most emphatically that he was going down-town to have *un verre*. We tried to reason with him, but our efforts proved useless, as is generally the case with *les ivrognes*. He would go down if *le diable* himself were to catch hold of him on the way. I held a moment's consultation with *mes camarades*, and, before Baptiste knew what we were about, we had him down in the snow, where we bound him hand and foot so as to render him incapable of interfering with our movements. We placed him in the bottom of the canoe, and gagged him so as to prevent him from speaking any words that might give us up to perdition.

And “*Acabris ! Acabras ! Acabram !*” up we went again, this time steering straight for the Gatineau. I had taken Baptiste's place in the stern. We had only a little over an hour to reach camp, and we all paddled away for dear life and eternal salvation. We followed the Ottawa River as far as the Pointe-Gatineau, and then steered due north by the polar star for our shanty. We were fairly flying in the air, and everything was going

well when that rascal of a Baptiste managed to slip the ropes we had bound him with and to pull off his gag. We had been so busy paddling that, the first thing we knew, he was standing in the canoe, paddle in hand, and swearing like a pagan. I felt that our end had come if he pronounced a certain sacred word, and it was out of the question to appease him in his frenzy. We had only a few miles to go to reach camp, and we were floating over the pine forest. The position was really terrible. Baptiste was using his paddle like a shillalah and making a *moulinet* that threatened every moment to crush in some one's head. I was so excited that by a false movement of my own paddle I let the canoe come down on a level with the pines, and it was upset as it struck the head of a big tree. We all fell out and began dropping down from branch to branch like partridges shot from the tamarack-tops. I don't know how long I was coming down, because I fainted before we reached the snow beneath, but my last recollection was like the dream of a man who feels himself dropping down a well without ever reaching bottom.

VII

About eight o'clock the next morning, I awoke in my bunk, in the cabin, whither some of our *camarades*

had conveyed us after having found us to our necks in a neighboring snow-bank, at the foot of a monster pine-tree. Happily, no one was seriously hurt, although we were all more or less bruised and scratched, some having secured even black eyes in our way down from the tree-top. We were all thankful that nothing worse had befallen us, and when the *camarades* said that they had found us sleeping away in the snow the effects of the previous night's frolic, not one of us had anything to say to the contrary. We all felt satisfied that our *escapade* with Old Nick remained unknown in the camp, and we preferred leaving our chums under the impression that we had taken *un verre* too many, to telling them of the bargain we had made to satisfy a passing fancy. So far as Baptiste Durand was concerned, there is no doubt that he had forgotten the latter part of his voyage, but he never alluded to the fact, and we followed his example. I was not till many years afterward that I related the story of our *aventures*, just as they happened on that memorable New Year's eve.

All I can say, my friends, is that it is not so amusing as some people might think, to travel in mid-air, in the dead of winter, under the guidance of Beelzebub, running *la chasse-galerie*, and especially if you have *un ivrogne* to steer your bark canoe. Take my advice, and don't listen to any one who would try to rope you in for

such a trip. Wait until summer before you go to see your sweethearts, for it is better to run all the rapids of the Ottawa and the St. Lawrence on a raft, than to travel in partnership with *le diable* himself.

And Joe, the cook, dipped a ladleful of boiling molasses from the big kettle on the fire, and declared that everything was now ready for the candy-pull.

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The Werwolves

I

A motley and picturesque-looking crowd had gathered within the walls of Fort Richelieu to attend the annual distribution of powder and lead, to take part in the winter drills and target practice, and to join in the Christmas festivities, that would last until the fast-approaching New Year.

Coueurs des bois from the Western country, scouts, hunters, trappers, militiamen, and habitants from the surrounding settlements, Indian warriors from the neighboring tribe of friendly Abenakis, were all placed under the military instruction of the company of regular marine infantry that garrisoned the fort constructed in 1665, by M. de Saurel, at the mouth of the Richelieu River, where it flows into the waters of the St. Lawrence, forty-five miles below Montreal.

It was on Christmas eve of the year 1706, and the dreaded Iroquois were committing depredations in the surrounding country, burning farm-houses, stealing

cattle and horses, and killing every man, woman, and child whom they could not carry away to their own villages to torture at the stake.

The Richelieu River was the natural highway to the Iroquois country during the open season, but now that its waters were ice-bound, it was hard to tell whence the attacks from those terrible savages could be expected.

The distribution of arms and ammunition having been made, under the joint supervision of the notary royal and the commandant of the fort, the men had retired to the barracks, where they were drinking, singing, and telling stories.

Tales of the most extraordinary adventures were being unfolded by some of the hunters, who were vying with one another in their attempts at relating some unheard-of and fantastic incidents that would create a sensation among their superstitious and wonder-loving comrades.

A sharp lookout was kept outside on the bastions, where four sentries were pacing up and down, repeating every half-hour the familiar watch-cry :

“Sentinelles ! prenez garde à vous !”

Old Sergeant Bellehumeur of the regulars, who had seen forty years of service in Canada, and who had come over with the regiment of Carignan-Salières, was

quietly sitting in a corner of the guard-room, smoking his Indian calumet, and watching over and keeping order among the men who were inclined to become boisterous over the oft-repeated libations.

One of the men, who had accompanied La Salle in his first expedition in search of the mouths of the Mississippi, was in the act of reciting his adventures with the hostile tribes that they had met in that far-off country, when the crack of a musket was heard from the outside, through the battlements. A second report immediately followed the first one, and the cry, "Aux armes !" was soon heard, with two more shots following close on each other.

The four sentries had evidently fired their muskets at some enemy or enemies, and the guard tumbled out in a hurry, followed by all the men, who had seized their arms, ready for an emergency.

The officer on duty was already on the spot when Sergeant Bellehumeur arrived to inquire into the cause of all this turmoil.

The sentry who had fired the first shot declared excitedly that all at once, on turning round on his beat, he had seen a party of red devils dancing around a bush fire, a couple of hundred yards away, right across the river from the fort, on the point covered with tall pine-trees. He had fired his musket in their direction, more

with the intention of giving alarm than in the hope of hitting any of them at that distance.

The second, third, and fourth shots had been successively fired by the other sentries, who had not seen anything of the Indians, but who had joined in the firing with the idea of calling the guard to the spot, and scaring away any enemy who might be prowling around.

“But where are the Indians now ?” inquired the officer, who had climbed on the parapet, “and where is the fire of which you speak ?”

“They seem to have disappeared as by enchantment, sir,” answered the soldier, in astonishment ; “but they were there a few moments ago, when I fired my musket at them.”

“Well, we will see” ; and, turning to Bellehumeur : “Sergeant, take ten men with you, and proceed over there cautiously, to see whether you can discover any signs of the presence of Indians on the point. Meanwhile, see to it that the guard is kept under arms until your return, to prevent any surprise.”

Bellehumeur did as he was ordered, picking ten of his best men to accompany him. The gate of the fort was opened, and the drawbridge was lowered to give passage to the party, who proceeded to cross the river,

over the ice, marching at first in Indian file. When nearing the opposite shore, near the edge of the wood, the men were seen to scatter, and to advance carefully, taking advantage of every tree to protect themselves against a possible ambush.

The night was a bright one, and any dark object could be plainly seen on the white snow, in the clearing that surrounded the fort.

The men disappeared for a short time, but were soon seen again, coming back in the same order and by the same route.

“Nothing, sir,” said the sergeant, in saluting the officer. “Not a sign of fire of any kind, and not a single Indian track, in the snow, over the point.”

“Well, that is curious, I declare ! Had the sentry been drinking, sergeant, before going on post ?”

“No more than the rest of the men, sir ; and I could see no sign of liquor on him when the relief was sent out, an hour ago.”

“Well, the man must be a fool or a poltroon to raise such an alarm without any cause whatever. See that he is immediately relieved from his post, sergeant, and have him confined in the guard-house until he appears before the commandant in the morning.”

The sentry was duly relieved, and calm was restored

among the garrison. The men went back to their quarters, and the conversation naturally fell on the peculiar circumstances that had just taken place.

II

An old weather-beaten trapper who had just returned from the Great Lakes volunteered the remark that, for his part, he was not so very sure that the sentry had not acted in perfect good faith, and had not been deceived by a band of *loups-garous*, – werwolves, – who came and went, appeared and disappeared, just as they pleased, under the protection of old Nick himself.

“I have seen them more than once in my travels,” continued the trapper ; “and only last year I had occasion to fire at just such a band of miscreants, up on the Ottawa River, above the portage of the Grandes-Chaudières.”

“Tell us about it !” chimed in the crowd of superstitious adventurers, whose credulous curiosity was instantly awakened by the promise of a story that would appeal to their love of the supernatural.

And every one gathered about the old trapper, who

was evidently proud to have the occasion to recite his exploits before as distinguished an assemblage of dare-devils as one could find anywhere, from Quebec to Michilimackinac.

“We had left Lachine, twenty-four of us, in three war-canoes, bound for the Illinois country, by way of the Ottawa River and the Upper Lakes ; and in four days we had reached the portage of the Grandes-Chaudières, where we rested for one day to renew our stock of meat, which was getting exhausted. Along with one of my companions, I had followed some deer-tracks, which led us several miles up the river, and we soon succeeded in killing a splendid animal. We divided the meat so as to make it easier for us to carry, and it was getting on toward nightfall when we began to retrace our steps in the direction of the camp. Darkness overtook us on the way, and as we were heavily burdened, we had stopped to rest and to smoke a pipe in a clump of maple-trees on the edge of the river. All at once, and without warning of any kind, we saw a bright fire of balsam boughs burning on a small island in the middle of the river. Ten or twelve renegades, half human and half beasts, with heads and tails like wolves, arms, legs, and bodies like men, and eyes glaring like burning coals, were dancing around the fire, and barking a sort of outlandish chant that was now and then changed to peals of infernal laughter. We could

also vaguely perceive, lying on the ground, the body of a human being that two of the imps were engaged in cutting up, probably getting it ready for the horrible meal that the miscreants would make when the dance would be over. Although we were sitting in the shadow of the trees, partly concealed by the underbrush, we were at once discovered by the dancers, who beckoned to us to go and join them in their disgusting feast. That is the way they entrap unwary hunters for their bloody sacrifices. Our first impulse was to fly toward the woods ; but we soon realized that we had to deal with loups-garous ; and as we had both been to confession and taken holy communion before embarking at Lachine, we knew we had nothing to fear from them. White loups-garous are bad enough at any time, and you all know that only those who have remained seven years without performing their Easter duties are liable to be changed into wolves, condemned to prowl about at night until they are delivered by some Christian drawing blood from them by inflicting a wound on their forehead in the form of a cross. But we had to deal with Indian renegades, who had accepted the sacraments only in mockery, and who had never since performed any of the duties commanded by the Church. They are the worst loups-garous that one can meet, because they are constantly intent on capturing some misguided Christian, to drink his blood and to eat his flesh in their

horrible *fricots*. Had we been in possession of holy water to sprinkle at them, or of a four-leaved clover to make wadding for our muskets, we might have exterminated the whole crowd, after having cut crosses on the lead of our bullets. But we were powerless to interfere with them, knowing full well that ordinary ammunition was useless, and that bullets would flatten out on their tough and impenetrable hides. Wolves at night, those devils would assume again, during the day, the appearance of ordinary Indians ; but their hide is only turned inside out, with the hair growing inward. We were about to proceed on our way to the camp, leaving the lous-garous to continue their witchcraft unmolested, when a thought struck me that we might at least try to give them a couple of parting shots. We both withdrew the bullets from our muskets, cut crosses on them with our hunting-knives, placed them back in the barrels, along with two *dizaines* [a score] of beads from the blessed rosary which I carried in my pocket. That would surely make the renegades sick, if it did not kill them outright.

“We took good aim, and fired together. Such unearthly howling and yelling I have never heard before or since. Whether we killed any of them I could not say ; but the fire instantly disappeared, and the island was left in darkness, while the howls grew fainter and fainter as the lous-garous seemed to be scampering in

the distance. We returned to camp, where our companions were beginning to be anxious about our safety. We found that one man, a hard character who bragged of his misdeeds, had disappeared during the day, and when we left on the following morning he had not yet returned to camp, neither did we ever hear of him afterward. In paddling up the river in our canoes, we passed close to the island where we had seen the louns-garous the night before. We landed, and searched around for some time ; but we could find no traces of fire, or any signs of the passage of werwolves or of any other animals. I knew that it would turn out just so, because it is a well-known fact that those accursed brutes never leave any tracks behind them. My opinion was then, and has never changed to this day, that the man who strayed from our camp, and never returned, was captured by the louns-garous, and was being eaten up by them when we disturbed their horrible feast.”

“Well, is that all ?” inquired Sergeant Bellehumeur, with an ill-concealed contempt.

“Yes, that is all ; but is it not enough to make one think that the sentry who has just been confined in the guard-house by the lieutenant for causing a false alarm has been deceived by a band of louns-garous who were picnicking on the point, and who disappeared in a twinkling when they found out that they were

discovered ?”

III

A murmur of assent greeted these last remarks of the speaker, and a number of *coureurs des bois* were ready to corroborate the absolute likelihood of his story by relating some of their own experiences with the loup-garous.

One of them, however, in his dislike for anything connected with military discipline, ventured to add some offensive remarks for the young officer who had ordered the sentry to be placed in confinement.

“*Halte-là !*” growled the sergeant. “The first one who dares insinuate anything contrary to discipline, or show a want of respect for any of our officers, will be placed in the dungeon without further ado. Tell as many stories as you please, but as long as you are under my orders you will have to remember that you are not roaming at large in the wilderness, and that you are here in one of the forts of his Majesty the King of France.”

This had the effect of producing an immediate silence, and the sergeant continued :

“I am not ready to gainsay the truthfulness of the story that has just been told, because I am myself inclined to believe in loup-garous, although I have never met one face to face ; but I will not suffer any one to speak disrespectfully of my superior officers. I will, however, if you desire it, tell you the experience of one of my old *copains*, now dead and gone these many years, with a female loup-garou, who lived in the Iroquois village of Caughnawaga, near Montreal.”

At the unanimous request of the crowd, the sergeant went on :

“Baptiste Tranchemontagne was a corporal with me, in the company of M. de Saurel, in the old regiment of Carignan-Salières. We had come from France together, and he and I made a pair in everything connected with the service, having fought side by side in many an encounter with the redskins. The poor fellow fell into the hands of the Iroquois at Cataracoui, and he was tortured at the stake in the village of the Mohawks. He died like a man, smiling when they tore the flesh from his body with red-hot tongs, and spitting in the faces of his tormentors when they approached him to cut off his lips and to pull out his eyes. May God have mercy on his brave soul !”

And the sergeant devoutly crossed himself.

“Baptiste, in one of our expeditions on the south

shore of Lake Ontario, had made the acquaintance of a young Indian maiden who was known as *La-linotte-qui-chante* among the warriors of her tribe. An intimacy sprang up between Baptiste and the young squaw, and they were married, Indian fashion, without much ceremony, the father's consent having been obtained by the gift of an old musket. The girl followed us back, and joined the tribe that had settled at Caughnawaga, under the protection of the guns of Fort St. Louis, opposite Lachine, where our company was stationed for nearly a whole year. Everything went well as long as we remained at Fort St. Louis, although, Indian-like, the young squaw was fearfully jealous of Baptiste, and at times would threaten him with acts of direful vengeance if he ever became unfaithful to her.

“One day our command was ordered to Fort St. Frédéric, on Lake Champlain, and our captain gave the strictest order that no camp-follower of any kind, men, women, or children, should be allowed to accompany us in the expedition. We started in the middle of the night, and Baptiste hurriedly said good-by to his Indian wife, telling her that he would return to see her in a short time. The squaw answered sulkily that she would follow him anywhere, and that, in spite of the captain or any one else, she would reach the the fort before we did. We knew the Indian character too well to doubt that she would do as she promised, and when we

marched over the drawbridge of Fort St. Frédéric, five days afterward, we were not too much astonished to see, among the throng of Indians who had gathered to see us arrive, the face of Baptiste's squaw, half concealed under her blanket. Baptiste was slightly annoyed at her presence, because he feared that the officers might think that, contrary to orders, he had encouraged her to follow the company. But we had no time to reflect on the situation before our company was ordered to embark in canoes, to proceed at once to Lake St. Sacrament (now Lake George). Baptiste did not even have the chance to speak to his squaw before we got under way, with three more companies of our regiment, under the command of Colonel de Ramezay. We were away for three months, engaged in an expedition against the Mohawks ; and we gave the red devils such a thrashing that they pleaded for peace, and we returned victorious to enjoy a few weeks of well-earned repose in the garrison of Montreal. Baptiste had lost sight of La-linotte-qui-chante, and he supposed that she had either returned to her tribe or else formed new ties with some of the trappers who regularly visited the forts to sell their furs and squander the proceeds in riotous living.

“The Indians having buried the tomahawk, there came a period of peace, when the governor-general at Quebec offered a grant of land to any soldier who

would quit the regular service, and a dowry of eighty pistoles in money to any woman, provided that they got married and settled in the country. I never had any taste for wedded life or for the career of a *pékin*, but Baptiste was not slow in casting his eyes upon a pretty girl who lived at Laprairie, across the river from Montreal. He told me confidentially that he had made up his mind to leave the service and to profit by the liberal offers of the government. I attempted to dissuade him from his project, because I hated to part with my best friend ; but he was smitten, and I had to make up my mind to bow to the inevitable when strange and unexpected occurrences soon took place that upset all his plans. One day, when we were both lounging about the market-place, Baptiste suddenly found himself face to face with La-linotte-qui-chante, whom he had last seen some six months before at Fort St. Frédéric. To say that he felt embarrassed would be putting it very mildly ; but he assumed a bold countenance, and spoke words of welcome that were received with apparent indifference by the Indian girl. She had returned to Caughnawaga, where she was now living, and she had come to Montreal with some Indian hunters who had brought their furs to market. She spoke not a word, but looked reproachfully at her old lover with her piercing black eyes, and disappeared in the crowd. Baptiste was seriously annoyed at this unexpected meeting, but as

the girl had left without uttering any reproaches, he took it for granted that she had become reconciled to the idea of a final separation between them. My chum had applied for his discharge, and was to be married on the coming Easter Monday, and, as a matter of course, I was to act as his best man – his *garçon d'honneur*. Preparations were being made for the wedding, and there was hardly a day that Baptiste did not cross over the river to go and see his fiancée. Ten days before the date appointed for the ceremony, Baptiste returned one night in great trouble. His intended had been taken ill, seriously ill, with a violent fever, and no one at Laprairie seemed to understand the nature of her sickness. He would ask the post surgeon to go and see her in the morning. And besides, on leaving Laprairie, that very night, he had met La-linotte-qui-chante at the cross-road that led to Caughnawaga. No words had been exchanged between them, but her presence there at such a time was sufficient to give him food for presages of no pleasant nature. Accompanied by the surgeon, he repaired to Laprairie on the following morning, and he was horrified to learn that his fiancée had been stricken down with the smallpox, that was then raging among our Indian allies encamped about Fort St. Louis. Baptiste insisted at once that he should nurse his sweetheart through her dangerous illness, and the doctor returned to Montreal after having prescribed

the necessary treatment. It was useless, however, for five days later my friend returned to Montreal with the sad news that his fiancée was dead. The poor fellow, in despair, reinlisted at once in our company, and declared that he would end his life in the ranks. He then took me aside and related to me the following incidents that had occurred on the night before the death of his betrothed. During the day he had been astonished, on entering the large family living-room, to find La-linotte-qui-chante sitting by the fireplace, as the Indians are wont to do, coming and going oftentime without asking permission of any kind from the inmates, and even without speaking a single word. Suspicious of her presence at such a place and under such circumstances, he immediately went to her and asked her what she was doing there.

“– I have come to offer you help in your trouble and consolation in your sorrow. The white maiden whom you love so much will be dead before morning, if I do not come to the rescue. I will go back to Caughnawaga, and ask for a potion that will cure her from our medicine-man. Meet me to-night, at twelve o’clock, at the first turn of the road, among the pine-trees on the riverside.

“And before Baptiste could answer she had left the house, going in the direction of the Indian village.

Although he did not half like the mysterious ways of the squaw, Baptiste said to himself that no harm could come of trying the decoction as a last resort, because the dreadful disease had made such progress that it was evident that his sweetheart was likely to die at any moment.

“Shorty before midnight Baptiste took his musket and went out to the rendezvous. He had been waiting for some time, and was getting impatient, when he heard a noise behind him, and in turning round perceived a pair of eyes glaring at him from a small distance in the underbrush. It could not be the squaw, and he supposed that it was some wild animal prowling about, probably a bear, a wolf, or a wild-cat. He instinctively shouldered his musket, and although he could not take a good aim in the dark, he fired, missing the beast, who sprang at him with a terrible growl.

“It was a wolf of enormous size, and for the first time Baptiste thought of a loup-garou. He was too well accustomed to danger to lose his presence of mind, and throwing his empty musket in the snow, he seized his hunting-knife, and made a lunge at the beast ; but the blade bent on the hide of the animal as if it had been thrust into a side of solde-leather. Baptiste now bethought himself of the only way of getting at the wolf, by drawing its blood in cutting a cross in its

forehead. The wolf seemed to realize the fact, and fought at paw's length with its powerful claws, tearing Baptiste's flesh into shreds, and trying to strike at his face so as to blind him, if possible, while keeping its own head out of the reach of the gleaming knife. The fight had lasted for some time, and Baptiste was getting exhausted, when by an adroit stroke of his weapon, always as sharp as a razor, he completely cut off one of the fore paws of the animal, who uttered a terrible yell resembling the scream of a woman, and fled through the woods, where it disappeared in an instant.

“Baptiste now understood the situation in a moment. La-linotte-qui-chante, who had been baptized and duly received in our holy religion, having afterward relapsed into idolatry, had been turned into a loup-garou, condemned to roam by night, while keeping her usual appearance during the day. Jealousy and revenge had induced her to attack her former lover, hoping to take him unawares, and to kill him in the woods, while his new love was lying on her death-bed, a victim to the terrible scourge that the squaw had brought to the house. Baptiste learned that La-linotte-qui-chante had been a frequent visitor for some time past, having succeeded in ingratiating herself with the poor dead girl, undoubtedly bringing to her the germ of the disease that was raging at the Indian village. Such was the savage revenge of the young squaw to punish the

faithlessness of Baptiste to his former vows of love and affection. It was also learned afterward that a human arm, evidently that of an Indian woman, had been found in the snow by some children who had strayed in the woods, at the very spot where the fight had taken place between Baptiste and the loup-garou. It was undoubtedly the fore paw of the wolf, which had resumed its former shape as the arm of the renegade squaw.

“I have already told you,” continued Sergeant Bellehumeur, “that poor Baptiste was later on taken prisoner by the Iroquois at Cataracoui, and that he was burned at the stake by the Mohawks. One of the prisoners who escaped from the redskins, and returned to Montreal, told me that he had remarked a one-armed squaw, who seemed to take special pleasure in inventing the most abominable devices to add to the sufferings of poor Baptiste. It was she who pulled out his tongue by the root, and who crushed in his skull with a tomahawk when he fainted from pain and loss of blood.

“Now,” summed up the sergeant, so as to cut short any more story-telling, “this is a real loup-garou story that I can vouch for, and that I would not permit any one to gainsay ; and I now would call your attention to the fact that I will order the *couvre-feu* to be sounded,

and that I shall expect every one of you to be snoring at the bugle-call, so as to observe the rules of this garrison.

“Lights out ! and silence in the barracks !”

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