

Chapter 1 A Servant's Daughter

(1647)

“Maman please, tell him, I don't want to go,” Barbe' pleaded with her mother.

“Your Papa's right Barbe', we don't know how much longer it will be safe here. Your brother is going to New France, you and your sister will hopefully have a chance at a better life there with him,” her mother answered softly, trying to calm her.

“I don't want to leave you,” Barbe' said, trying not to cry. “I don't care what happens; I'd rather stay here with you and Papa.”

“Barbe', that's enough!” her Papa sternly said. “I've explained to you why you have to go. There will be no more discussion, Jean leaves in two months, you and Mathurine, God willing, will be with him on that ship.”

“I'm thirteen years old Papa. I don't want to go away and leave you or Maman; I'm not ready to get married yet. Please, Papa, don't make me go,” Barbe' said, begging him one more time to let her stay.

“The legal marriage age is twelve. You will be fourteen by the time the ship arrives in Quebec. Jean has already been told you; are not to marry until you're fifteen,” her Papa answered.

“I will miss you Barbe',” her Maman said softly, trying again to reason with her and calm her, “but your Papa is right.

We don't know what is going to happen here, and we feel you will be safer away from France if trouble does come."

Barbe' wasn't sure how to fight them anymore, she just stood staring from one parent to the other. Giving up, she walked over and sat in the rocking chair that sat in front of the fireplace, thinking about what her parents had said to her.

"What about me Papa?" Barbe's sister Mathurine, who had been quiet so far, asked.

"You are almost twenty Mathurine," her Papa said, "you can marry any time. I told your brother though; he must approve of your choice."

"Thank you, Papa," Mathurine said relieved. She was just grateful that she would be allowed to pick her own husband. Arranged marriages in France were all too common.

Barbe' sat quietly in the chair next to the fire, finding comfort in the warmth from it, her Papa could see she was fighting back her tears. He walked over and tried once again to explain why he felt she needed to leave. "Barbe', please listen, I don't know what is going to happen here. King Louis is only eight years old. There are those that want to take over the throne, and I don't know what direction those that support or oppose him are going to turn. Plus, we are still at war with Spain, and don't have the best relations with England or Germany. I just want you where I know you will be safer. I've been to Quebec; the only threat will be from the natives in the area, not invading armies or the fight for the crown I fear is coming."

"But I'm scared Papa," Barbe' finally admitted as a tear escaped and rolled down her cheek.

“I’m scared for you to stay here. With France being at war for so long, there is no money to be made. Even if you stay, I will not be able to provide a dowry for you to marry, if there is even any young men left to marry by the time all this fighting ends. You’ll end up in a convent, is that what you want? Do you want to become a nun?” He asked her, softening his tone.

“No Papa,” Barbe’ answered, shaking her head. She took a deep breath, thinking about what he was telling her. “Tell me again about when you went to Quebec,” Barbe’ said to him, trying to calm herself. Even though she was upset with him, in her heart, she knew, her Papa had always loved her, and just wanted what was best for her.

Her father sighed and sank down into a chair near her. “Come sit Mathurine. I will tell you both again what I know about New France and Quebec. It is the most beautiful land I have ever seen.”

Mathurine nodded and sat on the rug her Maman had made that lay on the floor in front of the fire, close to where her father and sister were sitting. Their Maman was standing at the table in the room, cutting vegetables and throwing them into a pot that she would soon put on the hook in the fireplace to cook for the evening meal. Jean knew his daughters should be helping her, but needed to reassure himself, and them, that this decision was for the best.

“You’ve heard this story so many times before, where would you like me to start?” Jean Poisson asked his daughters once Mathurine was settled.

“Tell us about Mr. Champlain and Quebec,” Barbe’ said. “That’s my favorite part.”

Jean laughed, thinking back to that time, and started, “let’s see. Samuel de Champlain, well, not long before Barbe’

was born I met him. He had been over to the land claimed by Jacques Cartier many times. That's what he always called it 'The land claimed by Jacques Cartier'." He grabbed the collar of his shirt and changed his voice as he said the last part, imitating the voice of Samuel de Champlain and making both the girls giggle. "Mr. Champlain was sent by the king and he explored the area for many years after his arrival there. Finally had a fort built there and called it Quebec. I believe he did this in 1608. He told me once that the original fort had only three buildings, each built two stories high. Around the fort they built a tall stockade fence, and outside that fence, they dug out a deep moat all the way around. The moat was twelve feet deep and four feet wide." He stretched his arms out wide as he explained the size.

"Why did they need the wall and moat, Papa?" Barbe' asked him.

Jean smiled as he answered, knowing she already knew the answer and just wanted to hear the story again. "Well, Mr. Champlain had already had trouble with the Iroquois Indians in the area, especially the Mohawk and Oneida. He made treaties right away with the Huron and Algonquin tribes, who were the enemies of the Iroquois. Naturally, the Iroquois then decided that the French who had arrived in the area, were their enemies too."

"What did the Iroquois do Papa?" Mathurine asked him.

"There were many battles between the two. Luckily, Mr. Champlain kept plenty of the Huron and Algonquin warriors with him, so when the Iroquois attacked, he and the other French soldiers with him always had help. At one of the battles he was injured, I believe he took an arrow near his knee. The Huron took him to one of their healers, and while he was healing he lived one whole winter with them in their village," Jean told his girls.

“So how did you meet him?” Barbe’ asked.

“Mr. Champlain lived in Quebec and worked on building it into a settlement and trading post for the fur trade for more than twenty years. Then one year the English came and captured the fort,” Jean explained. “Mr. Champlain came back to France to live during that time. It wasn’t until four years later that France regained possession of the fort and settlement. The King asked Mr. Champlain to go back and be in charge of it.”

“Is that when you went with him?” Mathurine asked.

“Yes. That happened in 1633. I had become Mr. Champlain’s Valet here in France, and when he left to go back to Quebec, he asked me to go with him,” Jean answered.

“Were you sorry to leave Maman?” Barbe’ asked him.

“Of course I was. I didn’t even know we were going to have you,” he said to Barbe’, leaning over and tapping her on the nose. “I found out in a letter your Maman sent to me that we were to have another child. Your brothers Antoine and Michel were already grown and married when I left; Jean was not far behind them. I thought my last two little ones, Mathurine and Pierre, would be in good hands with your Maman and brothers.”

“Were you happy when you found out Papa?” Barbe’ asked him.

“I was happy, but I was also sad I wasn’t going to be here when you were born. You were two years old by the time I returned home,” He said, sitting back in his chair and thinking back to those times.

“Did you help Mr. Champlain explore?” Mathurine asked him.

“He was pretty much done with most of his exploration by that time, he was close to sixty years old. He did have two more trading posts built, one way up the river, about three days travel by canoe just past the rapids, and another in a new settlement he started called Trois Rivieres, which is about half the distance, only a day by canoe,” Jean told them. “Although I did travel with him to Trois Rivieres twice, we spent most of our time in Quebec. My job was as his valet. I had to make sure his clothes were clean, and all the wrinkles were pressed out of them, fill his baths, clean the dirt and mud off his boots at night, and help him dress and undress.”

“He couldn’t dress himself, Papa?” Barbe’ asked and giggled.

“You know how those wealthy, fancy gents dress,” he dramatically answered. “With all those layers and lace. It was a good job for me, that’s why your Maman and I decided I had to go with him when he asked me to.”

“Was he a nice man?” Mathurine asked him.

“Yes, he was a very nice man. He worked hard just like everyone else in Quebec. He was respected by both those in the settlement and the Indians that lived in the area,” he told her. “He was also God-fearing, and that’s always a good trait in any man.”

“You always say that Papa,” Barbe’ said to him smiling. Jean was glad to see her looking happy again. He knew the decision to send her across the ocean would be difficult for such a young girl, but he was convinced it was the best he could do for both his daughters.

“Because it is true daughter. Remember that when you are both looking for a husband. Anyone who doesn’t attend church and pray regularly is not a good man for you,” he told them seriously.

Barbe’, his wife and who his youngest daughter was named after, was now hanging their dinner on the hook that swung out from the fireplace. When she was done, she turned and said, “we’ve raised them well Jean, I trust them to choose wisely.” She then smiled and added, “they’ve had a good model in their Papa, they will each choose a kind and generous man, just like you I hope.”

“I’ve always tried to be a good husband and Papa,” he said smiling at the woman he had married thirty-six years earlier.

“Your a wonderful Papa,” his daughter Barbe’ answered. “So when did you leave Quebec? Finish the story, please Papa.”

“You already know this. Mr. Champlain died on Christmas morning in 1635. I stayed while he was buried and through the winter since there was no way for me to get home at that time of the year. In early spring, when the ships once again started to arrive, I took the first one heading back to France,” he finished.

“Was Maman happy to see you?” Barbe’ asked and again giggled knowing the answer.

“I don’t know, let’s ask her,” he whispered to her. He then grinned and said louder to his wife, “Barbe’ were you happy to see me?”

“You old codger, you know I was,” she answered him laughing.

“I was also very happy to finally meet my new daughter who I had only heard about in letters. I was gone for almost three years. Mathurine and Pierre had grown so much while I had been away that they weren’t children anymore, but almost young adults, Jean had grown into a fine young man, and the baby I had only heard about was already a toddler,” he said to his daughter.

“Oh Papa,” Barbe said as she jumped up from her seat and threw her arms around him, “I’m going to miss you and Maman so much.”

“We are going to miss you and Mathurine very much too. Remember though; you won’t be alone, your brother and his family will be going with you. Jean said that Jacqueline is very nervous about being on the ship with the children. She will need your help with them I’m sure,” her Papa said as he hugged her back.

“I love Jacqueline and my nieces, of course I will help her any way I can,” Barbe’ told him, letting go of him and standing back up.

“That’s my girl. I’m really hoping you’ll both be happy in Quebec,” he told them. He looked first at his oldest daughter and then his youngest before continuing, “I’m not sending you as a punishment girls. I’m hoping it is a way for you to have a better life. I don’t know what is going to happen here, we’ve been at war for so long.”

“We know Papa,” Mathurine answered him. She would also miss her parents but understood more of what had been going on with the war. Many of the boys her age from the village had already gone off to fight for the French King, and some had not come back and never would. “I’ll help Jean and Jacqueline look after the girls and Barbe’ on the ship. You won’t need to worry about us.”

“Thank you Mathurine,” her mother said from behind her, hugging her. “That makes me feel better.”

“So tell us about the Iroquois Papa,” Mathurine said. Because of the stories her Papa had told, they were what she worried about the most.

“I haven’t been over there for many years Mathurine,” her Papa said. “I hope things are better than they used to be. The Iroquois used to attack the settlement quite frequently, but I would think after all these years things must be better now. You’ll have to ask your brother; he was just in Quebec a couple of years ago.”

“Did people die when they attacked?” Barbe’ asked him.

“Some did,” he replied. “Just remember to do what you are told. When I was there the natives were scared of our muskets and pistols. The Iroquois only have clubs, tomahawks or bow and arrows. As long as we kept our weapons on us when we were away from the fort, we were somewhat safe.”

“We will remember Papa,” Mathurine said.

“Your brother will be your legal guardian until you marry,” he told them both. “I trust him to keep you safe, and to make sure you pick good men to marry.”

“I love Jean,” Barbe’ said. “I trust him too.” Jean was her favorite brother and had spent the most time playing with her growing up. Even when the farm was at it’s busiest time of the year, and he was tired from working sunup till sundown, he would still make time for her in the evenings. She had been sad when he had married and moved into his own home a few years before, even though she adored his wife and loved her young nieces.

“So what happens now, Papa?” Mathurine asked him.

“We have to go to the church tomorrow,” he answered her. “You and Barbe’ will both need letters from Father Anjou saying you are a good Catholic and in good health. Then you will have to sign a Filles a Marier contract.”

“What’s that Papa?” Barbe’ asked him.

“It just says that you agree to marry one of the men living over there after you arrive. That way the church will pay for your passage,” he answered and once again seen the look of panic on his young daughters face. “Don’t worry Barbe’, no one is going to force you to marry as soon as you arrive. The contract is a promise to marry eventually, you will have plenty of time to settle first.”

“But I get to choose who I marry, right Papa?” Barbe’ asked him, although he had already told her this multiple times.

“Of course you do. Your Maman and I want you to be happy Barbe’,” he answered. “As long as Jean approves of the match, the rest is up to you.”

“Thank you, Papa,” Barbe’ said, somewhat relieved.

“I know I already told you this too, but remember, I told your brother I would like you to wait until you’re fifteen,” he said. “You’re so young now that there’s no rush.” Barbe’ just nodded, thankful she would be given time after they arrived.

The next morning Barbe’ and Mathurine headed to the church with their father to talk to Father Anjou. They were quiet as they walked the short distance, each lost in their own thoughts. “Good morning Father,” Jean said as they arrived and seen the priest outside the chapel.

“Good morning Jean. Barbe’ and Mathurine, good to see you both,” he greeted them. “Is there something I can do for you?”

“Yes Father,” Jean began. “You know my son Jean is heading to New France in a couple of months. I know you wrote his family’s letter of recommendation. Barbe’ and I have decided to send the girls with his family; I was wondering if you would write letters for them also.”

“This is a pretty sudden decision Jean. Can I ask why you are sending them when you aren’t going?” Father Anjou asked.

Jean sighed and explained, “we’ve been at war for how many years now Father? Twenty? And now, I’m hearing all this talk about our boy king, his cousins and uncles may want to challenge his claim to the throne. I’m afraid of what’s going to happen. We’ve already had years where food was scarce due to the fighting and crops being destroyed. I have a chance to keep my daughters from experiencing more of that by sending them with Jean. I’m hoping it will be a chance at a better life for both of them.”

“I’ve heard some of those same rumors about our King and his family. I am praying it doesn’t become a fight for the throne,” Father Anjou answered shaking his head, he then turned the conversation back to the girls. “Are they going to become Filles a Marier?”

“I was hoping they could,” Jean told him.

“Even Barbe’?” He asked.

“Yes. She is young, but my son promised me he will keep her with him till she’s fifteen. Then she can marry

whoever she would like, as long as she has her brother's approval," he answered.

"Fifteen is a fine age to marry," Father Anjou said and then turned to the girls, "How do you feel about this?"

"I don't mind," Mathurine answered. "Papa thinks it's for the best. So many of the men have gone off to fight from the village already. I've heard the men that have gone over to Quebec are good men. They had to get letters of recommendation from the church too, didn't they Father?"

"I don't want to go, but I trust Papa," Barbe' answered truthfully. Father Anjou nodded at both of their answers.

"I'll get the letters written and signed. I know the girls are in excellent health. Are you looking for the church to sponsor their passage?" Father Anjou asked.

"Yes," Jean answered. "That's what their Maman and I were hoping for."

"I'm sure I can arrange their passage," he told Jean, he then turned back to the girls, "and yes Mathurine, the men have had to get letters from the church just like you, and are good men. Of course, there are men that were born in the settlements too. I will pray you both find happiness there."

"Thank you, Father," both Barbe' and Mathurine said.

The next day Jean stopped back at the church and picked up the letters for both of his daughters. Father Anjou assured him before he left that he would handle the paperwork for the church to pay the passage and provide a small dowry in exchange for them signing the Filles a Marier contracts.

Jean was sad as he walked back towards home. He was going to miss his family that was going so far away which included both his daughters, his son and daughter by marriage, and two of his granddaughters. Jean again reminded himself that he was doing what would be best for them.

Within a few weeks, all the required documents had been obtained, and the packing had begun. Each person wasn't allowed to take much, just one medium-sized trunk that they could pack with as many of their possessions as they could fit in it, and have it still close tightly. The sisters went through their belongings and carefully packed their trunks as neatly as they could, using every bit of available space. Barbe' and Jean found the money to purchase enough material to sew one new dress each for their daughters. It would be packed at the bottom of their trunks, to be used as a wedding dress so that they would have a piece of their Maman with them on that special day.