

Thomas Mayne REID

# The QUADROON

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Kyiv  
"ZNANNIA"

## Chapter 1

# The Father of Waters

Father of Waters! I worship thy mighty stream! As the Hindoo by the shores of his sacred river, I kneel upon thy banks, and pour forth my soul in wild adoration!

Far different are the springs of our devotion. To him, the waters of his yellow Ganges are the symbols of a superstitious awe, commingled with dark fears for the mystic future; to me, thy golden waves are the souvenirs of joy, binding the present to the known and happy past. Yes, mighty river! I worship thee in the past. My heart thrills with joy at the very mention of thy name!

Father of Waters! I know thee well. In the land of a thousand lakes, on the summit of the "*Hauteur de terre*" I have leaped thy tiny stream. Upon the bosom of the blue lakelet, the fountain of thy life, I have launched my birchen boat; and yielding to thy current have floated softly southward.

I have passed the meadows where the wild rice ripens on thy banks, where the white birch mirrors its silvery stem, and tall *coniferae* fling their pyramid shapes on thy surface. I have seen the red Chippewa cleave thy crystal waters in his bark canoe — the giant moose lave his flanks in thy cooling flood — and the stately wapiti<sup>1</sup> bound gracefully along thy banks. I have listened to the music of thy shores — the call of the cacawee, the laugh of the wa-wa goose, and the trumpet-note of the great northern swan. Yes, mighty river! Even in that far northern land, thy wilderness home, have I worshipped thee!

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<sup>1</sup> *Wapiti* — a Canadian deer. (*Here and farther on the notes by the editor.*)

Onward through many parallels of latitude — through many degrees of the thermal line!

I stand upon thy banks where thou leapest the rocks of Saint Antoine, and with bold frothing current cleavest thy way to the south. Already I note a change in the aspect of thy shores. The *coniferae* have disappeared, and thou art draped with a deciduous foliage of livelier hue. Oaks, elms, and maples, mingle their frondage, and stretch their broads arms over thee. Though I still look upon woods that seem illimitable, I feel that the wilderness is past. My eyes are greeted by the signs of civilisation — its sounds fall upon my ear. The hewn cabin — picturesque in its rudeness — stands among prostrate trunks; and the ring of the lumberer's axe is heard in the far depths of the forest. The silken blades of the maize wave in triumph over fallen trees, its golden tassels giving promise of a rich return. The spire of the church peers above the green spray of the woods, and the prayer of the Christian ascends to heaven sublimely mingling with the roar of thy waters!

I launch my boat once more upon thy buoyant wave; and, with heart as buoyant, glide onward and southward. I pass between bold bluffs that hem thy surging waves, and trace with pleasant wonder their singular and varied outlines — now soaring abruptly upward, now carried in gentle undulations along the blue horizon. I behold the towering form of that noted landmark "*La montaigne qui trempe á l'eau*," and the swelling cone on whose summit the soldier-traveller pitched his tent. I glide over the mirrored bosom of Pepin's lake, regarding with admiration its turreted shores. I gaze with deeper interest upon that precipitous escarpment, the "Lover's Leap," whose rocky wall has oft echoed back the joyous chaunt of the light-hearted voyageur, and once a sadder strain — the death-song of Wanona — beautiful Wanona, who sacrificed life to love!

Onward I glide, where the boundless prairies of the West impinge upon thy stream; and my eye wanders with delight over their fadeless green.

I linger a moment to gaze upon the painted warrior spurring his wild steed along thy banks — to gaze upon the Dacotah girls bathing their lithe limbs in thy crystal wave — then on again past the “Cornice Rocks” — the metalliferous shores of Galena and Dubuque — the aerial tomb of the adventurous miner.

I reach the point where the turbid Missouri rushes rudely upon thee, as though he would force thee from thy onward course. Poised in my light canoe, I watch the struggle. Fierce but short it is, for thou triumphest, and thy conquered rival is compelled to pay his golden tribute to thy flood that rolls majestically onward!

Upon thy victorious wave I am borne still southward. I behold huge green mounds — the sole monuments of an ancient people — who once trod thy shores. Near at hand I look upon the dwellings of a far different race. I behold tall spires soaring to the sky; domes, and cupolas glittering in the sun; palaces standing upon thy banks, and palaces floating upon thy wave. I behold a great city — a metropolis!

I linger not here. I long for the sunny South; and trusting myself once more to thy current I glide onward.

I pass the sea-like estuary of the Ohio, and the embouchure of another of thy mightiest tributaries, the famed river of the plains. How changed the aspect of thy shores. I no longer look upon bold bluffs and beetling cliffs. Thou hast broken from the hills that enchained thee, and now rollest far and free, cleaving a wide way through thine own alluvion. Thy very banks are the creation of thine own fancy — the slime thou hast flung from thee in thy moments of wanton play — and thou canst break through their barriers at will. Forests again fringe thee — forests of giant trees — the spreading *platanus*,

the tall tulip-tree, and the yellow-green cottonwood rising in terraced groves from the margin of thy waters. Forests stand upon thy banks, and the wreck of forests is borne upon thy bubbling bosom!

I pass thy last great affluent, whose crimson flood just tinges the hue of thy waters. Down thy delta I glide, amid scenes rendered classic by the sufferings of De Soto<sup>1</sup> — by the adventurous daring of Iberville<sup>2</sup> and La Salle<sup>3</sup>.

And here my soul reaches the acme of its admiration. Dead to beauty must be heart and eye that could behold thee here, in this thy southern land, without a thrill of sublimest emotion!

I gaze upon lovely landscapes ever changing, like scenes of enchantment, or the pictures of a panorama. They are the loveliest upon earth — for where are views to compare with thine? Not upon the Rhine, with its castled rocks — not upon the shores of that ancient inland sea — not among the Isles of the Ind. No. In no part of the world are scenes like these; nowhere is soft beauty blended so harmoniously with wild picturesqueness.

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<sup>1</sup> *Hernando de Soto* (c 1496—1542) — a Spanish navigator and conquistador who headed the first war of conquest of the Europeans to the north of Mexico; he was the first European who crossed the Mississippi river and left the documentary confirmation of this fact. He died having caught fever in the valley of the Arkansas river.

<sup>2</sup> *Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville* (1661—1706) — a French soldier, corsair, the native of Canada; fought against Englishmen on the part of France for the possession of North America; dislodged Englishmen from modern provinces of Ontario and Toronto. Headed naval guard of Canada; discovered the mouth of the Mississippi and founded French colonies on this river. For courage, resolution, and fairness he was called Canadian Cid.

<sup>3</sup> *Rene-Robert Cavalier de la Salle* (1643—1687) — a French traveler, founder of the French colony Louisiana which later on passed to the USA. He tried to assign to France the whole territory around the Mississippi.

And yet not a mountain meets the eye — not even a hill — but the dark *cypriees*, draped with the silvery *tillandsia*, form a background to the picture with all the grandeur of the pyrogenous granite!

The forest no longer fringes thee here. It has long since fallen before the planter's axe; and the golden sugar-cane, the silvery rice, and the snowy cotton-plant, flourish in its stead. Forest enough has been left to adorn the picture. I behold vegetable forms of tropic aspect, with broad shining foliage — the *Sabal* palm, the anona, the water-loving tupelo, the catalpa with its large trumpet flowers, the melting *liquid ambar*, and the wax-leaved magnolia. Blending their foliage with these fair *indigènes* are an hundred lovely exotics — the orange, lemon, and fig; the Indian-lilac and tamarind; olives, myrtles, and bromelias; while the Babylonian willow contrasts its drooping fronds with the erect reeds of the giant cane, or the lance-like blades of the *yucca gloriosa*.

Embowered amidst these beautiful forms I behold villas and mansions of grand and varied aspect — varied as the races of men who dwell beneath their roofs. And varied are they; for the nations of the world dwell together upon thy banks — each having sent its tribute to adorn thee with the emblems of a glorious and universal civilisation. Father of Waters, farewell!

Though not born in this fair southern land, I have long lingered there; and I love it *even better than the land of my birth*. I have there spent the hours of bright youth, of adventurous manhood; and the retrospect of these hours is fraught with a thousand memories tinged with a romance that can never die. There my young heart yielded to the influence of Love — a first and virgin love. No wonder the spot should be to me the most hallowed on earth!

Reader! listen to the story of that love!

## Chapter 2

# Six Months in the Crescent City<sup>1</sup>

Like other striplings escaped from college, I was no longer happy *at home*. The yearning for travel was upon me; and I longed to make acquaintance with that world, as yet only known to me through the medium of books.

My longing was soon to be gratified; and without a sigh I beheld the hills of my native land sink behind the black waves — not much caring whether I should ever see them again.

Though emerging from the walls of a classic college, I was far from being tinctured with classic sympathies. Ten years spent in pondering over the wild hyperbole of Homer, the mechanical verse-work of Virgil, and the dry indelicacies of Horatius Flaccus, had failed to imbue me with a perception of that classic beauty felt, or pretended to be felt, by the spectacled *savant*. My mind was not formed to live on the ideal, or dream over the past. I delight rather in the real, the positive, and the present. Don Quixotes may play the troubadour among ruined castles, and mincing misses cover the ground of the guide-books. For my part I have no belief in the romance of old world life. In the modern Tell I behold a hireling, ready to barter his brawny limbs to the use of whatever tyrant; and the picturesque Lazzaroni<sup>2</sup>, upon closer acquaintance, dwindles down to the standard of a hen-roost thief. Amid the crumbling walls of Athens and the ruins of

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<sup>1</sup> *The Crescent City* — in this way Americans often call New Orleans.

<sup>2</sup> *Lazzaroni* — Italian paupers who were looking for casual work, but, for the most part, they were lazy persons.

Rome I encounter inhospitality and hunger. I am not a believer in the picturesqueness of poverty. I have no relish for the romance of rags.

And yet it was a yearning for the romantic that called me from home. I longed for the poetic and picturesque, for I was just at that age when the mind is imbued with its strongest faith in their reality. Ha! mine is not yet disabused of this belief. I am older now, but the hour of disenchantment has not yet come upon me — nor ever will. There *is* a romance in life, that is no illusion. It lives not in the effete forms and childish ceremonies of the fashionable drawing-room — it has no illustration in the tinsel trappings and gaudy puerilities of a Court. Stars, garters, and titles are its antidotes; red cloth and plush the upas-trees<sup>1</sup> of its existence.

Its home is elsewhere, amid the grand and sublime scenes of Nature — though these are not necessary accompaniments. It is no more incidental to field and forest, rock, river, and mountain, than to the well-trodden ways of the trading-town. Its home is in human hearts — hearts that throb with high aspirations — bosoms that burn with the noble passions of Liberty and Love!

My steps then were not directed towards classic shores, but to lands of newer and more vigorous life. Westward went I in search of romance. I found it in its most attractive form under the glowing skies of Louisiana.

In the month of January, 18 —, I set foot upon the soil of the New World — upon a spot stained with English blood. The polite skipper, who had carried me across the Atlantic, landed

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<sup>1</sup> *Upas-tree* — the most venomous variety of antiar which grows on the isle of Java. The bad fame about venomous qualities of upas-trees predetermined the arrival of popular superstition about the poisonous qualities of the air around them caused by their harmful fumes especially in their shadow.

me in his gig. I was curious to examine the field of this decisive action<sup>1</sup>; for at that period of my life I had an inclination for martial affairs. But something more than mere curiosity prompted me to visit the battle-ground of New Orleans. I then held an opinion deemed heterodox — namely, that the *improvised* soldier is under certain circumstances quite equal to the professional hireling, and that long military drill is not essential to victory. The story of war, superficially studied, would seem to antagonise this theory, which conflicts also with the testimony of all military men. But the testimony of mere military men on such a matter is without value. Who ever heard of a military man who did not desire to have his art considered as mythical as possible? Moreover, the rulers of the world have spared no pains to imbue their people with false ideas upon this point. It is necessary to put forward some excuse for that terrible incubus upon the nations, the “standing army.”

My desire to view the battle-ground upon the banks of the Mississippi had chiefly reference to this question. The action itself had been one of my strong arguments in favour of my belief; for upon this spot some six thousand men — who had never heard the absurd command, “Eyes right!” — out-generalled, “whipped,” in fact nearly annihilated, a well-equipped and veteran army of twice their number!

Since standing upon that battle-ground I have carried a sword in more than one field of action. What I then held only as a theory, I have since proved as an experience. The “drill” is a delusion. The standing army a cheat.

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<sup>1</sup> *The battle for New Orleans* (24 Dec. 1814 — 8 Jan. 1815) — the last great battle in Anglo-American War which was crowned with the victory of Americans whose fatal casualties consisted only of 55 soldiers while those ones of the British army were 386 soldiers.

In another hour I was wandering through the streets of the Crescent City, no longer thinking of military affairs. My reflections were turned into a far different channel. The social life of the New World, with all its freshness and vigour, was moving before my eyes, like a panorama; and despite of my assumption of the *nil admirari*, I could not help *wondering as I went*.

And one of my earliest surprises — one that met me on the very threshold of Transatlantic existence — was the discovery of my own utter uselessness. I could point to my desk and say, “There lie the proofs of my erudition — the highest prizes of my college class.” But of what use they? The dry theories I had been taught had no application to the purposes of real life. My logic was the prattle of the parrot. My classic lore lay upon my mind like lumber; and I was altogether about as well prepared to struggle with life — to benefit either my fellow-man or myself — as if I had graduated in Chinese mnemonics.

And oh! ye pale professors, who drilled me in syntax and scansion, ye would deem me ungrateful indeed were I to give utterance to the contempt and indignation which I then felt for ye — then, when I looked back upon ten years of wasted existence spent under your tutelage — then, when, after believing myself an educated man, the illusion vanished, and I awoke to the knowledge that *I knew nothing!*

With some money in my purse, and very little knowledge in my head, I wandered through the streets of New Orleans, wondering as I went.

Six months later, and I was traversing the same streets, with very little money in my purse, but with my stock of knowledge vastly augmented. During this six months I had acquired an experience of the world more extensive, than in any six years of my previous life.