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THE DOOM TRAIL

By Arthur D. Howden Smith
Author of PORTO BELLO GOLD, Etc.

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CHAPTER VIII—Continued

"Of it," he repeated.

"Of it," he repeated impatiently. "Since his Most Catholic Majesty hath a just claim to all lands in these parts—on this side of Hudson's river, at any rate."

"To be sure, to be sure," I assented quickly. "But, Monsieur Joncaire, you will be interested to know there is an accursed tribe of savages who do not believe as you do."

"Is that so, Jean? And who may they be?"

"The Messesagues," his face lighted up.

"They are in De Tonty's country. And how is the dear Alphonse?"

"Fleeing for his life, no less."

"Those same accursed Messesagues, monsieur, rose up against us, and Monsieur de Tonty must flee to the northward and make the journey through the country of the Hurons."

"A look of grave concern overspread Joncaire's face.

"Are you certain of this, Jean?"

"Beyond doubt, monsieur; for my friend, the Wolf here, smuggled a message from me to Monsieur de Tonty, who had me come at once to you that you might hold up all west-bound canoes."

"Humph!" he growled. "Have you been long in Canada, Jean?"

"But this year, monsieur."

"Humph!" growled Joncaire again. "And where do you come from, Jean?"

Something in his speech warned me—the liquid slur of the South.

"I, monsieur? I replied innocently. "Oh, I am of Flearcy. But monsieur is of the south—no? of Provence?"

All the suspicion fled from Joncaire's face, and in its stead blossomed a broad smile.

"Feste!" he ejaculated. "Tis a clever lad! And how knew you that, Jean?"

I was overjoyed—and in no need to simulate my sentiments. This was good fortune.

"Was I not camping beside the Regiment de Provence when we were on the Italian frontier? 'Tis a pleasant way those lads have of talking. And such good companions with the bottle! Ah, for some of that warm southern wine at this moment instead of the accursed rum. Rum is good only for savages."

"You say truth," applauded Joncaire. "Come your ways within, Jean, and you shall taste of the blood of La Belle France—although it be not our Provence vintage. By the way, do you know Provence?"

"I cannot say so with honesty, monsieur," I fenced, "although I have been in Arles."

"In Arles!"

He flung his arms around my neck. "Jean, I love you, my lad! I was born in St. Remi, which is but a short distance out in the diocese."

We were now in the entrance of the log house, and Joncaire opened wide the door.

"Jean, you are a lad in a million!" he pronounced. "You shall drink deep. I have some wine which Bizon the attendant fetched out for a few of us—you will understand you must say naught of it hereafter; it never paid duty. Aye, we shall make a fine night of it, and you shall tell me of all that has passed in Arles these many years. He clapped his hands, and a soldier entered.

"Francis," announced Joncaire, "this is Jean Courbevois, who will be my guest until he departs. He has been in Arles, Francis. Remember that. What he orders you will render to him. Now bring us the flagon of wine which Monsieur Bizon sent out this spring."

The soldier saluted me as if I were a marshal of France and brought in the flagon of the attendant's wine with the exquisite reverence which only a son of France could bestow upon the choicest product of the soil of France.

"Pour it out, Francis," commanded Joncaire.

The soldier hesitated.

"And Monsieur de Lery?" he said.

"A thousand million curses!" exploded Joncaire. "Am I to wait for him? Am I to sacrifice my choicest wine in his gutter?"

"Who is Monsieur de Lery?" I asked.

Francis filled a thick mug with the ruby juice.

"What? You do not know him? This pompous whippersnapper who sets out to teach Louis Thomas de Joncaire, sieur de Chabert, his duty, after thirty-five years on the frontier—pah! He is—"

"Monsieur de Lery enters," interposed Francis with a glance at the doorway.

A slender, wiry little man in a wig several sizes too big for him strode into the room. He favored me with a curious glance, nodded to Joncaire and took a seat across the table from me.

My host made a wry smile and motioned Francis to bring a third mug.

"Holla, Monsieur de Lery," he said. "This is a gallant young forest-runner, one Jean Courbevois, who has come to tell me that charming idiot Alphonse de Tonty has been chased out of Le de Troit by the Messesagues, Jean. Monsieur de Lery is the king's engineer officer in Canada."

"Another case of a log fortification, I suppose," remarked de Lery sarcastically in a dry, crackling voice. "You gentlemen will never learn."

"You must think we grow lous d'or instead of furs in Canada," growled Joncaire. "Be sure, we of the wilderness posts are the most anxious to have stone walls around us. Well, what headway have you made?"

"I have traced out the lines of the central mass," replied de Lery, taking a gulp of the wine. "Tomorrow I shall mark out a surrounding work of four bastions to encompass it."

He rose from his seat.

"Speaking for myself, I have had sufficient wine, and I shall retire. If the masons bring in the loads of stone we expect in the morning, we shall be able to lay the first course by noon."

Joncaire twisted his face into a grimace as de Lery ascended a steep flight of ladder-stairs to an upper story.

"What is the difficulty, monsieur?" I inquired sympathetically.

"Why, at last I have persuaded this stupid, timorous government of ours to build me a proper fort. 'Tis the

only way we shall hold the sacre English in check. With a fort here we can control in some measure the intercourse betwixt the western tribes and the English. Also, we shall have a constant threat here to keep the Iroquois at peace."

"Well, I worked up Vandreuil to approve it, obtained the grants from Paris, secured the necessary mechanics—and then I sent this popinjay to supervise the work. I had pitched on this site here. He would have none of it. No, he must overturn all my plans and put the new works several miles down the river where it runs into the lake. He is conceited with himself because he has been charged with all the works of fortification in Canada."

"Are there others then, monsieur?" I asked casually, busying my nose in the wine-mug.

"Aye, to be sure. He is to build a wall around Montreal, and to strengthen the enceinte of Quebec."

"But we are at peace with these sacre English," I objected.

Joncaire, now thoroughly convivial, winked at me over the rim of his mug.

"For the present, yes. But how long, Jean? Every year that passes the English grow in strength, and we become weaker; I speak now in matters of trade; for after all, lad, the country which obtains the mastery in trade must be the military master of any contending nation. I may be only a simple soldier, but so much I have learned."

"We are a colony of soldiers and traders, well armed and disciplined. They are an infinitely larger group of colonies with only a few soldiers and traders, but many husbandmen. Give them time, and they will obtain such a grip on the soil of the wilderness that they cannot be pried loose. But if we use our temporary advantage, and keep them from winning supremacy in the trade with the savages, then, my

offer and kept their precious manuscript.

The Bible which the dealer bought is a magnificent copy on vellum of the first book ever printed in Europe from metal types.

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But they were prudent men. They knew the elector could, and they suspected that he would, retake the town whenever he pleased, so they declined

his offer and kept their precious manuscript.

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