

ledge to himself that he, a British officer, was now in truth a willing deserter. But to be a deserter he found more tolerable than to return at the price of a private and indelible shame.

Menewehna, cheated of his fears, watched him with a new and growing hope. The snows melted; May came with its flowers, June with its heat, July with the roaring of bucks in the forest; and still the men hung about the village, fishing and shooting, or making short excursions to Sault Sainte Marie or the bay of Boutchitouay, or the mouth of the Mississaki river on the north side of the lake, where the wildfowl were plentiful; but showing no disposition to go out again upon the war-path as they had gone the year before. The frenzy which then had carried them hundreds of miles from their homes seemed now to be entirely spent, and the war itself to have faded thousands of miles away. Once or twice a French officer from Fort Mackinac was paddled across and landed and harangued the Indians; and the Indians listened attentively, but never stirred. Of the French soldiers drilling at the fort they spoke now with contempt.

John saw no reason for this change, and set it down to that flightiness of purpose which—as he had read in books—is common to all savages. He had yet to learn how rumour travels in solitary lands over which the very sky becomes as it were a vast sounding-board, echoing far distant events not only within a few hours of their happening, but sometimes even a day or two before they happen.

It was on his return from the Isles aux Castors, where with two score young men of the tribe he had spent three weeks in fishing for sturgeon, that he heard of the capture of Fort Niagara by the English. Azoka announced it to him.

“Said I not how it would happen?” she reminded him. “But if you leave us now you must come back with her and see my boy. When he comes to be born he shall be called Netawis. Ononwe and I are agreed upon it.”

“I have no thought of leaving,” John answered. “Fort Niagara is far from here.”