

Beyond the Frontier
By RANDALL PARRISH
A Romance of Early Days in the Middle West

Author of "Keith of the Border," "My Lady of Doubt," "The Maid of the Forest," etc.



CHAPTER XXIV.

Warriors of the Illini.

"Yes, M. de la Forest," I said, stepping forward to save Rene from a question which would embarrass him.

"I am the daughter of Captain de Chesnayne, whom the Sieur d'Artigny hath taken under his protection."

"La Chesnayne's daughter? Ah, I heard the story told in Quebec—twas La Barre's girl who gave me the facts with many a chuckle, as though he held it an excellent joke. But why are you here, madame? Is not M. Casson in the fort yonder?"

"'Tis a long tale, La Forest," broke in D'Artigny, laying his hand on the other's shoulder, "and will bide a better time for telling. I am a soldier, and you may trust my word. We are La Salle's men; let it go at that, for there is graver duty fronting us now than the retelling of camp gossip."

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"And what about the lady?"

"I shall go with you, messieurs," I said quietly. "There will be no more danger there than here; besides, you would not leave me alone without a guard, and you will need every fighting man."

"I felt the grip of Rene's hand, but it was La Forest's voice that spoke."

"The right ring to that, hey, D'Artigny? Madame answers my last argument. But first let us have word with the chief."

He addressed a word into the crowd of indistinguishable figures, and an Indian came forward. Dim as the light was, I was impressed with the dignity of his carriage, the firm character of his facial outline.

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"You will walk with me, dear one, you are not afraid?"

"Not of the peril of coming battle," I answered. "I think I hardly realize what that all means; but the risk

"There would be battle first, if I know my old comrades well. No, as to that there is no cause to fear. I shall be given fair trial now, and welcome it. My fear has been for you—the vengeance of Casson, if ever you came within his grasp again. But that also is settled."

"Settled? What is it you would tell me?"

"This, sweetheart; you should know, although I would that some other might tell you. La Forest whispered it to me while we were alone yonder, for he knew not you were estranged from your husband. He bears with him the king's order for the arrest of M. Casson. Captain de Baugis is commissioned by La Barre to return him safely to Quebec for trial."

"On what charge?"

"Treason to France; the giving of false testimony against a king's officer, and the concealing of official records."

"Mon Dieu! Was it the case of my father?"

"Yes; the truth has been made clear. There is, as I understand from what La Forest told me, not sufficient evidence against La Barre to convict, yet 'tis believed the case will cost him his office. But M. Casson was his agent, and is guilty beyond a doubt."

"But, monsieur, who made the charges? Who brought the matter to the attention of Louis?"

"The Comte de Frontenac; he was your father's friend, and won him restoration of his property. Not until La Forest met him in France was he aware of the wrong done Captain de Chesnayne. Later he had converse with La Salle, a Frenchman once stationed at Montreal, and two officers of the regiment of Carignan-Sallieres. Armed with information thus gained, he made appeal to Louis. 'Tis told me the king was so angry he signed the order of arrest with his own hand, and handed it to La Forest to execute."

"The governor knows?"

"Not yet. La Forest felt it best to keep the secret, fearing he might be detained, or possibly ambushed on the way thither."

"I cannot describe my feelings—joy, sorrow, memory of the past over-whelming me. My eyes were wet with tears, and I could find no words. D'Artigny seemed to understand, yet he made no effort to speak, merely holding me close with his strong arm. So in silence, our minds upon the past and the future, we followed the savages through the black night along the dim trail. For the time I forgot where I was, my weird, ghastly surroundings, the purpose of our stealthy advance, and remembered only my father, and the scenes of childhood. He must have comprehended, for he made no attempt to interrupt my reverie, and his silence drew me closer—the steady pressure of his arm brought me peace."

Suddenly before us loomed the shadow of the great rock, which rose a mighty barrier across the trail; its crest outlined against the sky. The Indians

had halted here, and we pressed forward through them, until we came to where the chief and La Forest waited.

"I think I hardly realize what that all means; but the risk

"There would be battle first, if I know my old comrades well. No, as to that there is no cause to fear. I shall be given fair trial now, and welcome it. My fear has been for you—the vengeance of Casson, if ever you came within his grasp again. But that also is settled."

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