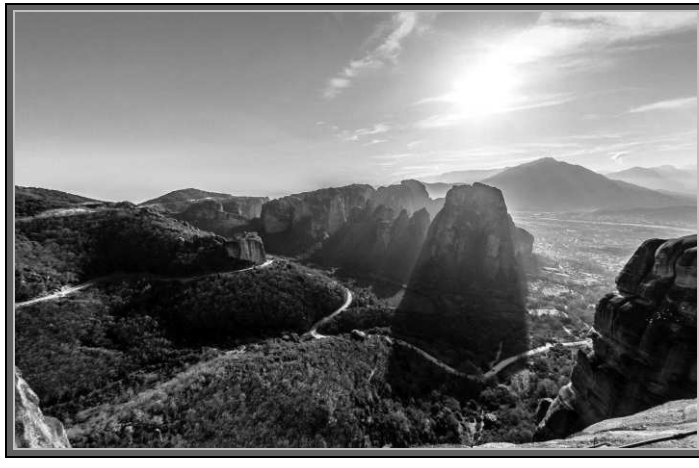
# SHADOWS ON THE ROCK

# SHADOWS ON THE ROCK



*By*

**WILLA CATHER**

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# *Table of Contents*

**ABOUT AUTHOR:** ---------- 7

**PART 1 - THE APOTHECARY** ---------- 10

**Chapter 1** ---------- 10

**Chapter 2** ---------- 15

**Chapter 3** ---------- 28

**Chapter 4** ---------- 33

**Chapter 5** ---------- 39

**PART 2 - CÉCILE AND JACQUES** ---------- 48

**Chapter 1** ---------- 48

**Chapter 2** ---------- 57

**Chapter 3** ---------- 63

**Chapter 4** ---------- 79

**Chapter 5** ---------- 85

**Chapter 6** ---------- 95

**Chapter 7** ---------- 100

**Chapter 8** ---------- 106

**Chapter 9** ---------- 112

**PART 3 - THE LONG WINTER** ---------- 116

**Chapter 1** ---------- 116

**Chapter 2** ----------123

**Chapter 3** ----------126

**Chapter 4** ----------135

**Chapter 5** ----------143

**Chapter 6** ----------152

**PART 4 - PIERRE CHARRON ---------- 163**

**Chapter 1** ----------163

**Chapter 2** ----------170

**Chapter 3** ----------176

**PART 5 - THE SHIPS FROM FRANCE --------- 190**

**Chapter 1** ----------190

**Chapter 2** ----------198

**Chapter 3** ----------203

**Chapter 4** ----------214

**PART 6 - THE DYING COUNT ---------- 222**

**Chapter 1** ----------222

**Chapter 2** ----------228

**Chapter 3** ----------235

**Chapter 4** ----------243

**PART 7 - EPILOGUE ---------- 252**

# About Author:



Wilella Sibert Cather (1873 – 1947) is an eminent author from the United States. She is perhaps best known for her depictions of U.S. life in novels such as O Pioneers!, My Ántonia, and Death Comes for the Archbishop.

## Other Books of Willa Cather:

- *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927)
- *Pioneers!* (1913)
- *My Ántonia* (1918)
- *One of Ours* (1923)
- *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940)
- *The Song of the Lark* (1915)
- *The Professor's House* (1925)
- *The Troll Garden and Selected Stories* (1905)
- *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920)
- *Not Under Forty* (1936)

*Vous me demandez des graines de fleurs de ce pays. Nous en faisons venir de France pour notre jardin, n'y en ayant pas ici de fort rares ni de fort belles. Tout y est sauvage, les fleurs aussi bien que les hommes.*

**Marie de l'Incarnation**

**(LETTRE À UNE DE SES SŒURS)**

**Québec, le 12 août, 1653**

# PART 1 - THE APOTHECARY

## *Chapter 1*

One afternoon late in October of the year 1697, Euclide Auclair, the philosopher apothecary of Quebec, stood on the top of Cap Diamant gazing down the broad, empty river far beneath him. Empty, because an hour ago the flash of retreating sails had disappeared behind the green island that splits the St. Lawrence below Quebec, and the last of the summer ships from France had started on her long voyage home.

As long as *La Bonne Espérance* was still in sight, many of Auclair's friends and neighbours had kept him company on the hill-top; but when the last tip of white slid behind the curving shore, they went back to their shops and their kitchens to face the stern realities of life. Now for eight months the French colony on this rock in the North would be entirely cut off from Europe, from the world. This was October; not a sail would come up that wide waterway before next July. No supplies; not a cask of wine or a sack of flour, no gunpowder, or leather, or cloth, or iron tools. Not a letter, even—no news of what went on at home. There might be new wars, floods, conflagrations, epidemics, but the colonists would never know of them until next summer. People sometimes said

that if King Louis died, the Minister would send word by the English ships that came to New York all winter, and the Dutch traders at Fort Orange would dispatch couriers to Montreal.

The apothecary lingered on the hill-top long after his fellow townsmen had gone back to their affairs; for him this severance from the world grew every year harder to bear. It was a strange thing, indeed, that a man of his mild and thoughtful disposition, city-bred and most conventional in his habits, should be found on a grey rock in the Canadian wilderness. Cap Diamant, where he stood, was merely the highest ledge of that fortified cliff which was "Kebec,"—a triangular headland wedged in by the joining of two rivers, and girdled about by the greater river as by an encircling arm. Directly under his feet was the French stronghold,—scattered spires and slated roofs flashing in the rich, autumnal sunlight; the little capital which was just then the subject of so much discussion in Europe, and the goal of so many fantastic dreams.

Auclair thought this rock-set town like nothing so much as one of those little artificial mountains which were made in the churches at home to present a theatric scene of the Nativity; cardboard mountains, broken up into cliffs and ledges and hollows to accommodate groups of figures on their way to the manger; angels and shepherds and horsemen and camels, set on peaks, sheltered in grottoes, clustered about the base.

Divest your mind of Oriental colour, and you saw here very much such a mountain rock, cunningly built over with churches, convents, fortifications, gardens, following the natural irregularities of the headland on which they stood; some high, some low, some thrust up on a spur,

some nestling in a hollow, some sprawling unevenly along a declivity. The Château Saint-Louis, grey stone with steep dormer roofs, on the very edge of the cliff overlooking the river, sat level; but just beside it the convent and church of the Récollet friars ran downhill, as if it were sliding backwards. To landward, in a low, well-sheltered spot, lay the Convent of the Ursulines … lower still stood the massive foundation of the Jesuits, facing the Cathedral. Immediately behind the Cathedral the cliff ran up sheer again, shot out into a jutting spur, and there, high in the blue air, between heaven and earth, rose old Bishop Laval's Seminary. Beneath it the rock fell away in a succession of terraces like a circular staircase; on one of these was the new Bishop's new Palace, its gardens on the terrace below.

Not one building on the rock was on the same level with any other,—and two hundred feet below them all was the Lower Town, crowded along the narrow strip of beach between the river's edge and the perpendicular face of the cliff. The Lower Town was so directly underneath the Upper Town that one could stand on the terrace of the Château Saint-Louis and throw a stone down into the narrow streets below.

These heavy grey buildings, monasteries and churches, steep-pitched and dormered, with spires and slated roofs, were roughly Norman Gothic in effect. They were made by people from the north of France who knew no other way of building. The settlement looked like something cut off from one of the ruder towns of Normandy or Brittany, and brought over. It was indeed a rude beginning of a "new France," of a Saint-Malo or Rouen or Dieppe, anchored here in the ever-changing northern light and weather. At its feet, curving about its base, flowed the

mighty St. Lawrence, rolling north toward the purple line of the Laurentian mountains, toward frowning Cap Tourmente which rose dark against the soft blue of the October sky. The Île d'Orléans, out in the middle of the river, was like a hilly map, with downs and fields and pastures lying in folds above the naked tree-tops.

On the opposite shore of the river, just across from the proud rock of Quebec, the black pine forest came down to the water's edge; and on the west, behind the town, the forest stretched no living man knew how far. That was the dead, sealed world of the vegetable kingdom, an uncharted continent choked with interlocking trees, living, dead, half-dead, their roots in bogs and swamps, strangling each other in a slow agony that had lasted for centuries. The forest was suffocation, annihilation; there European man was quickly swallowed up in silence, distance, mould, black mud, and the stinging swarms of insect life that bred in it. The only avenue of escape was along the river. The river was the one thing that lived, moved, glittered, changed,—a highway along which men could travel, taste the sun and open air, feel freedom, join their fellows, reach the open sea … reach the world, even!

After all, the world still existed, Auclair was thinking, as he stood looking up the way by which *La Bonne Espérance* had gone out only an hour ago. He was not of the proper stuff for a colonist, and he knew it. He was a slender, rather frail man of about fifty, a little stooped, a little grey, with a short beard cut in a point, and a fair complexion delicately flushed with pink about his cheeks and ears. His blue eyes were warm and interested, even in reflection,—they often had a kindling gleam as if his thoughts were pictures. Except for this lively and inquiring spirit in his glance, everything about him was

modest and retiring. He was clearly not a man of action, no Indian-fighter or explorer. The only remarkable thing about his life was that he had not lived it to the end exactly where his father and grandfather had lived theirs,—in a little apothecary shop on the Quai des Célestins, in Paris.

The apothecary at last turned his back to the river. He was glancing up at the sun to reckon the time of day, when he saw a soldier coming up the grassy slope of Cap Diamant by the irregular earth path that led to the redoubt. The soldier touched his hat and called to him.

"I thought I recognized your figure up here, Monsieur Euclide. The Governor requires your presence and has sent a man down to your shop to fetch you."

Auclair thanked him for his trouble and went down the hill with him to the Château. The Governor was his patron, the Count de Frontenac, in whose service he had come out to Canada.

# *Chapter 2*

It was late in the afternoon when Auclair left the Château and made his way through the garden of the Recollet friars, past the new Bishop's Palace, and down to his own house. He lived on the steep, winding street called Mountain Hill, which was the one and only thoroughfare connecting the Upper Town with the Lower. The Lower Town clustered on the strip of beach at the foot of the cliff, the Upper Town crowned its summit. Down the face of the cliff there was but this one path, which had probably been a mere watercourse when Champlain and his men first climbed up it to plant the French lilies on the crest of the naked rock. The watercourse was now a steep, stony street, with shops on one side and the retaining walls of the Bishop's Palace on the other. Auclair lived there for two reasons: to be close at hand where Count Frontenac could summon him quickly to the Château, and because, thus situated on the winding stairway connecting the two halves of Quebec, his services were equally accessible to the citizens of both.

On entering his door the apothecary found the front shop empty, lit by a single candle. In the living-room behind, which was partly shut off from the shop by a partition made of shelves and cabinets, a fire burned in the fireplace, and the round dining-table was already set with a white cloth, silver candlesticks, glasses, and two clear decanters, one of red wine and one of white.

Behind the living-room there was a small, low-roofed kitchen, built of stone, though the house itself was built of wood in the earliest Quebec manner,—double walls, with sawdust and ashes filling in the space between the two frames, making a protection nearly four feet thick against the winter cold. From this stone kitchen at the back two pleasant emanations greeted the chemist: the rich odour of roasting fowl, and a child's voice, singing. When he closed the heavy wooden door behind him, the voice called: "Is it you, Papa?"

His daughter ran in from the kitchen,—a little girl of twelve, beginning to grow tall, wearing a short skirt and a sailor's jersey, with her brown hair shingled like a boy's.

Auclair stooped to kiss her flushed cheek. *"Pas de clients?"* he asked.

*"Mais, oui! Beaucoup de clients.* But they all wanted very simple things. I found them quite easily and made notes of them. But why were you gone so long? Is Monsieur le Comte ill?"

"Not ill, exactly, but there is troublesome news from Montreal."

"Please change your coat now, Papa, and light the candles. I am so anxious about the poulet. Mère Laflamme tried hard to sell me a cock, but I told her my father always complained of a cock." The daughter's eyes were shaped like her father's, but were much darker, a very dark blue, almost black when she was excited, as she was now about the roast. Her mother had died two years ago, and she made the ménage for her father.

Contrary to the custom of his neighbours, Auclair dined at six o'clock in winter and seven in summer, after

the day's work was over, as he was used to do in Paris,—though even there almost everyone dined at midday. He now dropped the curtains over his two shop windows, a sign to his neighbours that he was not to be disturbed unless for serious reasons. Having put on his indoor coat, he lit the candles and carried in the heavy soup tureen for his daughter.

They ate their soup in appreciative silence, both were a little tired. While his daughter was bringing in the roast, Auclair poured a glass of red wine for her and one of white for himself.

"Papa," she said as he began to carve, "what is the earliest possible time that Aunt Clothilde and Aunt Blanche can get our letters?"

Auclair deliberated. Every fall the colonists asked the same question of one another and reckoned it all anew. "Well, if *La Bonne Espérance* has good luck, she can make La Rochelle in six weeks. Of course, it has been done in five. But let us say six; then, if the roads are bad, and they are likely to be in December, we must count on a week to Paris."

"And if she does not have good luck?"

"Ah, then who can say? But unless she meets with very heavy storms, she can do it in two months. With this west wind, which we can always count on, she will get out of the river and through the Gulf very speedily, and that is sometimes the most tedious part of the voyage. When we came over with the Count, we were a month coming from Percé to Quebec. That was because we were sailing against this same autumn wind which will be carrying *La Bonne Espérance* out to sea."

"But surely the aunts will have our letters by New Year's, and then they will know how glad I was of my béret and my jerseys, and how we can hardly wait to open the box upstairs. I can remember my Aunt Blanche a little, because she was young and pretty, and used to play with me. I suppose she is not young now, any more; it is eight years."

"Not young, exactly, but she will always have high spirits. And she is well married, and has three children who are a great joy to her."

"Three little cousins whom I have never seen, and one of them is named for me! Cécile, André, Rachel." She spoke their names softly. These little cousins were almost like playfellows. Their mother wrote such long letters about them that Cécile felt she knew them and all their ways, their individual faults and merits. Cousin Cécile was seven, very studious, *bien sérieuse,* already prepared for confirmation; but she would eat only sweets and highly spiced food. André was five, truthful and courageous, but he bit his nails. Rachel was a baby, in the midst of teething when they last heard of her.

Cécile would have preferred to live with Aunt Blanche and her children when she should go back to France; but by her mother's wish she was destined for Aunt Clothilde, who had long been a widow of handsome means and was much interested in the education of young girls. The face of this aunt Cécile could never remember, though she could see her figure clearly,—standing against the light, she always seemed to be, a massive woman, short and heavy though not exactly fat,—square, rather, like a great piece of oak furniture; always in black, widow's black that smelled of dye, with gold rings on her fingers and a very

white handkerchief in her hand. Cécile could see her head, too, carried well back on a short neck, like a general or a statesman sitting for his portrait; but the face was a blank, just as if the aunt were standing in a doorway with blinding sunlight behind her. Cécile was once more trying to recall that face when her father interrupted her.

"What are we having for dessert tonight, my dear?"

"We have the cream cheese you brought from market yesterday, and whichever conserve you prefer; the plums, the wild strawberries, or the gooseberries."

"Oh, the gooseberries, by all means, after chicken."

"But, Papa, you prefer the gooseberries after almost everything! It is lucky for us we can get all the sugar we want from the Count. Our neighbours cannot afford to make conserves, with sugar so dear. And gooseberries take more than anything else."

"There is something very palatable about the flavour of these gooseberries, a bitter tang that is good for one. At home the gooseberries are much larger and finer, but I have come to like this bitter taste."

*"En France nous avons tous les légumes, jusqu'aux dattes,"* murmured Cécile. She had never seen a date, but she had learned that phrase from a book, when she went to day-school at the Ursulines.

Immediately after dinner the apothecary went into the front shop to post his ledger, while his daughter washed the dishes with the hot water left in an iron kettle on the stove, where the birch-wood fire was now smouldering coals. She had scarcely begun when she heard a soft scratching at the single window of her kitchen. Through the small panes of glass a face was looking in,—a

terrifying face, but one that she expected. She nodded and beckoned with her finger. A short, heavy man shuffled into the kitchen. He seemed loath to enter, yet drawn by some desire stronger than his reluctance. Cécile went to the stove and filled a bowl.

"There is your soup for you, Blinker."

"Merci, Ma'm'selle." The man spoke out of the side of his mouth, as he looked out of the side of his face. He was so terribly cross-eyed that Cécile had never really looked into his eyes at all,—this was why he was called Blinker. He took a half-loaf from his coat-pocket and began to eat the soup eagerly, trying not to make a noise. Eating was difficult for him,—he had once had an abscess in his lower jaw, it had suppurated, and pieces of the bone had come out. His face was badly shrunken on that side, under the old scars. He knew it distressed Cécile if he gurgled his soup; so he struggled between greed and caution, dipping his bread to make it easy chewing.

This poor mis-shapen fellow worked next door, tended the oven fires for Nicholas Pigeon, the baker, so that the baker could get his night's sleep. His wages were the baker's old clothes, two pairs of boots a year, a pint of red wine daily, and all the bread he could eat. But he got no soup there, Madame Pigeon had too many children to feed.

When he had finished his bowl and loaf, he rose and without saying anything took up two large wooden pails. One was full of refuse from the day's cooking, the other full of dish-water. These he carried down Mountain Hill, through the market square to the edge of the shore, and there emptied them into the river. When he came back, he

found a very small glass of brandy waiting for him on the table.

"Merci, Ma'm'selle, merci beaucoup," he muttered. He sat down and sipped it slowly, watching Cécile arrange the kitchen for the night. He lingered while the floor was swept, the last dish put in place on the shelves, the dish-towels hung to dry on a wire above the stove, following all these operations intently with his crooked eyes. When she took up her candle, he must go. He put down his glass, got up, and opened the back door, but his feet seemed nailed to the sill. He stood blinking with that incredibly stupid air, blinking out of the side of his face, and Cécile could not be sure that he saw her or anything else. He made a fumbling as if to button his coat, though there were no buttons on it.

"Bon soir, Ma'm'selle," he muttered.

Since this happened every night, Cécile thought nothing of it. Her mother had begun to look out for Blinker a little before she became so ill, and he was one of the cares the daughter had inherited. He had come out to the colony four years ago, and like many others who came he had no trade. He was strong, but so ill-favoured that nobody wanted him about. Neighbour Pigeon found he was faithful and dependable, and taught him to stoke the wood fire and tend the oven between midnight and morning. Madame Auclair felt sorry for the poor fellow and got into the way of giving him his soup at night and letting him do the heavy work, such as carrying in wood and water and taking away the garbage. She had always called Blinker by his real name, Jules. He had a cave up in the rocky cliff behind the bakery, where he kept his chest,—he slept there in mild weather. In winter he slept

anywhere about the ovens that he could find room to lie down, and his clothes and woolly red hair were usually white with ashes. Many people were afraid of him, felt that he must have crooked thoughts behind such crooked eyes. But the Pigeons and Auclairs had got used to him and saw no harm in him. The baker said he could never discover how the fellow made a living at home, or why he had come out to Canada. Many unserviceable men had come, to be sure, but they were usually adventurers who disliked honest work,—wanted to fight the Iroquois or traffic in beaver-skins, or live a free life hunting game in the woods. This Blinker had never had a gun in his hands. He had such a horror of the forest that he would not even go into the near-by woods to help fell trees for firewood, and his fear of Indians was one of the bywords of Mountain Hill. Pigeon used to tell his customers that if the Count went to chastise the Iroquois beyond Cataraqui, Blinker would hide in his cave in Quebec. Blinker protested he had been warned in a dream that he would be taken prisoner and tortured by the Indians.

Dinner was the important event of the day in the apothecary's household. The luncheon was a mere goûter. Breakfast was a pot of chocolate, which he prepared very carefully himself, and a fresh loaf which Pigeon's oldest boy brought to the door. But his dinner Auclair regarded as the thing that kept him a civilized man and a Frenchman. It put him in a mellow mood, and he and his daughter usually spent the long evening very happily without visitors. She read aloud to him, the fables of La Fontaine or his favourite Plutarch, and he corrected her accent so that she would not be ashamed when she returned home to the guardianship of that intelligent and exacting Aunt Clothilde. It was only in the evening that

her father had time to talk to her. All day he was compounding remedies, or visiting the sick, or making notes for a work on the medicinal properties of Canadian plants which he meant to publish after his return to Paris. But in the evening he was free, and while he enjoyed his Spanish snuff their talk would sometimes lead far away and bring out long stories of the past. Her father would try to recall to her their old shop on the Quai des Célestins, where he had grown up and where she herself was born. She thought she could remember it a little, though she was only four years old when they sailed with the Count for the New World. It was a narrow wedge, that shop, built in next to the carriage court of the town house of the Frontenacs. Auclair's little chamber, where he slept from his sixth year until his marriage, was on the third floor, under the roof. Its one window looked out upon the carriage court and across it to the front of the mansion, which had only a blind wall on the street and faced upon its own court.

When he was a little boy, he used to tell Cécile, nothing ever changed next door, except that after a rain the cobbles in the yard were whiter, and the ivy on the walls was greener. Every morning he looked out from his window on the same stillness; the shuttered windows behind their iron grilles, the steps under the porte-cochère green with moss, pale grass growing up between the stones in the court, the empty stables at the back, the great wooden carriage gates that never opened,—though in one of them a small door was cut, through which the old caretaker came and went.

"Naturally," Auclair would tell his daughter, "having seen the establishment next door always the same, I supposed it was meant to be like that, and was there,

perhaps, to give a little boy the pleasure of watching the swallows build nests in the ivy. The Count had been at home when I was an infant in arms, and once, I believe, when I was three, but I could not remember. Imagine my astonishment when, one evening about sunset, a dusty coach with four horses rattled down the Quai and stopped at the carriage entrance. Two footmen sprang down from the box, rang the outer bell, and, as soon as the bar was drawn, began pulling and prying at the gates, which I had never seen opened in my life. It seemed to me that some outrage was being committed and the police should be called. At last the gates were dragged inward, and the coach clattered into the court. If anything more happened that night I do not recall it.

"The next morning I was awakened by shouting under my window, and the sound of shutters being taken down. I ran across my room and peeped out. The windows over there were not only unshuttered, but open wide. Three young men were leaning out over the grilles beating rugs, shaking carpets and wall-hangings into the air. In a moment a blacksmith came in his leather apron, with a kit of tools, and began to repair the hinges of the gates. Boys were running in and out, bringing bread, milk, poultry, sacks of grain and hay for the horses. When I went down to breakfast, I found my father and mother and grandparents all very much excited and pleased, talking a great deal. They already knew in which chamber the Count had slept last night, the names of his equerries, what he had brought with him for supper in a basket from Fontainebleau, and which wines old Joseph had got up from the cellar for him. I had scarcely ever heard my family talk so much.

"Not long after breakfast the Count himself came into our shop. He greeted my father familiarly and began asking about the people of the Quarter as if he had been away only a few weeks. He inquired for my mother and grandmother, and they came to pay their respects. I was pulled out from under the counter where I had hidden, and presented to him. I was frightened because he was wearing his uniform and such big boots. Yes, he was a fine figure of a man forty years ago, but even more restless and hasty than he is now. I remember he asked me if I wanted to be a soldier, and when I told him that I meant to be an apothecary like my father, he laughed and gave me a silver piece."

Though Auclair so often talked to his daughter of the past, it was not because there was nothing happening in the present. At that time the town of Quebec had fewer than two thousand inhabitants, but it was always full of jealousies and quarrels. Ever since Cécile could remember, there had been a feud between Count Frontenac and old Bishop Laval. And now that the new Bishop, Monseigneur de Saint-Vallier, had just come back from France after a three years' absence, the Count was quarrelling with him! Then there was always the old quarrel between the two Bishops themselves, which had broken out with fresh vigour upon de Saint-Vallier's return. Everyone in the diocese took sides with one prelate or the other. Since he landed in September, scarcely a week went by that Monseigneur de Saint-Vallier did not wreck some cherished plan of the old Bishop.

Before they went to bed, Auclair and his daughter usually took a walk. The apothecary believed this habit conducive to sound slumber. Tonight, as they stepped out into the frosty air and looked up, high over their heads, on the edge of the sheer cliff, the Château stood out against the glittering night sky, the second storey of the south wing brilliantly lighted.

"I suppose the Count's candles will burn till long past midnight," Cécile remarked.

"Ah, the Count has many things to trouble him. The King has not been very generous in rewarding his services in the last campaign. Besides, he is old, and the old do not sleep much."

As they climbed Mountain Hill, they passed in front of Monseigneur de Saint-Vallier's new episcopal Palace, and that, too, was ablaze with lights. Cécile longed to see inside that building, toward which the King himself had given fifteen thousand francs. It was said that Monseigneur had brought back with him a great many fine pieces of furniture and tapestry to furnish it. But he was not fond of children, as the old Bishop was, and his servants were very strict, and there seemed to be no way in which one could get a peep behind those heavy curtains at the windows.

Their walk was nearly always the same. On a precipitous rock, scored over with dark, uneven streets, there were not many ways where one could stroll with a careless foot after nightfall. When the wind was not too biting, they usually took the path up to the redoubt on Cap Diamant and looked down over the sleeping town and the great pale avenue of river, with black forest stretching beyond it to the sky. From there the Lower

Town was a mere sprinkle of lights along the water's edge. The rock-top, blocked off in dark masses that were convents and churches and gardens, was now sunk in sleep. The only lighted windows to be seen were in the Château, in the Bishop's Palace, and on the top floor of old Bishop Laval's Seminary, out there on its spur overhanging the river. That top floor, the apothecary told his daughter, was the library, and likely enough some young Canadian-born Seminarians to whom Latin came hard were struggling with the Church Fathers up there.