

## LA SALLE

From the book, "*Historical Plays for Children*"

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### CHARACTERS:

- Louis
- La Salle
- Tonty
- Pages
- Ladies and Gentlemen of the court
- Courtiers
- Huron Chief
- Huron Indians
- Ottawa Chief
- Other Huron and Ottawa Indians
- A Friar
- Father Hennepin
- Other white men
- Monso
- Iroquois Chief
- Iroquois Brave
- Other Iroquois Indians
- Father Membre
- Traders

### SCENE I

*Court of Louis XIV of France*

LOUIS: It is a great satisfaction to us to know that you have been successful in your explorations in the New World. I understand that you established a good settlement at Lachine.

LA SALLE: Yes, we cleared away the woods and built a stockade and houses. It is a good trading station for furs, but very badly exposed to the attacks of the Iroquois Indians.

LOUIS: Why did you give it such a name? I believe that the word "Lachine" means China.

LA SALLE: The name was a joke, your Majesty. I have always been so anxious to find a route to China, that even my men called me Lachine sometimes.

LOUIS: Tell us something of Fort Frontenac. I understand that you have that settlement well established, also.

LA SALLE: We have, indeed. We built a large stone fort with rows of barracks for soldiers, officers'

quarters, and a guardhouse.

LOUIS: Is it well fortified?

LA SALLE: We have nine small cannon to protect us from attack.

LOUIS: I suppose that a good many people live near the fort for protection.

LA SALLE: Yes. Nearby is a thriving village of French families. They have cleared the land and tilled the soil, and they even keep cattle, fowl, and swine.

COURTIER: Tonty is here, your Majesty.

LOUIS: Usher him into our presence. (*Tonty enters.*) Welcome to the court, brave Tonty. (*Tonty bows low.*) I wish to introduce you to Robert Chevalier de la Salle of whom you have already heard so often. (*The two men bow.*)

TONTY: To meet so distinguished a gentleman is an unexpected honor and a great pleasure.

LOUIS: You two have traveled so much that you will have many interests in common.

TONTY: But our purposes have been different. In Sicily I fought for Italy, my native land. (*To La Salle.*) You, I believe, have made exploration your aim.

LA SALLE: Yes, and I am anxious to explore still further.

TONTY: I myself would enjoy that kind of work.

LOUIS: I think that together you could accomplish good results. (*To Tonty.*) Why not go with him on his next trip? (*To La Salle.*) What voyage do you wish to make next, La Salle?

LA SALLE: I should like to explore the lakes and rivers to the west, build forts, and carry on trade in beaver and buffalo skins.

TONTY: That would be an interesting adventure.

LA SALLE: It takes strong men to undertake such perilous work, but I believe you could do it well.

LOUIS: (*Laughing.*) Tonty is all sound but one hand, I believe.

LA SALLE: I do not understand. He seems to have both hands.

TONTY: (*Holding up a gloved hand.*) I am glad that you did not observe my misfortune. I was wounded in Sicily. This hand is made of copper. I always wear a glove to cover it.

LA SALLE: Indeed, I had not noticed it. Your loss would be an advantage among the Indians. They would look upon a man with a copper hand as a god.

LOUIS: (*Laughing.*) At any rate, it might serve well as a weapon.

LA SALLE: I should be glad to have your company, Tonty, if you care to go.

LOUIS: We will consider that arrangement settled, and we shall be glad to assist you both as much as lies in our power.

LA SALLE: We thank you, for your confidence in us.

TONTY: I thank your Majesty and you, La Salle.

LOUIS: We will plan the details of the expedition tomorrow.

*(All go out, led by the King.)*

## SCENE II

### *A Landing Near St. Ignace*

*(Indians speak their own language. White men talk French, except when speaking to Indians.)*

HURON CHIEF: *(Pointing toward the water.)* What is that strange winged object floating on the water?

OTTAWA CHIEF: *(Looking in same direction.)* I think it is a large boat.

HURON CHIEF: Perhaps it brings enemies to our shore.

OTTAWA CHIEF: It carries the white flag of France. It cannot be very unfriendly.

HURON CHIEF: See the monster carved on its prow, with letters painted at the side.

OTTAWA CHIEF: I can spell the name. A white trader once taught me to read a little of the white man's language.

HURON CHIEF: What is the name of the boat?

OTTAWA CHIEF: *(Spelling.)* G-R-I-F-F-I-N.

HURON CHIEF: What does that mean?

OTTAWA CHIEF: I do not know.

HURON CHIEF: *(Teasingly.)* I thought you said you knew the paleface language. *(Ottawa Chief haughtily turns his back. Huron pointing.)* See, the men are getting ready to land. *(Both look. Indians enter and point excitedly in the direction of the water, while they talk confusedly to one another. One of*

*the five cannon on board is fired. The Indians yell with fear.)*

OTTAWA CHIEF: I hope they do not mean to attack us.

BRAVE: *(Brandishing tomahawk.)* If they do, we are ready for them.

*(Enter La Salle, Tonty, Father Hennepin with a square object strapped to his back, and a Friar. Indians huddle in the background.)*

LA SALLE: Here is the chapel of the Jesuits. We are among friends.

*(A Jesuit friar steps forward.)*

FRIAR: I offer you welcome, men of France.

LA SALLE: We thank you, Father. *(Friar shakes hands with the Frenchman.)*

FRIAR: You have come hither in a fine boat.

TONTY: Yes, but we built it with great difficulty, and we have had a hard voyage.

FRIAR: Did you bring the boat far?

TONTY: We built it near Niagara Falls, much against the will of the Senecas, who would not even sell us corn. If it had not been for the Mohegans, we should have starved to death.

HENNEPIN: Last winter La Salle and his dog went on foot for supplies all the way to Fort Frontenac, two hundred and fifty miles.

LA SALLE: But during all our hard tramping Father Hennepin never left this altar behind. *(La Salle touches the portable altar strapped to Father Hennepin's back.)* He always carried it so that he might make a church of the wilderness, if he saw an opportunity to do missionary work among the savages.

FRIAR: That is the right spirit. Now let us all go into the chapel and thank God for your safe voyage.

*(Hennepin takes the altar off his back and sets it on the ground. All go out except the Indians.)*

OTTAWA CHIEF: I do not like this floating fort of the pale faces.

HURON CHIEF: It could destroy us all, if those big guns were fired at us.

BRAVE: We will watch these men night and day.

*(White men return.)*

FRIAR: Tell us more of your voyage. It is of the greatest interest to us.

LA SALLE: Well, we encountered a bad storm on Lake Huron; but, as you see, we escaped.

*(Four men stealthily cross the stage.)*

TONTY: Excuse me for interrupting the conversation, but I should like to inquire who those four men are that just entered.

FRIAR: They are fur traders that came here a short time ago.

TONTY: They are the men that we sent ahead of us. Are they trading for themselves?

FRIAR: Yes, and they are succeeding very well in their business.

LA SALLE: They are deserters from our party. They should be arrested, and their plunder should be taken from them.

FRIAR: That is shocking. I hope you will punish them. We do not wish to harbor deserters.

TONTY: (*Motioning to one of the party.*) Come with me, and we will arrest them at once.

FRIAR: There are, I believe, two others at the Falls of St. Mary.

TONTY: Probably they are deserters, too. Several of our men have left us. I will go tomorrow and arrest them, also. (*Tonty and his man go out.*)

LA SALLE: Tonty is a brave and faithful companion. I do not know what I should do without him.

FRIAR: He seems to be very reliable. I suppose that you have planned further explorations.

LA SALLE: We hope to establish a chain of forts from the Niagara to the Mississippi. When these become the centers of French settlements, we shall have done valuable service to France.

FRIAR: That is a gigantic undertaking. I hope that you may succeed. It is now about noon. Let us go and have something to eat. Then we can discuss this matter further.

LA SALLE: We appreciate your kindness and hospitality.

(*They all go out. Indians following and grumbling among themselves.*)

### SCENE III

#### *A Landing near the Southern End of Lake Michigan*

(*All conversation with Indians is in their language. Hennepin is chopping down a tree.*)

LA SALLE: That is a fine grapevine growing around that tree.

FRIAR: Yes, we shall get some good grapes when the tree is felled.

LA SALLE: They will go finely with our dinner of bear meat and venison.

HENNEPIN: Look out, friends, the tree is going to fall! (*Tree is supposed to fall. They dodge out of the way.*) Now you men may pick the grapes from the vine.

(*Men pick grapes and put them in a basket.*)

LA SALLE: I shall be glad when we reach the place where Tonty is to meet us. I miss him more every day.

HENNEPIN: (*Sticking his ax in a block.*) He will teach those deserters a good lesson. He always seems to know just what to do in an emergency.

LA SALLE: I wish the *Griffin* would come back, but I fear we shall never see her again.

HENNEPIN: She may have been destroyed by the traders whom you sent back with her to Niagara.

LA SALLE: Or else she may have been lost in a storm.

TRADER: (*Entering.*) I think that I have found the Indian whose footprints we discovered last night.

LA SALLE: Where?

TRADER: Strange sounds come from behind that bank. (*Pointing.*)

LA SALLE: (*Approaching bank.*) Who is there, friend or foe?

(*Five Indians brandishing war clubs appear from behind bank.*)

LA SALLE: Drop your war clubs, red men. We are not your enemies.  
(*They drop clubs.*)

BRAVE: We thought you were Iroquois, not Frenchmen.

HENNEPIN: Is that why you hid behind the bank?

(*During this conversation an Indian steals a bright-colored coat, hurriedly cuts it into small pieces, and distributes them among the other Indians.*)

BRAVE: Yes, we are never sure who are friendly or unfriendly--so many tribes are our enemies.

FRIAR: (*Touching La Salle's sleeve.*) See what those Indians are doing!

LA SALLE: (*Threateningly.*) How dare you? That coat belongs to my friend Tonty, and you will have to pay for it.

BRAVE: We shall do nothing of the kind; and if you are anxious to fight, we are ready for you.

(*Indians group together, brandish war clubs, and mutter threateningly. La Salle and the other white men seize their guns.*)

LA SALLE: It will go hard with you if you try to fight with us.

BRAVE: *(In a frightened tone, to the other Indians.)* See, they have fire sticks. They are going to shoot us. Let us pay for the coat.

*(Indians seem frightened, and nod assent.)*

BRAVE: How much do you want us to pay you for the coat?

LA SALLE: What have you to offer?

BRAVE: *(Picking up bundle.)* These beaver skins are all we have.

LA SALLE: Well, they will do. We do not wish to be unreasonable in our demands.

*(Brave hands skin to La Salle.)*

BRAVE: I hope you are not angry with us.

LA SALLE: Not at all. Come and eat dinner with us.

*(They all go out, Hennepin carrying the basket of grapes picked by the men.)*

#### SCENE IV

##### *Illinois Indian Village on the Illinois River*

*(Indian language is used in speaking with Indians. The Indians are preparing a meal. The white men enter suddenly. Indians run about in great confusion. Chief tries to calm their fears and approaches La Salle with a calumet. La Salle shows the calumet which his party carries. All assume a friendly attitude and smile and nod pleasantly.)*

CHIEF: Palefaces, you are welcome; but why did you come this way?

LA SALLE: We have come to help you against your enemies, the Iroquois; and we want to build a fort near you for supplies.

CHIEF: We are glad to have you with us. When you came, we were preparing to eat. Sit down and feast with us.

*(Indians put food into the mouths of the white men.)*

CHIEF: At dawn we expect to go hunting. Now, since we are through eating, let us go to sleep.

*(All wrap up in blankets and lie down. Monso enters stealthily and wakes up the Indians. They sneak into a corner and hold council.)*

MONSO: Do not trust La Salle. He is deceiving you.

BRAVE: How?

MONSO: He is going to persuade other tribes to war against you.

CHIEF: We are glad to know that. We will try to keep the white men from going any farther on their journey.

*(A white man stirs in his sleep. Morning is supposed to dawn.)*

BRAVE: Go, Monso! We must not let La Salle know that you have been here. Let us go back to our places and lie down.

*(Monso sneaks out. Indians creep back to their places. La Salle and Tonty wake up and withdraw to one side, followed by a friendly Indian, who whispers to them. They nod thoughtfully and whisper to each other.)*

LA SALLE: *(To the Indian, in an audible whisper.)* I am glad that you told us about Monso and that midnight council. What he said is not true.

INDIAN: I knew that it was not. That is why I let you know about it; but do not tell the others that I told you.

LA SALLE: No indeed. We will keep your secret.

*(Other Indians wake up, and all rise and busy themselves getting breakfast.)*

CHIEF: *(To La Salle and Tonty.)* I want to warn you against going farther down the big river. It is full of monsters and whirlpools, and the tribes are all hostile.

LA SALLE: The greater the danger, the more glory in making the journey.

CHIEF: You will regret it if you go.

LA SALLE: You think we are not your friends. That is the trouble.

CHIEF: I did not say so.

LA SALLE: We know all about what Monso told you. Think not that the Frenchmen are asleep when they seem to be.

TONTY: If what Monso said is true, he would not have sneaked away in the dark.



HENNEPIN: If we had been your enemies, we would have killed you when we first came and found you frightened.

LA SALLE: If you are still suspicious of us, speak frankly and let us know.

*(Indians consult together, nod and shake their heads reassuringly.)*

CHIEF: We believe what you say, and are willing to take your word instead of Monso's.

SQUAW: *(Entering.)* Breakfast is ready.

*(They all go out.)*

## SCENE V

### *Indian Settlement on the North Bank of the Illinois River*

*(Indian language is used. All are busy at various kinds of work.)*

INDIAN SCOUT: *(Entering.)* The Iroquois are coming.

*(Great excitement ensues. All seize weapons.)*

CHIEF: How many are there?

SCOUT: At least five hundred.

CHIEF: They outnumber us. Most of our young braves are away hunting.

BRAVE: Why should the Iroquois attack us at this time? This man *(pointing to Tonty)* must be their secret friend.

SQUAW: Kill him! Kill the paleface!

*(Indians angrily surround him. He raises his copper hand and makes a quieting gesture.)*

TONTY: Listen, my brothers. We will help you to fight the Iroquois. This magic hand of mine will bring victory.

CHIEF: Listen to the medicine man of the palefaces. He will lead us to victory.

BRAVE: We do not trust him.

CHIEF: We cannot fight the Iroquois alone. We can do no better than let the Frenchmen help us.

*(Indians grumblingly acquiesce.)*

SCOUT NO. 2: *(Entering.)* The Iroquois are almost here.

TONTY: I hear their yells. Be ready, men, for the attack.

*(Iroquois rush in and take a stand together. Illinois and Frenchmen group themselves a short distance away. They shoot arrows and guns at one another.)*

TONTY: *(To Chief.)* We can never defeat them. They outnumber us. Give me a wampum belt as a sign of truce, and I will try to persuade them to stop fighting.

*(Chief gives Tonty belt, and he rushes among the savages. One, seizes his hair, to scalp him. Another stabs him in the breast. He frees himself and staggers against a tree.)*

IROQUOIS BRAVE: That man belongs to the tribe of the Illinois. Burn him at the stake.

CHIEF: No, his ears are not pierced. He is a Frenchman.

TONTY: *(Aside.)* It is fortunate that they do not know I am an Italian.

CHIEF: Let him alone. Permit him to speak.

*(They all lower their weapons and listen to him.)*

TONTY: Listen, red men, you must not attack the Illinois. They are friends of the great white chief to the east, and he will punish you.

CHIEF: But they are no friends of ours.

TONTY: They are stronger than you, and they will kill you all. Take my advice and stop fighting.

BRAVE: What he says may be true.

TONTY: You will soon find out that it is only too true.

CHIEF: Well, we will do as you say, and stop fighting for the present. Here is a wampum belt as a token of peace. Take it back to your friends.

*(Tonty staggers out, holding his hand where he was wounded in the chest. The red men, talking among themselves, go out in the opposite direction.)*

## SCENE VI

*St. Ignace*

*(They speak the French language. La Salle and Tonty enter arm in arm, followed by traders.)*

LA SALLE: *(Slapping Tonty on the shoulder.)* Tonty, I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you. If I

had known you were safe, I might have sailed down the big river; but I could not persuade myself to go without you.

TONTY: How did you find out that I was alive?

LA SALLE: From the Indians. I hunted for you the entire length of the Illinois River. Then I stripped some bark from a tree and hung up a board on which I had drawn pictures of myself and our party, so that you might see it and follow us if you passed that way.

TONTY: I was so often delayed by the Indians that I could not come to you any sooner.

LA SALLE: Let us sit down here and talk our plans.

*(Both sit down; others group themselves about and listen.)*

LA SALLE: First we must explore the great river to its mouth, make settlements along its bank, and by this route ship furs to France.

MEMBRE: Any one else would lack courage for such an expedition; but La Salle has no equal for determination.

LA SALLE: Nor Tonty for enthusiasm. *(To Tonty.)* You look thin, my friend.

TONTY: That is no wonder. We had very little to eat for over a month. Once we lay down by our camp fire to die of starvation, but the Ottawa Indians saw the smoke and brought us food.

LA SALLE: Your clothes are all worn out *(feeling Tonty's sleeve)*. By the way, that red coat you left with me was stolen by the Indians. They admired its color.

TONTY: We all need some new garments. At one time we had to cut up Father Membre's cloak to make moccasins.

LA SALLE: Luckily we have clothes for everybody, and plenty to eat.

TONTY: That is good. Now that we are all together again do you think that we had better start south at once?

LA SALLE: As soon as we collect boatloads of supplies. I hope that we have already experienced the worst part of the trip; but we must be prepared for anything.

TONTY: Do you still intend to form a confederacy of the western tribes against the Iroquois?

LA SALLE: Yes, I have begun that already. It is the only way to control the fur trade for France.

TONTY: To do this, we should hold councils with all the chiefs.

LA SALLE: That is what I am planning. Indians will do anything for tobacco and a few other presents.

TONTY: *(Laughing.)* Yes, I found that out during my travels.

LA SALLE: This has been an eventful day. We are all tired and need sleep. Tomorrow we can resume the accounts of our adventures and finish making our plans. (*Rising.*) It is now late. Let us go to bed.

TONTY: (*Yawning.*) I am more than willing.

(*All go out, yawning.*)

## SCENE VII

### *Court of Louis XIV*

LOUIS: We have been very much interested in this story of yours, La Salle. You have shown great persistency and courage, and have accomplished what has never been done before. When did you say that you reached the mouth of the Mississippi?

LA SALLE: In April. The river divides into three streams, by which it empties into the Gulf. Tonty sailed through one, some of our party through another, and I explored the third. We met and claimed for France all the territory along the big river far eastward and westward.

LOUIS: What did you call it?

LA SALLE: We called it Louisiana, in honor of your Majesty. We set up a post and fixed to it a metal plate bearing the arms of France, your name, and the date.

LOUIS: You have done us honor. What further plans have you made?

LA SALLE: Tonty and I have both come to the conclusion that an easy route to Canada may be made through the Gulf and up the big river.

LOUIS: (*Meditatively.*) Let us see. Spain owns the Gulf. France is at war with Spain. (*He hesitates and thinks.*) Here is an excellent opportunity to drive the Spaniards from that part of the New World. How many ships do you need?

LA SALLE: About three, your Majesty.

LOUIS: I will give you four, besides one hundred soldiers and all the supplies you require.

LA SALLE: Then I will set sail as soon as everything is in readiness. Tonty is waiting for me now at Fort St. Louis. Together, I believe that we can succeed in driving out all the Spaniards from the mouth of the river.

LOUIS: I have the utmost confidence in you both. Let us withdraw and make further plans for the expedition.

(*All go out, following Louis.*)

CURTAIN