

# THE MARKS OF THE BEAR CLAWS



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BY

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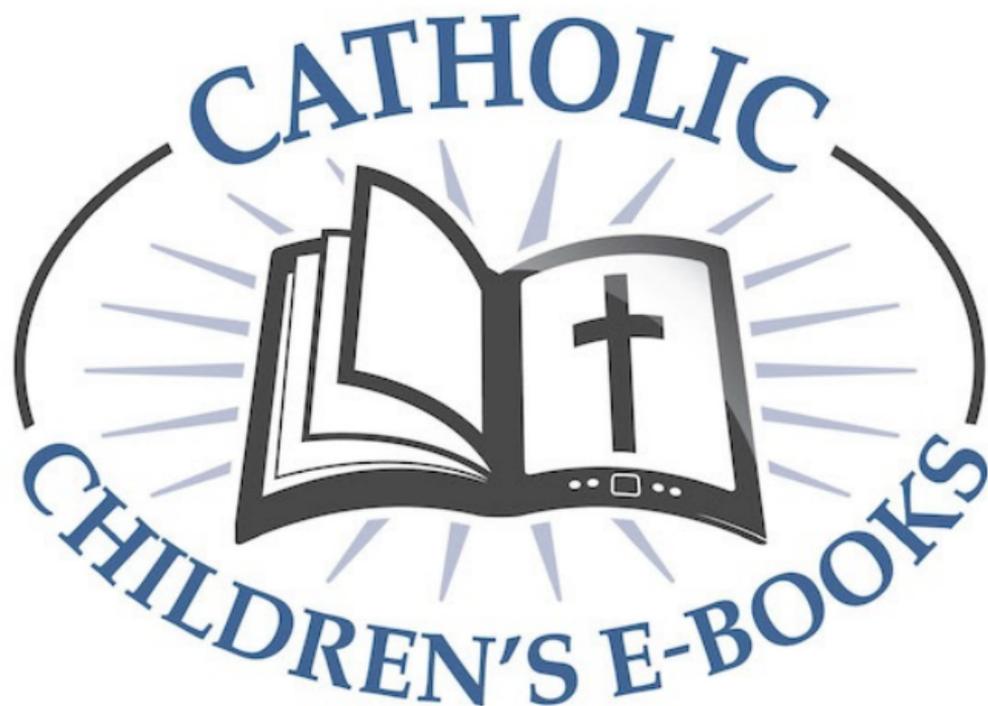


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# The Marks of the Bear Claws

## CHAPTER I

### RED BEAR IS OBSTINATE

“HE won’t come. Monsieur, he won’t come.”

“I am glad to hear it, boy.”

“But, Monsieur, you don’t know him. He’d protect us during the whole voyage; he never sleeps; he’s always on the watch.”

“I see, you want him for a watch-dog. I’d rather call him a snake, for he’s always hiding around the village. He has a guilty look, that Indian, and I don’t trust him, and am glad that he’s not coming.”

“I’ve explained the reason of his action, monsieur; he is afraid of Father Marquette. His father made him promise when a boy not to become a Christian and told him not to go to the Black-robe’s house. He is superstitious, there is no doubt about that. But can you blame him? Are not half of his people that way? I heard Father Marquette say the other day that it took centuries to convert the French. Give the poor Indians a

chance; give Red Bear a chance. In fact I'd hoped that the voyage would bring him closer to the priest and be the means of converting him."

"Well, Paul; he is your friend and I admire you for defending him, but I say again, that I'm glad Red Bear is not coming."

"You may be sorry before the voyage is over."

"Yes, I may, but just jump out of my way, young fellow. I must have this canoe ready before night and give it a trial."

"Can I help you?"

"Yes, you can help me. The Ottawa flotilla is to start for Quebec this morning, and you can help me by helping the Bear into one of the canoes with instructions to stay in Quebec."

"He doesn't need any help. I've been talking with him for an hour. He has made up his mind to go, and nothing can move him."

"Then I have one thing to say; don't stop the Bear. Let him go to Quebec, and to-morrow I hope we'll be able to start in the opposite direction."

The boy said nothing, but stood watching his

companion, who with thread, made of the bark of leatherwood, was stitching the side of a birch canoe. But the lad's thoughts were about the Indian friend who was so soon to leave him. The flotilla of thirty canoes was to start for Quebec that morning. Would it not be possible to detain the Indian until the convoy of canoes had departed? His face suddenly brightened. With a pleasant "good morning" and a graceful bow he left the lake shore.

The Frenchman who was working on the canoe was named Felix Lataupine—one of a party of six preparing to start on a voyage of discovery the following morning. He was of medium size, with a full round face, dark eyes, and coarse black hair. For years a soldier on the upper Saint Lawrence and afterward a hunter on the plains of Illinois, Lataupine had escaped the contaminating influence of the camp, and in the midst of corrupt companions had led a truly Christian life. Inured to hardships, acquainted with the waterways of the country, deeply interested in any undertaking for the public good—bold, faithful, and jovial,—

he was both a useful and a pleasant associate.

His aversion for the Indian boy, called Red Bear, was not without reason. The latter was an unconverted Huron over whom the missionaries had absolutely no influence. When a child, his father, a superstitious chief, had made him fast for several days and nights, and at the end of each night had asked the boy whether he had dreamed of any animal. On his replying that he had not, the fast was continued until the mother, seeing the boy was wasting away, told him to say that he had seen a bear in his dream. The delighted father took from his neck a string of bear claws, and placing them on the head of his son consecrated him to the Great Bear, which from that time was to be his protector. He was told that the one condition of his protection was that he should not become a Christian. The ceremony had made such an impression on the boy that he was afraid to approach the missionaries, who were regarded as the enemies of the spirit who was to protect him. The Indian was known, too, to be treacherous and unfaithful. There was but one person in all

Canada who trusted him, a lad by the name of Paul Guibeau,—the very one who had just pleaded for the Indian with Lataupine.

“Remember, that he is to leave with that flotilla this morning,” cried Lataupine to Paul, for the boy seemed to be meditating some scheme, and his companion rightly interpreted his action as planning to retain his Indian friend. “If you don’t see that he starts, I’ll bind him hands and feet and give him to one of the Christian Ottawas to take to Quebec as a prisoner.”

Paul turned and could see the smile on Lataupine’s face as he delivered himself of this threat; for the big-hearted Frenchman, while he despised and distrusted the Huron, was a warm friend of Paul. The latter understood the nature of the threat and responded in the same bantering, joking way: “The Bear is going with us—and I predict that he will save your life and mine.”

“I’d drown him the first day,” replied Felix Lataupine in a loud voice, as he smeared one of the seams of the canoe with tar.

“Father Marquette wants him with us,” said

Paul turning and unconsciously retracing his steps slowly.

“You mean he is willing, and this only after a month of pleading on your part.”

“I repeat what I said, monsieur, he wants the Indian to come.”

“Then it is with the hope that he may be able to convert the pagan.”

“Partly so; but he wants Red Bear as a protection. Every Indian at the village says we’ll never return. Father Marquette thinks it is well to have some one as a scout.”

“Then he is to be our watch-dog; that is what I said at first.”

In the enthusiastic defense of his Indian friend, Paul continued to retrace his steps toward the canoe. “Red Bear will be neither our dog nor our scout, for he’s going to Quebec to-day; he said he was going and I believe he’ll keep his word.”

“Parbleu! There goes my tar!” exclaimed Lataupine, for Paul in the excitement of his defense had upset the wooden bowl and spilled its contents.

“I beg your pardon, monsieur, I quite forgot myself.”

“I’ll forgive you if you only get the Huron started, and be sure he has his claws with him. I’m under the impression that you believe in the charm of those claws, and if you bring them with you it will confirm me in my belief.”

“Look at that seam,” and Paul pointed to an opening in which not half enough tar had been poured.

“I’ll spoil the job if you do not get away and stop talking about that cursed pagan. The tar is too cold to work with.” Lataupine scraped up the tar from the ground and placed the wooden bowl which contained it on a flat stone, which in turn was put over the fire. “Go on, boy! go on! and put the Bear in a canoe and send him to Quebec;” and the man continued to stir the tar while heating it.

With another graceful bow the boy turned, and started for the cabin of Father Marquette who had asked him to secure some flowers for the mission chapel.

“I do believe that Paul has been influenced by

the tricks and incantations of that devil of a Huron," muttered Lataupine as he stirred the tar. "The Indian cannot come! He must not come! He'll make a pagan of Paul and bring a curse on the expedition." The Frenchman looked up from his work and watched the boy, who was walking briskly toward the missionary's cabin, holding his beaver-skin cap in his right hand and letting the warm May breeze play through his long black hair. He was low of stature, with broad shoulders, and a large round head. His short jacket and trousers of bluish-gray cloth were worn and faded; but around his waist, and tied with a double knot, was a new, yellow sash. His French boots, which reached to his knees, were torn and patched. Still there was nothing slovenly in the boy's appearance; his long residence at a frontier post had made it impossible for him to discard his old clothes for others which were newer and better. "As fine a lad as I ever saw," continued Lataupine, talking to himself as he stood erect and admired the physique of his sturdy friend. "He is strong and active, too, and a good oarsman—

rather young for the work, but I'm sure he can stand the voyage. Pierre says he is but sixteen, but he looks seventeen or more. That sash will lose its yellow before he gets back from the voyage. I wonder whether he knows the difficulties before him."

Thus mused Lataupine to himself, while again and again he resolved to prevent the Bear from joining the expedition. Paul at the same time was maturing his plans to have the Huron accompany them.

## CHAPTER II

# FAREWELL TO THE BEAR

“GOOD morning, Father, I have come to get the lilacs for you.”

“Will you be able to find them?” replied Father Marquette, who walked out from his little mission cabin, and placed his right hand upon the shoulder of the boy.

“The island is not large, and I do not see how I can miss the flowers, if the bush is as high as you say it is.”

“I have not seen the shrub for a year, but it was then fully ten feet tall—taller in fact than any I have seen in Europe.”

“Was it in bloom, Father?”

“No, it was too early in the spring, but I remember that the buds were beginning to swell and to promise a bountiful supply of blossoms. The bush is about twenty feet from the shore, and a little west of Eagle Bluff.”

“Then I’ll have no difficulty in finding it.”

“The lilac is dear to me on account of its

associations,” said the priest. “When I was a student at the Jesuit college in Rheims, a missionary returned from the far east and brought with him, among other new plants, one that was called the sacred flower of the gods of Persia. Years after, when I returned to teach in the same college, the walks were lined with these beautiful lilacs and the odor from them pervaded the garden. I remember how we decorated the altar of the Blessed Virgin with these choice flowers, and the perfume filled the chapel. That year Father Mercier, now in Quebec, left the college for the missions of Canada. I gave him a small root and asked him to plant it in New France, and added that, when it was time for it to bloom, I should join him in the New World. When he arrived in Quebec, Father Dablon was starting for the lakes, and at his request carried this shoot with him. Stopping at the island on his way to this mission, he planted the root. Last year he visited me at the mission and told me where I could find the shrub. I did find it, but, as I said, it was too early in the spring for it to bloom. I am quite sure that it is

blooming now, and with its flowers we must decorate the altar of the Blessed Virgin.”

“I’ll do my best to get them, Father.”

“And when you have cut them, place them in the canoe carefully, so as not to break the stems.”

“Certainly, Father; and now I must be off, for I want to take Red Bear with me so as to return before the Ottawa flotilla starts for Quebec.” Paul hung his head as he made this last statement, for he had resolved to detain the Bear until the Indian convoy had sailed. “You know, Father, that Red Bear is going back to Quebec.”

“It is just as well; even when I gave you permission to bring him I doubted about the wisdom of the plan.”

“I know the men are opposed to his going, but I think they’re making a mistake.” And the boy remained unshaken in his resolution to make this last effort to retain the Huron. The lad felt that he was to undertake a perilous expedition, and in this he shared the convictions of his older associates. But the others, so thought Paul, did not know the value of the Bear as a protection against all

dangers and surprises. Paul was not an obstinate or self-willed boy; in this instance he was of the opinion that he was the best judge of the Huron's worth. Father Marquette had given his consent to bring the Indian, and Paul intended, if it lay in his power, to bring him.

"If you are to return before noon you must start at once," were the warning words of the priest.

Before ten minutes had passed a light canoe pushed off from the northern shore of the Straits of Mackinac, with its prow turned toward an island. In the canoe were Paul Guibeau and his Indian friend.

"Red Bear," began the French lad, when the canoe was some distance from the shore, "tomorrow Sieur Joliet and Father Marquette start on the voyage to find the great river called Mit-chi-sipi. I am going with them. The Huron and Ottawa Indians think that we'll never return. They say that the river is inhabited by a demon who devours all who enter it. His voice is so loud that it sounds like thunder, and his teeth are sharper than those of the black bear. Whenever you are

with me, I am safe. You protect me as the bird protects its young; you are like the young tree in the woods which shelters the flowers beneath it and protects them from frost; you can hide me away like the minnow deep in the water; with you I can escape from danger as quickly as the gull from the musket of the pale-face." Thus in figurative language, which he knew would flatter and please, did Paul seek to win over his Indian friend.

The Huron understood French, but he was afflicted with a partial dumbness and conversed in monosyllabic, guttural sounds which few could understand. But aided by the vivid gesticulation of his friend, and from long association, Paul could follow his speech with but little difficulty. As the two conversed, the canoe danced over the choppy waves, and, driven by a slight wind from the north, drifted toward the mainland south of the strait. Paul, too, by a twist of the oar, turned the canoe from the island. Thus the light craft, zigzagging from side to side, covered almost twice the distance it would have taken had it gone

in a direct line.

On reaching the island, it was necessary to go far beyond Eagle Bluff, for the shore here was wild and rugged, and the storm-beaten precipice was a perpendicular wall from twenty to thirty feet high. Extending from this shore of solid rock can be seen to-day a ledge reaching out over the water which is so deep that the largest lake vessels approach within a few feet of the land. The ledge is now called Lover's Leap; but was then known as Eagle Bluff, for an eagle which had its nest near by was often seen to perch upon the rocky precipice.

"What a sweet smell," said Paul aloud, just as the canoe was gliding beneath the bluff. The water here, being sheltered by the island from the northern wind, was so smooth that the rowing was an easy task. Up to this point, the odor of the pine pervaded the air, but now it was no longer perceived, and the air was filled with the fragrance of some unknown flower. "Can that be the lilac?" continued the boy, looking along the precipice. Not a flower could be seen in the bare

crevices of the rocks.

The two canoemen finally landed at a place where they could climb the shore. Working their way through the dense pines, they reached Eagle Bluff, from which as a guiding point they sought the place where the lilac grew. Brushing aside the pines they suddenly came upon the coveted shrub; and not one, but a patch of them, covered with blooms from the lowest twig to the topmost leaf. Here were flowers sufficient to beautify not only the little altar but the entire mission chapel. The slender sprout from the college in Europe had grown and ramified until here in the midst of the pines it claimed a little world of its own. Nor has it ceased to grow, for in the course of two centuries it has covered not only the island but the entire northern peninsula.

Paul was purposely slow in cutting the flowers and carrying them to the canoe, where each bunch was carefully deposited. It was noon before a sufficiently large quantity had been collected. When the boys returned for the last load, their attention was attracted by something on the lake

just visible through the thick undergrowth. Running to the edge of the precipice to get a better view of the object, they saw at a glance that it was the flotilla of canoes on its way to Quebec.

With all his natural shrewdness, the Bear did not suspect his friend of treason. With his hand shading his face from the morning sun, he glanced now at the canoes, now at the clear deep water beneath him. Running back to the cluster of flowers, and placing a string of bear claws in a bunch of lilacs which Paul had cut, he as quickly returned to the edge of the precipice. Suddenly, with the quick, graceful movement of a gull, he dived into the lake. He soon arose to the surface and with rapid strokes swam toward the convoy of boats fully half a mile away. Perceiving him, the Indians in one of the canoes came to his rescue.

Paul saw him taken into the canoe, stripped of his wet clothes and dressed in furs, a large quantity of which the Ottawas were carrying as merchandise to Quebec. He stood watching the flotilla until it vanished, and then with a heavy

heart gathered up his flowers. As he did so, the string of bear claws fell from the bunch of lilacs. Thinking that Red Bear had left them by mistake, he put them into his pocket to keep in remembrance of his friend.

## CHAPTER III

### STEPHEN DORVAL.

ON the northern shore of the Strait of Mackinac stood the mission of Saint Ignace. Within the rectangular palisade of pine trees were grouped the rude cabins of the Huron and Ottawa Indians. Christians though they were, they did not always manifest that brotherly love and harmony which the priests taught them should be among the first fruits of their conversion; and for the sake of peace a second palisade, smaller than that which protected the mission, separated the two tribes.

To the south of the village, and within the enclosure, were the chapel, the missionary's cabin, and accommodations for the hunters and traders who came to spend the winter at the straits. Farther up the beach were the wigwams of some fifty pagan Indians who refused all communication with their converted tribesmen, and preferred to starve and freeze rather than enjoy the warmth and comfort of the mission.

With them lived a trapper by the name of Stephen Dorval. He belonged to that wild class of *coureurs-de-bois* or bushrangers, who knew no law, and were at times wilder and more savage than the savages themselves.

Among those who had spent the winter at the mission was Louis Joliet, who had been sent by the Governor of Canada, Frontenac, to undertake the discovery of the great river, called *Mit-chi-sipi*, of which so many strange reports had reached Quebec. As representing in person the highest official in New France, Joliet had been given a cabin next to that of the missionary, Father Marquette. Here, after the evening *May-services*, previous to the departure of the expedition, Joliet was making his final preparations. He was just folding away some birch-bark to be used as writing material, when there was a knock at the door and in walked Stephen Dorval.

“Monsieur, may I speak with you for a moment?” asked he.

“And may I ask who you are?” was the reply as

Joliet folded his birch-bark and placed it on the rustic table by his side.

“You ask who I am, monsieur! We have spent the winter here at the mission and you do not know me?”

“We have never met before.”

“No, we have never met. I am not good enough for you and for your company. Still I was born and educated in France, and came of a family of greater distinction than that of Sieur Joliet. I am Stephen Dorval.” There was something of refinement in the tall, gaunt figure which indicated that the trapper had once enjoyed the advantages which he claimed.

“Stephen Dorval,” repeated Joliet. “I should have known you, monsieur, from all that I have heard of you.”

“You have heard nothing that was good. I venture to say that I have not a friend in Canada.”

“You have certainly deserved punishment at the hands of the government, if all is true that people say about you.”

“I do not know what is said about me, and I

care less!" There was a tone of contempt in the speaker's voice.

"And are you not afraid of being arrested and carried to Quebec?"

Dorval drew himself up to his full height and deliberately folded his arms. "Monsieur Joliet," said he, "I do not believe that twenty men could take me to Quebec; I do not know how I'd escape, but I'd do it. I am not a man to boast. I have more than the cunning of the savage. If nature has made me an outlaw, she has given me wonderful instincts of self-preservation. I repeat it, I will never be taken to Quebec a prisoner; although God knows I have often deserved it. I have broken every law made by the Governor. I have sold whiskey from Quebec to Lake Tracy. I have traded illegally, I have robbed trading posts, I have done all kinds of evil. I am not saying this to boast of it. I know it is wrong. I am ashamed of it. I got started in the wrong way, and I continued in the wrong way. But there is one thing I have not done; I have not stained my hands in human blood, not even Indian blood. I have never killed

a human being.”

For some time there was a silence. Joliet wondered what had brought the man to his cabin, and what had forced this confession. The visitor did not know how to begin to announce the object of his coming, or rather he felt that he had begun in the wrong way.

“The Indian boy, Red Bear, is not going on the expedition,” resumed Dorval in a modified tone.

“No.”

“Has he already started for Quebec?”

“So I am told,” and Joliet wondered of what interest this could be to the visitor.

“Was not one of the two canoes made to accommodate four persons?”

“Three the size of Lataupine would fill it.”

“Monsieur,” said Dorval. “I have come to ask a favor.”

“And what is that favor?”

“I want to accompany you on your voyage of discovery.”

Joliet stepped toward the fire place in which a blaze was lighting up the cabin and dispelling the

chill of the evening, then turned and faced the visitor. "Monsieur Dorval," he began, as he glanced at the wild costume of the visitor who was dressed like the Indians with whom he associated, "I am a representative of the government of New France, and you are an outlaw in the eyes of this same government. To permit you to accompany the expedition would be to receive you in the service of the government. Do you not see that your request is impossible?"

"It does look that way," and Dorval stood for some minutes in silence. "Listen to me, for a moment," he began again. "Is there no hope for one who has done wrong? Must he always remain an outlaw, a convict? Is there no chance for him to reform? Is prison or death the only alternative? You have just finished the services in the chapel —"

"Yes, and they were very impressive," interrupted Joliet. "Never before did I hear Father Marquette speak with so much feeling."

"I was in the chapel. I do not know why I went, but I was there, and while I was there I resolved

to be a better man. I want to give up this savage life and return to civilization. I want to begin the practice of my duties as a Christian. Am I first to serve in a French prison? Is there not some other way of beginning a better life? Can I not work in the service of France, and when I have proved that I am no longer an outlaw, will you not ask pardon of Frontenac for me? If you refuse me this help, how am I to begin to reform? Monsieur, here is the solemn promise that Stephen Dorval is a changed man from this minute if only he gets this chance to reform.” Again Dorval folded his arms and stood in respectful silence.

Joliet, too, was silent.

“I repeat it, monsieur, I repeat that I can be of service to the government,” again began the pleader, profiting by the silence of the leader. “And I can do the government great harm. As I said before I will not go to prison—no one can put me there. If I am pardoned, I have no friends to help me to make a living, and will be forced to go back to my savage life. If I am not pardoned, I must continue in my savage life and remain an

enemy of the government. If I am permitted to work for the government and prove that I deserve pardon, I can continue in this service. Dorval's rifle will be a protection to you, his knowledge of the savages and their ways will be a guard to you, and lastly his fidelity in the service of New France will prove that Stephen Dorval has made no idle boast."

"I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of your promise," replied Joliet; "but your proposition is a rather strange one, and I must have time to consider it."

"Then I shall await your answer until to-morrow morning," and Dorval turned to leave the cabin.

"Wait," said Joliet, as the stranger opened the door. "I had thought of talking the matter over with Father Marquette before giving you my answer, but I know he will leave the decision with me. It is late now, and to-morrow morning we shall not have time to discuss the question. Monsieur Dorval, I take you at your word. You may come with us to share the glories and the

hardships of the voyage. But it will not do to join the expedition here at the mission, for neither the French nor the savages would understand why you had been admitted as one of the party. You know where Gull Point is?"

"I do."

"Then wait for us there to-morrow."

"Thanks," said he, as he grasped the hand of Joliet. "To-night you have made a man of Stephen Dorval, and I promise you that you will never regret what you have done for him."