LAZARRE

By Mary Hartwell Catherwood

With Illustrations By Andre Castaigne

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SYNOPSIS.

Eagle de Ferrier, a little girl fugitive from the Reign of Terror in France, finds a boy, 9 years old, in St. Bartholomew's church, London, who appears to be well-nigh imbecile. She defends him from the taunts of English boys and girls. Her father and cousin, Philippe, French refugees, think they discover in the boy likenesses to the Dauphin, supposed to have been murdered in the prison. Bellenger, French court painter, appears and carries off the boy, refusing any explanation. Nine years later the boy comes to himself in a richly furnished bed, seeing a woman, with a babe in her arms, looking at him, and discovers that he is in the house of Le Ray de Chaumont, near Lake George. He remembers posing upon a naked rock, ready to dive into the lake, and that his mother, of the Iroquois tribe, was cooking over the fire in the interior of the lodge. How he, supposedly an Indian, came to be in the white man's bed, he soon learned. It appears from the conversation of those about him that in diving he had struck his head on a rock bottom of the lake, and was brought in insensible for treatment. His father, Chief Thomas Williams, of the Iroquois, came in and demanded him, but was refused. Dr. Chantry is overheard proposing to bleed him again, when he leaped out of bed and through the door, and, running out on the lawn, finds the woman with the babe reading a missal. The book he recognized as having belonged to his mother in some previous existence, he could not tell when.

Skenedonk, an Oneida friend, and Dr. Chantry find him, and while the woman with the babe, Eagle de Ferrier, and Count de Chaumont discuss his identity, she contending that he is the missing dauphin, and he that he is the son of Chief Williams, the Indian boy is returned to his father's wigwam. In the night he goes out alone, tears the hot bandages from his head and lays his head in the cool brook. While enjoying the sensation of cooling water he hears a woman's cry in the woods. He discovers that it is Annabel de Chaumont, and her escort, who have been lost in a bear pen. He pilots them to a house near by occupied by George Croghan.

AWAKING.

Chapter III.—Continued.

I was not sorry to be allowed to enter, for I was tired to exhaustion, and sat down on the floor away from the fire. The man looked at me suspiciously, though he was ruddy and good-natured. But he bent quite over before De Chaumont's daughter, and made a flourish with his hand in receiving young Croghan. There were in the cabin with him two women and two little girls; and a Canadian servant like a fat brown bear came from the rear of the house to look at us, and then went back to the horses.

All the women began to speak, but Annabel de Chaumont could talk faster than the four others combined, so they knew our plight before we learned that they were the Grignon and Tank families, who were going into the west to find settlement and had made the house their camp for one night. The Dutch maid, dark and round-eyed, and the flaxen little Grignon, had respect for their elders and held their tongues while Mme. Tank and Mme. Grignon spoke, but Annabel de Chaumont was like a grove of sparrows. The world seemed swarming with young maids. The travelers were mere children, while the count's daughter was startling as an angel. Her clothing fitted her body like an exquisite sheath. I do not know what it was, but it made her look as slim as a dragon-fly. Her white and rose-pink face had a high-arched nose, and was proud and saucy. She wore her hair beaten out like mist, with rich curly shreds hanging in front of her ears to her shoulders. She shook her head to set her hat straight, and turned her eyes in rapid smiling sweeps. I knew as well then as I ever did afterwards that she was bound to befool every man that came near her.

There were only two benches in the cabin, but it was floored and better made than our hunting lodges. The temporary inmates and their guests sat down in a long row before the fire. I was glad to make a pillow of a saddle near the wall, and watch their backs, as an outsider. Mademoiselle de Chaumont absorbed all eyes and all attention. She told about a ball, to which she had ridden with her governess and servants a three days' journey, and from which all the dancers were riding back a three days' journey to join in another ball at her father's house. With the hospitality which made Le Ray de Chaumont's manor the palace of the wilderness as it existed then, she invited the hosts who sheltered her for the night, to come to the ball and stay all summer. And they lamented that they could not accept the invitation, being obliged to hurry on to Albany, where a larger party would give them escort on a long westward journey.

The head of the house took up his bow, as if musing on the ball, and Annabel de Chaumont wriggled her feet faster and faster. Tireless as thistledown that rolls here and there at the will of the wind, up she sprang and began to dance. The children watched her spellbound. None of us had ever seen the many figures through which she passed, or such wonderful dancing. The chimney was built of logs and clay, forming terraces. As if it was no longer possible for her to stay on the ground, she darted from the bench-end to the lowest log, and stepped on up as fearlessly as a thing of air, until her head touched the roof. M. Grignon played like mad, and the others clapped their hands. While she poised so I sat up to watch her, and she noticed me for the first time by firelight.

"Look at that boy—he has been hurt—the blood is running down his cheek!" she cried. "I thought he was an Indian—and he is white!"

She came down as lightly as she had gone up, and caused me to be haled against my will to the middle of a bench. I wanted the women to leave me alone, and told them my head had been broken two days before, and was nearly well. The mothers, too keen to wash and bandage to let me escape, opened a saddle pack and tore good linen.

George Croghan stood by the chimney, slim and tall and handsome. His head and face were long, his hair was of a sunny color, and his mouth corners were shrewd and good-natured. I liked him the moment I saw him. Younger in years than I, he was older in wit and manly carriage. While he looked on it was hard to have Madame Tank seize my head in her hands and examine my eyebrow. She next took my wrists, and, not satisfied, stripped up the right sleeve and exposed a crescent-shaped scar, one of the rare vaccination marks of those days. I did not know what it was. Her animated dark eyes drew the brows together so that a pucker came between them. I looked at Croghan, and wanted to exclaim: "Help yourself! Anybody may handle me!"

"Ursule Grignon!" she said sharply, and Madame Grignon answered:

"Eh, what, Katrina?"

"This is the boy."

"But what boy?"

"The boy I saw on the ship."

"The one who was sent to America——"

Madame Tank put up her hand, and the other stopped.

"But that was a child," Madame Grignon then objected.

"Nine years ago. He would be about 18 now."

"How old are you?" they both put to me.

Remembering what my father had told Doctor Chantry, I was obliged to own that I was about 18. Annabel de Chaumont sat on the lowest log of the chimney with her feet on a bench, and her chin in her hand, interested to the point of silence. Something in her eyes made it very galling to be overhauled and have my blemishes enumerated before her and Croghan. What had uplifted me to Madame de Ferrier's recognition now mocked, and I found it hard to submit. It would not go well with the next stranger who declared he knew me by my scars.

"What do they call you in this country?" inquired Madame Tank.

I said my name was Lazarre Williams.

"It is not!" she said in an undertone, shaking her head.

I made bold to ask with some warmth what my name was then, and she whispered—"Poor child!"

It seemed that I was to be pitied in any case. In dim self-knowledge I saw that the core of my resentment was her treating me with commiseration. Mme. de Ferrier had not treated me so.

"You live among the Indians?" Mme. Tank resumed.

The fact was evident.

"Have they been kind to you?"

I said they had.

Mme. Tank's young daughter edged near her and inquired in a whisper:

"Who is he, mother?"

"Hush!" answered Mme. Tank.

The head of the party laid down his violin and bow, and explained to us:

"Mme. Tank was maid of honor to the Queen of Holland, before reverses overtook her. She knows court secrets."

"But she might at least tell us," coaxed Annabel, "if this Mohawk is a Dutchman."

Mme. Tank said nothing.

"What could happen in the court of Holland? The Dutch are slow coaches. I saw the Van Rensselaers once, near Albany, riding in a wagon with straw under their feet, on common chairs, the old patroon himself driving. This boy is some off-scouring."

"He outranks you, mademoiselle," retorted Mme. Tank.

"That's what I wanted to find out," said Annabel.

I kept half an eye on Croghan to see what he thought of all this woman talk. For you cannot help being more dominated by the opinion of your contemporaries than by that of the fore-running or following generation. He held his countenance in excellent command, and did not meddle even by a word. You could be sure, however, that he was no credulous person who accepted everything that was said to him.

Mme. Tank looked into the reddened fireplace, and began to speak, but hesitated. The whole thing was weird, like a dream resulting from the cut on my head; the strange white faces; the camp stuff and saddlebags unpacked from horses; the light on the coarse floor; the children listening as to a ghost story; Mlle. de Chaumont presiding over it all. The cabin had an arched roof and no loft. The top was full of shadows.

"If you are the boy I take you to be," Mme. Tank finally said, sinking her voice, "you may find you have enemies."

"If I am the boy you take me to be, madame, who am I?"

She shook her head.

"I wish I had not spoken at all. To tell you anything more would only plunge you into trouble. You are better off to be as you are, than to know the truth and suffer for it. Besides, I may be mistaken. And I am certainly too helpless myself to be of any use to you. This much I will say: when you are older, if things occur that make it necessary for you to know what I know, send a letter to me, and I will write it down."

With delicacy Monsieur Grignon began to play a whisper of a tune on his violin. I did not know what she meant by a letter, though I understood her. Madame Tank spoke the language as well as anybody. I thought then, as idiom after idiom rushed back on my memory, that it was an universal language, with the exception of Iroquois and English.

"We are going to a place called Green Bay, in the northwest territory, Remember the name: Green Bay. It is in the Wisconsin country."

IV.

Dawn found me lying wide awake with my head on a saddle. I slipped out into the dewey half light.

That was the first time I ever thought about the mountains. They seemed to be newly created, standing up with streamers of mist torn and floating across their breasts. The winding cliff-bound lake was like a gorge of smoke. I felt as if I had reared upon my hind feet, lifting my face from the ground to discover there was a God. Some of the prayers our priest had industriously beaten into my head, began to repeat themselves. In a twinkling I was a child, lonely in the universe, separated from my dim old life, instinct with growth, yet ignorant of my own needs.

What Madame de Ferrier and Madame Tank had said influenced me less than the intense life of my roused activities.

It was mid forenoon by the sun when I reached our lodges, and sat down fagged outside my father's door, to think longer before I entered. Hunger was the principal sensation, though we had eaten in the cabin the night before, and the Indian life inures a man to fasting when he cannot come by food. I heard Skenedonk talking to my father and mother in our cabin. The village was empty; children and women, hunters and fishermen having scattered to woods and waters.

"He ought to learn books," said Skenedonk. "Money is sent you every year to be spent upon him; yet you spend nothing upon him."

"What has he needed?" asked my father.

"He needs much now. He needs American clothes. He wept at the sight of a book. God has removed the touch since he plunged in the water."

"You would make a fool of him," said my father. "He was gone from the lodge this morning. You taught him an evil path when you carried him off."

"It is a natural path for him. He will go to his own. I stayed and talked with De Chaumont, and I bring you an offer. De Chaumont will take Lazarre into his house, and have him taught all that a white boy should know. You will pay the cost. If you don't, De Chaumont will look into this annuity of which you give no account."

"I have never been asked to give account. Could Lazarre learn anything? The priest has sat over him. He had food and clothing like my own."

"That is true. But he is changed. Marianne will let him go."

"The strange boy may go," said my mother. "But none of my own children shall leave us to be educated."

I got up and went into the cabin. All three knew I had heard, and they waited in silence while I approached my mother and put my hands on her shoulders. There was no tenderness between us, but she had fostered me. The small dark eyes in her copper face, and her shapeless body, were associated with winters and summers stretching to a vanishing point.

"Mother," I said, "is it true that I am not your son?"

She made no answer.

"Is it true that the chief is not my father?"

She made no answer.

"Who sends money to be spent on me every year?"

Still she made no answer.

"If I am not your son, whose son am I?"

In the silence I turned to Skenedonk.

"Isn't my name Lazarre William, Skenedonk?"

"You are called Lazarre Williams."

"A woman told me last night that it was not my name. Everyone denies me. No one owns me and tells whose child I am. Wasn't I born at St. Regis?"

"If you were, there is no record of your birth on the register. The chief's other children have their births recorded."

I turned to my father. The desolation of being cut off and left with nothing but the guess of strangers overcome me. I sobbed so the hoarse choke echoed in the cabin. Skenedonk opened his arms, and my father and mother let me lean on the Oneida's shoulder.

I have thought since that they resented with stoical pain his taking their white son from them. They both stood severely reserved, passively loosening the filial bond.

All the business of life was suspended, as when there is death in the lodge. Skenedonk and I sat down together on a bunk.

"Lazarre," my father spoke, "do you want to be educated?"

The things we pine for in this world are often thrust upon us in a way to choke us. I had tramped miles, storming for the privileges that had made George Croghan what he was. Fate instantly picked me up from the unendurable conditions to set me down where I could grow, and I squirmed with recoil from the shock.

I felt crowded over the edge of a cliff and about to drop into a valley of rainbows.

"Do you want to live in De Chaumont's house and learn his ways?"

My father and mother had been silent when I questioned them. It was my turn to be silent.

"Or would you rather stay as you are?"

"No, father," I answered, "I want to go."

The camp had never been dearer. I walked among the Indian children when the evening fires were lighted, and the children looked at me curiously as at an alien. Already my people had cut me off from them.

"What I learn I will come back and teach you," I told the young men and women of my own age. They laughed.

"You are a fool, Lazarre. There is a good home for you at St. Regis. If you fall sick in De Chaumont's house who will care?"

"Skenedonk is my friend," I answered.

"Skenedonk would not stay where he is tying you. When the lake freezes you will be mad for snowshoes and a sight of the St. Lawrence."

"Perhaps so. But we are not made alike. Do not forget me."

They gave me belts and garters, and I distributed among them all my Indian property. Then, as if to work a charm which should keep me from breaking through the circle, they joined hands and danced around me. I went to every cabin, half ashamed of my desertion, yet unspeakably craving a blessing. The old people variously commented on the measure, their wise eyes seeing the change in one who had been a child rather than a young man among them.

If the wrench from the village was hard, the induction into the manor was harder. Skenedonk took me in his boat, skirting the long strip of mountainous shore which separated us from De Chaumont.

He told me De Chaumont would permit my father to pay no more than my exact reckoning.

"Do you know who sends the money?" I inquired.

The Oneida did not know. It came through an agent in New York.

"You are ten years older than I am. You must remember very well when I was born."

"How can that be?" answered Skenedonk. "Nobody in the tribe knows when you were born."

"Are children not like the young of other creatures? Where did I come from?"

"You came to the tribe with a man, and Chief Williams adopted you."

"Did you see the man?"

"No. I was on the other side of the ocean, in France."

"Who saw him?"

"None of our people. But it is very well known. If you had noticed anything you would have heard the story long ago."

What Skenedonk said was true. I asked him, bewildered—"Why did I never notice anything."

The Oneida tapped his bald head.

"When I saw you first you were not the big fellow with speaking eyes that you are to-day. You would sit from sunrise to sunset, looking straight ahead of you and never moving except when food was put in your hand. As you grew older the children dragged you among them to play. You learned to fish, and hunt, and swim; and knew us, and began to talk our language. Now at last you are fully aroused and are going to learn the knowledge there is in books."

I asked Skenedonk how he himself had liked books, and he shook his head, smiling. They were good for white men, very good. An Indian had little use for them. He could read and write and cast accounts. When he made his great journey to the far country, what interested him most was the behavior of the people.

(To be continued to-morrow.)

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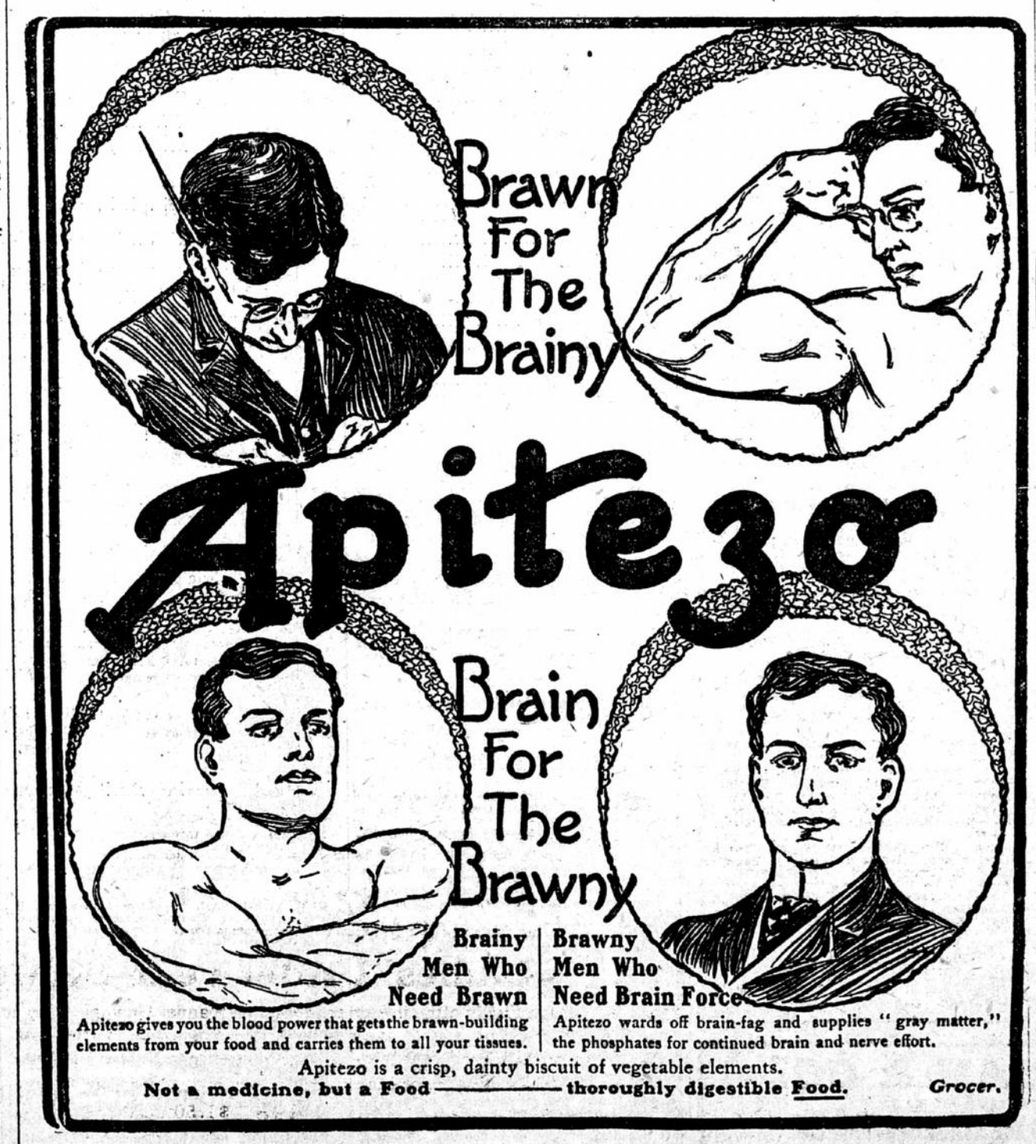

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