

The Long March

HOW ACHILLE GOYETTE, IN THE HOUR OF HIS GREAT TRIAL,
KEPT FAITH WITH HIS FRIEND EUDORE CORRIVEAU

By William Merriam Rouse

IN the *salon* of a solid stone house of the Rue Laval two men lifted their glasses in a joyous farewell. The fortified Upper Town had no more worthy citizen than good Eudore Corriveau—a man as sturdy of soul as he was of shoulders, an official of the Banque Nationale, and with so much of the love of *le bon Dieu* in his heart that the poor and afflicted of Quebec blessed him.

“*Salut!*” he exclaimed, beaming over the rim of his glass at his younger friend, Achille Goyette.

Eudore was not a handsome man, but when his face wore the expression which it had now for Goyette all the world loved him.

“*Salut, mon ami!*” replied Achille, throwing back his shapely head and laughing for pure joy of living.

Why not? The air of winter was more exhilarating than whisky *blanc*, the heavens of *beau Canada* were jeweled with stars, and the gray, walled town that he loved held Eudore Corriveau. Above all, there was this romantic errand for his friend. He could not imagine life more sweet to the taste than it was this cold, beautiful night.

“As you know,” said Eudore, “the railroad ends at Baie St. Paul. From there you will go with a horse and *traîneau*, or on snowshoes, as may be necessary, through the villages along the St. Lawrence to Rivière Ste. Marguerite. Naturally, Marie will be ready to come with you, and you should be able to bring her back here so that we can be married at the end of Lent. Do not be afraid that she will be a trouble to you on your journey. If you cannot get horses, she will march on foot with you, mile for mile. She is a marvelous woman, my friend!”

Achille Goyette smiled, and his dark blue eyes—the slightly mad, humorous eyes of the born adventurer—grew darker still. His strong body shifted, and with a movement as easily swift as the movement of a cat he let his hand rest upon Corriveau’s shoulder.

“But certainly she is marvelous, Eudore! They are all marvelous, when we love them, and I will bring her to you so that you can be married at the end of Lent. I will swear a great oath!”

“There is no need for an oath between friend and friend.” A little mistiness touched the eyes of Eudore Corriveau. “Thou hast been as a brother to me, Achille!”

“And thou knowest what there is between thee and me!”

“Nothing at all!” laughed Corriveau, to throw aside all this seriousness. “I am ten years older and more foolish than you, Achille—that is all. It is proven. I should have brought Marie Gagnon to Quebec with me last summer, when I found her. I should be able to pull myself away from the affairs of the bank, and go for her now. Bah! But Marie understands all this perfectly! Achille, she is the most sensible among women!”

“Truly!” agreed Goyette, with twinkling eyes. “She is superb. She is magnificent. I grant everything.”

“Wait until you see her, and talk with her, my friend!” cried Eudore. “You will begin to search all Canada for another woman like her!”

“Never! Me, I do not marry.”

“Wait! I myself have often said that, in the past.”

“Poof! Already I have three wives—the blue Laurentians, the great river, and this queen of cities!”

"Did I not have a bride in the bank? Achille, some day you will be shaken like a rag!"

"May that day be far off, then!" laughed Goyette. He slipped into his *capote* of homespun and took up the tall *casque* of astrakhan that set so gallantly over one ear. Achille wore also the *ceinture fléchée* of the ancient times—a conscious affectation that brought blessings upon him from old men and strangers, and smiles from the grandmothers.

The *ceinture* was a broad woven scarf that went over one shoulder, twice around his waist, and hung in fringed ends—orange, vermilion, yellow, scarlet, blending harmoniously in the fabric and crying to the world that here came one who remembered the former customs. It belted in Achille's *capote* and at the same time whipped his spirit to fine imaginings.

Corriveau, wearing a most dignified business suit from the best tailor in Quebec, smiled fondly upon his friend.

"There is but fifteen minutes before your train leaves," he said, "and the driver of the *traineau* has already sent in three times to see why you don't come. Go, my friend!"

For the twentieth time they shook hands, they embraced, and finally Achille ran out of the *salon*. He cleared the stone steps at a leap, and flung himself in among the many robes of the low Canadian sleigh. His best friend, Eudore Corriveau, stood in the doorway, a square and honest figure, and lifted his hand in salute. Bells jingled, the plumes on the horses danced.

"*Marche donc!*" shouted the driver, in a voice made hoarse by many years of whisky *blanc*.

II

It is a long way from the lights of the Rue St. Jean to the village of Rivière Ste. Marguerite. Between them lie small towns, and villages, and many long miles of forest. It is like walking back through the centuries to go to one of these hamlets, perhaps ten days' march from the nearest railroad, and find the thick-walled stone houses lying half asleep in the snow. It was like that when Achille Goyette, having crossed the Saguenay, followed the Rivière Ste. Marguerite up to the village and stood looking down from a bluff.

A handful of black roofs lay scattered upon a hillside, with house walls white-

washed, or tinted pink, lavender, or some other color that fell in with the mood of the owner. Light curls and wisps of smoke hung above the chimneys, held by the motionless cold air. As far as Goyette could see in every direction there stretched snow, and dark forest, and more snow.

He loved it; for to those born to the north the cold is kind, and his blood was running hot within him as he went down to the village. The trip had been good sport, and it would be no small pleasure to see this marvel of perfection who was to become the wife of his best friend.

Achille walked along the single, snow-filled street, between houses with double windows and double doors. Here and there he saw the head of some woman, curious at sight of a stranger. An old man was sawing wood with the steady patience of the aged. A dog trotted down the street with a fresh bone. Goyette began to look for a shop where he might inquire his way to the Gagnon house.

Then it was that his head was turned by the sound of opening doors and the creak of quick footsteps upon frozen snow. Out of one of the houses came a girl, with a jaunty fur cap upon her black hair and the big collar of a fur coat rolling back from the most adorable chin that Achille Goyette had ever seen.

Now when a young man thinks that a girl has the most adorable chin he has ever seen, or the most adorable feet, or eyes, or hands, it is a veritable sign that his heart has been more or less affected. Thus the heart of Achille reacted upon his feet so that he stopped and stared, with such unconscious admiration that he was not at all impolite.

One cannot accuse a charming girl of flirting merely because she looks with interest at a strange young man. It may be that this girl took less rapid steps for a moment. Certainly she allowed her black eyes to meet the gaze of Goyette.

What eyes she had! They were deep, like the fathomless skies of night, blue-black, faintly luminous within. There was nothing muddy about the black of her eyes and hair; they were of the same fine clearness as her skin.

"*Bonjour, mademoiselle!*" said Achille, touching his *casque* with the tip of a mitten. If he had hesitated, he knew that he would have lost the courage to speak; and now he must say something more to hold

her there. "I am looking—can you tell me where I can find Mlle. Marie Gagnon?"

"But yes, *monieur!*" The girl came nearer and looked up into his face gravely, and yet with the hint of a sparkle in the depths of her blue-black eyes. "I am Marie Gagnon."

Once Achille Goyette had gone through the ice into a swift little river—icy, tearing along with tremendous force over rocks. This experience was like that.

It was not until after he plunged that he realized how great a hold this girl had taken upon him at first sight. Fool! He had been all ready to forget his boastings that he would not marry; all ready to fall in love without waiting to find out whether this girl was married. It served him right that she was betrothed to his friend, and thus a thousand times more removed from him.

"I am Achille Goyette," he said in a low voice, and he contrived to make his lips smile. "I have come to take you to Quebec, *mademoiselle.*"

"Oh!" There was an instant change in Marie Gagnon. All her reserve toward him as a stranger vanished, and at the same time she became impersonal, businesslike. Her eyes sobered with thought. "I was expecting you!"

"Yes—my friend, Eudore Corriveau—"

"Of La Banque Nationale?"

"But certainly! There is no other in Quebec!"

"*Bien!* It is better that you do not come home with me. Go out along the main road about half a mile, and wait for me there. I shall not be long."

"If *mademoiselle* wishes," said Goyette, filled with surprise; "but—"

"One does not march in overshoes," she said, showing a slender little foot impatiently. "I must get *bottes sauvages*, snowshoes, everything. *Alors*, make haste, M. Goyette!"

She was gone down the street, fairly skimming the packed and frozen snow, before Achille could speak again. He looked after her, trying to shake the bewilderment out of his mind. Then he shrugged, and turned to retrace his steps. After all, it was his business merely to take Marie Gagnon safely from Rivière Ste. Marguerite to Quebec.

Why he should not go to the Gagnon house with her he could not guess, unless it might be that her family objected to the

marriage. This seemed incredible; for what father would not be glad to have Eudore Corriveau for a son-in-law? However, of the circumstances of the romance Achille knew only that during the previous summer Eudore had been on a tour of inspection of the many tiny branches of the bank, without one of which no village considered itself complete. There had probably been all of an hour's work to do in Rivière Ste. Marguerite, but he had stayed there two weeks. To Goyette the remarkable thing was that his friend had not fully confided in him; but it might be that some difficulty had arisen lately—something of which Corriveau was not aware.

Out on the white road, beyond sight of the village, Achille found a fence post just peeping above the snow, and sat down by it. The fair world had become a little tinged with bitterness for him. The wind, which had seemed so gayly strong upon his face, became an annoyance, and the richly dark forest took on a somber hue. He was glad of this little space of time in which to strengthen his soul, to clear it of desire for Marie Gagnon.

He thought of what Eudore had prophesied as they drank their farewell:

"Some day you will be shaken like a rag!"

Eh, bien! If he had gone a day, perhaps even an hour, without knowing that Marie was betrothed to his friend, he would indeed have been shaken like a rag. He admitted to himself that always he had had a dream of a woman who was to be his wife. The dream had stood before him but a little while since; and now it must always remain a dream.

Achille looked up from his meditations, and saw a slender, fur-clad figure coming to join him. Rising to meet her, he saw to the fastenings of his snowshoes, and adjusted the tump line of his pack. She had not given him a chance to hire a horse and *traineau* in Rivière Ste. Marguerite, and so they would have to march on foot to the next village.

"*Courage, mon brave!*" he muttered to himself as she came up, with a friendly smile in her eyes.

"It goes well!" she exclaimed, with a glance over her shoulder along the road toward the village. "*Marche donc!*"

She laughed, and swung into step with him. Goyette looked at her very small knapsack, slung upon a strap over the

shoulder, and was mildly surprised. It was not thus that he had thought a bride would travel. However, no doubt she had sent her trunk on by carrier, and was prepared to rough it with him until they should reach the railroad. They would sleep in villages and travel much of the way by *traineau*, so she could get along with very little. He admired her the more that she had the good sense to travel light.

"You do not talk much, *monsieur!*" she said, after they had gone on for ten minutes in silence.

Her face was raised, with a mischievous light in her eyes.

"*Pardon!*" Achille laughed grimly at his own thoughts. "I am overcome, perhaps, at the good luck of Eudore Corriveau."

"Yes?" She raised her eyebrows. "He is a very fine man, M. Corriveau."

"He is my best friend. I wish him all happiness!"

"You have known him for a long time, M. Goyette?"

"Ah, yes! We were together in the Twenty-Second Battalion. Eudore saved my life."

This was not a matter of which Achille spoke often, but now he wanted Marie to know that he was bound to Corriveau by a tie almost as strong as that which she was about to assume. He looked at her, and saw that a new interest had kindled in the lambent black depths. If he had had words to make her understand, he would have told her how Eudore had gone out and brought him in, wounded, while death came screaming down the sky.

"Then I understand why he sent you to Rivière Ste. Marguerite," she smiled. "Are you glad you came, M. Goyette?"

Achille was startled. *Bon Dieu!* Was she trying to flirt with him? It could not be, and yet unmistakably she looked upon him with interest. He did not know at all what to make of this Marie Gagnon. She was more beautiful, more charming, more mysterious than any woman he had ever known. He looked ahead through the days that lay between them and the end of the journey, and groaned inwardly.

"I am glad," he told her stoutly. "I am glad, let come what may!"

"Trouble may come," she said lightly. "Are you armed?"

"Why, no! My knife—that is all. One does not carry a rifle for a trip like this.

Do you mean that trouble may come from back there?"

He made a movement of his head toward the village, and she responded with a nod. For a moment he thought she was going to explain further, but she did not, and he considered it impolite to ask what she meant.

"Ah, well!" she murmured, at length. "If trouble comes, we will meet it, you and I. In the meantime let us be gay!"

"I will try," promised Achille, smiling.

"Is it going to be so hard, then, to be gay with me?"

"It would not be hard to be very happy with you!" he told her, forgetting for an instant who she was.

More came into his voice than he intended should be there. Her glance fell, and a little pink touched the alabaster of her cheeks. Achille cursed himself. This was a fine beginning for a journey with the bride of his friend!

"You have not known me an hour yet," she said; "nor I you."

She was not displeased—it was impossible not to see that. Goyette lifted his face resolutely to the distant line where wooded hills met pale blue sky. If Marie Gagnon was a flirt, he felt sorry for his friend, but that made no difference in the feeling that he himself had for the girl. Good or bad, he was beginning to love her, and there was no way of escape from it. He foresaw that he was going to suffer hour by hour, if he kept faith with Eudore Corriveau.

III

THE white road fell away steadily behind them, and before night they came to a little village where Goyette had already made arrangements for them to stay at the house of the mayor. In that place they found a man to drive them onward the next day. Thus the journey went. Most of the time they drove, but occasionally they walked for half a day or more, when no one could be hired to carry them in a sleigh. While the *habitant* will place his house at the disposal of a stranger with the most magnificent hospitality, he does not like to go far from his own village.

Through these days of traveling Marie Gagnon and Achille Goyette came to know each other better every hour. Their companionship was so unbroken that it seemed to Achille she must know every thought before it was spoken, and perhaps those which

his honor would not let him speak. He could not say as much for himself. He knew, indeed, every turn of her black head, every gesture, and all the intonations of her voice; but he could not say that he knew anything of what went on underneath that shining, blue-black hair.

She seemed to offer him opportunities to speak forth what was in his heart, and yet she was no trifter. The first day had driven that idea into the oblivion where it belonged. There was sober purpose under her gayety; and she had not completely shaken off apprehension about whatever it was that had threatened her in the village of Rivière Ste. Marguerite.

The last day of travel before they would reach Baie St. Paul, and the railroad, found them in this situation with reference to each other. It was one of those stages of the journey which they were obliged to make on foot, not having been able to get a *traineau* in the village where they had passed the night. Goyette, with the experience of the country which he had acquired on the trip out from Quebec, decided to take a route through the forest that would cut off miles of the winding road. When he struck off across country, Marie Gagnon made no objection, but after they had entered the silent aisles of the forest it seemed to him that depression settled upon her.

This was kindred to his own feeling. For him the end was coming soon; they would reach the electric railroad, and with that he must, in effect, bid farewell to Marie. A swift trip along the shore of the ice-bound St. Lawrence, Eudore Corriveau beaming upon them in the station at Quebec, a hurrying hither and yon, and a wedding in the Basilica—all this must be so; and the inevitability of it was like a great weight upon Achille.

They did not talk much this day. The light-hearted chatter of yesterday had not been renewed, as if by tacit consent, and until they were well into the forest neither spoke more than a dozen words. Then it was that Marie became alert, anxious. She seemed to be listening, and her glance swept thickets and every close growth of evergreens as they approached.

"I did not think you were one to be afraid in the woods," smiled Achille. "Even if the wolves came down from the north so far, they would hardly attack two human beings, and in daylight."

"It is not wolves that I fear." She glanced at him with a trifle of impatience. "We may have been followed even thus far from Rivière Ste. Marguerite. This is the first time we have left the road, and their first chance to attack with perfect safety. I—I have *felt* that some one was following!"

"But surely," exclaimed Achille, "there cannot be any serious interference with you!"

She looked up with a strange expression—puzzled and not a little anxious.

"I have wondered—" Suddenly she halted and laid her hand upon his arm. "You do not know that I carry money for the bank?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" breathed Achille. "So that is it! Now I can understand many things—your manner of leaving Rivière Ste. Marguerite—yes, everything. At least, nearly everything; but it is strange that Eudore did not tell me."

"He would not!" She smiled. "It is like that with the money of the bank, which is a great trust. Few know what is being done, and it is better so. M. Corriveau himself does not know that it is I who carry the money. The manager of our branch in the village arranged it with me. There have been half a dozen robberies in our parish this winter, and it was thought well to send all the surplus to Quebec."

Achille Goyette, turning his gaze from Marie's face for a moment, suddenly knew that the words he had been about to say were true words. He had been about to say that it would have been better to tell him in the beginning; and what he saw at this moment proved that the revelation had come too late. There was a movement in some young pines—a movement that was not from the light breeze overhead, nor of any small beast. He had a brief glimpse of a man's face peering at them.

The shadowy pursuers, whose presence Marie had felt, were closing in. Now there remained to be considered only how many they were in number, and what arms they bore. Thoughts swept the mind of Goyette like particles of snow driven by a blizzard wind. There was no way out. He stood alone with Marie—and she was the greater trust. Instinctively Achille threw his arm across her shoulders as he swept with a glance the little open space in which they stood. [Wolves! That was the word that covered everything!]

Three men were advancing out of the bushes, just as wolves would have attacked; each coming from a different direction, so that one would certainly be behind him, to spring while he was engaged with the others. They moved silently, like wolves, with their heads thrust down and their snowshoes lifting and falling like the padding steps of attacking wild beasts. Nor was there any more mercy in those three faces than he could have expected from wolves. Their knives were out, gleaming dully in the pale light of the forest.

If they had rifles, they had chosen not to use them. It was to be a still and deadly battle, with no quarter given. Achille Goyette knew, from those three wolfish faces, that he must fight for more than the money of his friend's bank. Death both for him and for Marie was drawing in upon them.

Achille found his own knife in his hand—a good blade, strong and supple. Marie had pressed close to him. Her face was stricken white as it lifted to his for guidance, but there was no hint of panic or weakness there. For an instant he looked full into her eyes, and in that instant he saw deep into them, and beyond, into the depths of her soul.

She loved him!

He jerked his eyes away from hers, to meet the nearest of the attacking men. Not a word from any of them—not a demand for the money! They meant death.

Their knife blades shone, points upward. One of the men moved his knife back and forth, back and forth, like the tail of an angry cat.

Goyette turned, as an animal at bay turns. With his left hand he took hold of Marie's shoulder.

"Get down!" he whispered hoarsely. "Down at my feet, and keep still!"

In all the province it is not likely that there was a man as completely master of his snowshoes as was Achille Goyette. He leaped forward awkwardly, and pretended to trip and fall, so that he went down to one knee in front of one of the men. That one struck instantly. Their blades clicked and hung for an instant; then the steel of Goyette thrust into the body hanging over him, and with a half choked cry the man sagged down.

Achille let himself rest upon his haunches, with his arms dragging in the snow, as if he had been wounded. The

others came on with a rush, forgetful of their caution now that they believed him half done for. When the nearest of them had lifted his arm to strike, Achille shot up like a bolt of vengeance, and drove his knife into the man's shoulder until the point met bone.

A yell tore up to the whispering firs. The next moment one of the human wolves was running, with the fear of death pushing at his heels, while the other two lay struggling in the bloodstained snow. Achille ran to lift Marie, but she met him halfway across the short distance that had separated them.

"Achille!" she cried. "My well beloved! Thou art not hurt?"

Her arms closed around his neck, and she held him to her fiercely, clutching as if to draw him back from the brink of an abyss. Then indeed was there a great battle for Achille Goyette—greater than that one which he had just fought for Marie's life and his own.

He held her with strong hands, but the dark forest swung, blurred, before his eyes. It seemed that the mass of black hair against his face was choking him. He gathered up the reins of his being, as he had learned to do in the far country of his ancestors when it was necessary to go forth into night and death.

"Listen to me, my soul!" he said, in a voice that he did not know as his own. "Me, I have a dog, not large, but a leader. His name is Boule. Once, in the Ungava country, I was driving him with eight other dogs. They had not eaten for days; and for me there was only a little piece of bacon left. I made camp. I was weak, understand me, cold, and hungry. I found some wood, and came back, and what do you think I saw? Boule standing over my bacon and fighting those eight dogs alone! Marie, I am not less than my dog Boule, and I will not fail to keep faith with Eudore Corriveau!"

He stood away from her, almost roughly. She cried out brokenly, as she looked at him with wide, unveiled eyes. Then she turned and walked on blindly, sobbing.

IV

IN that shifting throng which meets trains of any importance arriving at the Gare du Chemin de Fer Electrique, Achille Goyette saw the broadly smiling face of his friend Eudore Corriveau. Beside the bank

official stood a tall, deep-chested woman, handsome, with flashing black eyes. Toward them Achille marched silently, with Marie Gagnon at his side.

"Achille, my friend!" cried Corriveau. He embraced the younger man, and shook both his hands. "Forgive me that long and useless trip! Behold Mlle. Marie Gagnon, who will do me the honor of becoming my wife! Already she was on her way to Quebec when you arrived at Rivière Ste. Marguerite. My happiness will not be complete until you forgive me, good friend!"

"But—" gasped Achille, staring. He perceived that the women knew each other. Had he gone mad, and was this a dream of insanity? "But, Eudore, I have brought your fiancée, Mlle. Marie Gagnon, with me. *Voilà!*"

"*Parbleu!*" Eudore Corriveau chuckled until he shook from head to foot. "He would bring me a Marie Gagnon, no matter

whom! And this one is the little cousin of our bank manager, and also the cousin of my own Marie! Do you not know, Achille, that the name Gagnon in Quebec is like Smith among the English? And the Maries are countless!"

Achille looked at his Marie Gagnon, and he saw the pain fading from her eyes. Again they looked at him as they had in the forest beyond Baie St. Paul. The same warmth filled them, and grew into a smile that finally spread to her lips.

"Ah, now I understand this remarkable friend of yours, M. Corriveau!" she said. "Let me tell you that we have not spoken to each other since we turned two men who tried to rob us over to the mayor in Baie St. Paul!"

"Marie!" cried Achille joyfully. "Marie! You—I—"

"Name of a dog!" exclaimed Eudore Corriveau, delighted. "It is going to be a double wedding!"

THE SILVER SOLSTICE

Now comes the silver solstice of long nights,
With days but brief, bright intervals between;
The glamorous season of the regnant moon—

Mysterious, mad queen,
Who flings aside her shining draperies
And bares her lovely body to the sheen
Of shimmering ice and palely glimmering lights.

Flitting along white, powdered paths that wind
Between black lattices of naked trees,
Dancing upon the argent edges of the sea,
She yields herself, exultant, to a cosmic mood
And sways a mystic world triumphantly.

So I whose heart, aglow with inner heat,
Need not regret the truant Southern sun,
Feeling the magic of those crystal hours
Of snow and silver spun,
Go forth at night to gambol with the moon,
To follow her fantastic dance and run
Where young romance and I again may meet.

Come, sweetheart, too, give way to phantasy!
Forget the golden madness of the June!
Dance one long night away across the spangled snows!
For now your blood shall beat with fiercer ecstasy
Than any languid pulse of summer knows!

Nelle Richmond Eberhart