

## Chapter 34

It was almost the end of August before the men arrived. They made up a defiant if small Acadian refugee armada. The *Marie-Josèphe*, the *Saint-Charles* and the *Angélique* were among them. Ti-Jos spotted them when they were just specks on the horizon. He waited until he was sure they were not British warships before he ran to tell the others. "I know, I just know one of them is Papa's ship, the *Marie-Josèphe*," he told his Aunt Jeanne.

There was a flurry of tense excitement at the news. The women and children gathered quietly, in small groups, speaking in whispers as if they might be heard from out at sea. They did not dare go directly to the landing spot a short distance away or show themselves on the shore in case Ti-Jos was wrong. There were surely British warships around and privateers and ordinary thieves. Besides, Anne had told them she thought the men would have lost their ships and would arrive overland.

Jeanne thought her heart would break if the ships suddenly changed direction and sailed by. But no, they were headed directly for the landing near them. Suddenly, Ti-Jos gave a cry and started to run. "It's them. It's them."

Jeanne shouted to Ti-Jos to wait, but he was already halfway to the landing, with Pierrot and Nono and the other children and the mothers following.

It took some time for the men to disembark because there was only space for one ship at a time at the little landing space. The *Marie-Josèphe* was the first ship to reach land. Joseph almost stepped on Ti-Jos, who was dancing around him in excitement. He gave his son a rough hug. "Ti-Jos, my man, can you go and keep a lookout for ships, the way I taught you?"

Ti-Jos was off like a bolt of lightning for his lookout spot.

Jeanne could see that Joseph was tense. He looked at the assembled families.

"Mesdames, I know you are very anxious to know who is with us, but I must ask you to be patient. We have supplies and we have to unload them as quickly as possible and then find a place to hide our ships." Some men were beginning to unload the *Marie-Josèphe* as he spoke. He noticed two young boys struggling to pull a small canoe to the shore to help. "Oui, les gars," Joseph said and told one of his men to help the boys. "We can use that boat."

As soon as his ship was unloaded, Joseph sailed it away and the next ship came in. In the meantime, the canoes went back and forth. As each ship was unloaded it followed Joseph's ship up the rivière Nipisiguit to find a secluded corner in which to hide.

Anne and Marie-Cécile Landry took charge on shore. They decided what the women and older children could carry and had them take as much as possible to the nearest campsite.

Finally, the ships were empty and secured on the river. The men were back and had carried the heavier provisions up to the camp. Everyone had worked quickly, efficiently and almost silently.

It was a bittersweet reunion. Abraham's ship had been lost and his wife Marguerite was despondent that it was not among the others when they returned. Fortunately he had only lost his ship and returned with his brother Charles. A number of the returning men had lost their ships too. Marie-Cécile Landry, who had heard that her husband and son were lost, wept with joy when her son found her. Many others' hopes were dashed. Young Anne-Marie Gautier, expecting her first child in a few months, was informed by her brother-in-law that her husband had died in battle. Almost all of the men who arrived found family, but not all the waiting families found their men. Among the men who arrived were some of the most experienced resistance leaders, such as Joseph Leblanc dit Le Maigre, the brothers Pierre and Jean Gautier, Paul Landry, Joseph Richard and Abraham Boudreau.

Pierre Bois had been wounded. He limped off the *Angélique* and tried to run to his family. "Stay, Pierre," Jeanne called, "we're coming!" He scooped up the children in his arms and Jeanne wrapped her arms around him. He wanted to help unload his ship, but Jeanne stopped him. She would take good care of him.

Finally, a hush descended on all of them. Joseph asked his brother Charles to speak.

Charles laughed. "My brother is a man of action. I only get to speak when things are quiet. You women have done un beau travail here. Wherever you are, you women of Acadia, we men know it's our home and our land.

"We have brought all the supplies we could get our hands on," he continued. "We even have a couple of kegs of rum and I hope you will forgive us if we have un p'tit coup to celebrate our reunion. Tomorrow we will speak of more serious things."

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In the following days, the men took stock of the location and condition of the encampments and the women took stock of the new supplies.

When the men agreed that their situation was good, they quickly began to repair what houses could be salvaged and to build others. They cut down suitably sized pine trees, squared them, put them one upon the other, and fastened them with wooden pegs. They filled the crevices with moss and secured the chimneys with clay. This made a snug house that could withstand the harsh winters.

The women dealt with the barrels of flour, dried cod and the salt that would allow them to cure fish. There were blankets, shoes and clothing. But the provisions had to be carefully doled out. The most valuable of all was the flour. They would stretch it out by baking bread only at intervals of one or two weeks. The winter would be long, and they could not depend on further privateering for supplies.

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Pierre Bois found himself, perhaps for the first time in his life, the centre of his wife's attention. He had been shot in the leg during the battle at Ristigouche. The wound had not been properly treated and had festered. Jeanne insisted that he stay off his feet and she put a poultice of herbs on his wound. Marie was her mother's assistant, and Pierrot and Nono ran circles around their Papa while he held Angélique on his lap.

"Well, Jeanne," he said one day with typical Acadian wit, "if I had known I would be so well treated, I'd have shot myself in the leg long ago."

Jeanne did not answer. She could not quite explain to herself why she suddenly felt such a surge of affection for her husband.

Pierre recovered in time to help build their own winter house. As the workload lessened, Jeanne once again was privy

to her brothers' discussions. Charles had almost convinced Joseph that if they could stay hidden for now and not do anything to further incite British anger, they might have a chance to settle in this area. It was good country. They could live by fishing and hunting, and the land could be farmed if only they could stay long enough in one place. There were other Acadians in the Nipisiguit area, and in Caraquet, Ristigouche and Chipagan. And there had been Mi'kmaw communities here for centuries.

"Think about it, Joseph," Charles said. "Let the rest of the world go by. We can make our home here without anyone being the wiser."

"Charles, you're too good a man to see evil in anyone," said Joseph. "Do you think the British will just forget about us Acadians?"

"They might if we leave them alone. We don't need to raid their ships if we can live off the land. Can't we at least try this?"

"What about the other resistance leaders?"

"What about them? They are at the end of their resources too."

"Well, Charles, let's get through the winter and then see what spring brings."

*Mon Dieu*, thought Jeanne, *we are back to waiting through another winter to learn what news spring will bring.*

Late in September, they heard that Montréal had fallen. On September 8, a year after the French troops had been defeated on the Plains of Abraham and surrendered Québec, Montréal had surrendered without a shot being fired. Québec, Montréal, La Petite Rochelle were no more. The Acadian refugees were now truly abandoned on this vast continent.

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