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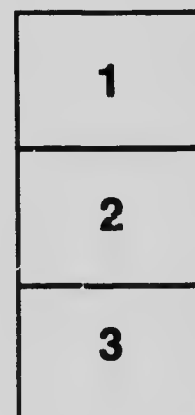
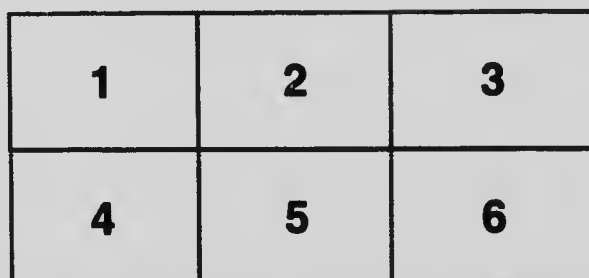
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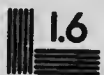
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THE MAID OF THE FOREST

SOME SUCCESSFUL BOOKS

By RANDALL PARRISH

MY LADY OF THE NORTH

Seventy-two Thousand

MY LADY OF THE SOUTH

Sixty-two Thousand

BOB HAMPTON OF PLACER

Sixty-five Thousand

SWORD OF THE OLD FRONTIER

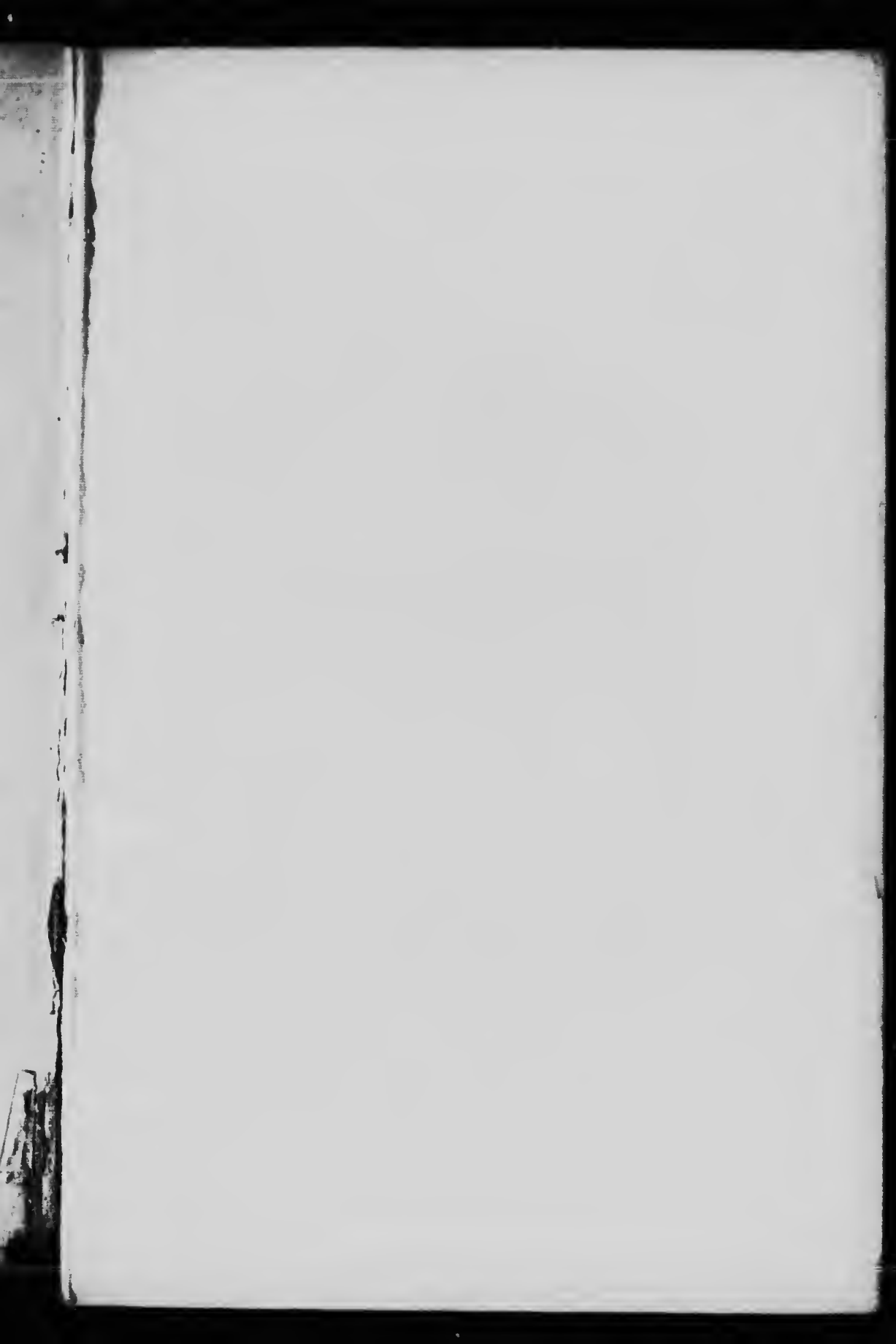
Fifty-second Thousand

BETH NORVELL

Fifty-third Thousand

WHEN WILDERNESS WAS KING

Fifty-fifth Thousand





The Maid of the Forest

The Maid of the Forest

A Romance of St. Clair's Defeat

BY
RANDALL PARRISH

ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANK E. SCHOONOVER



McCLELLAND & GOODCHILD
TORONTO

A. C. McCLURG & CO., CHICAGO

1913

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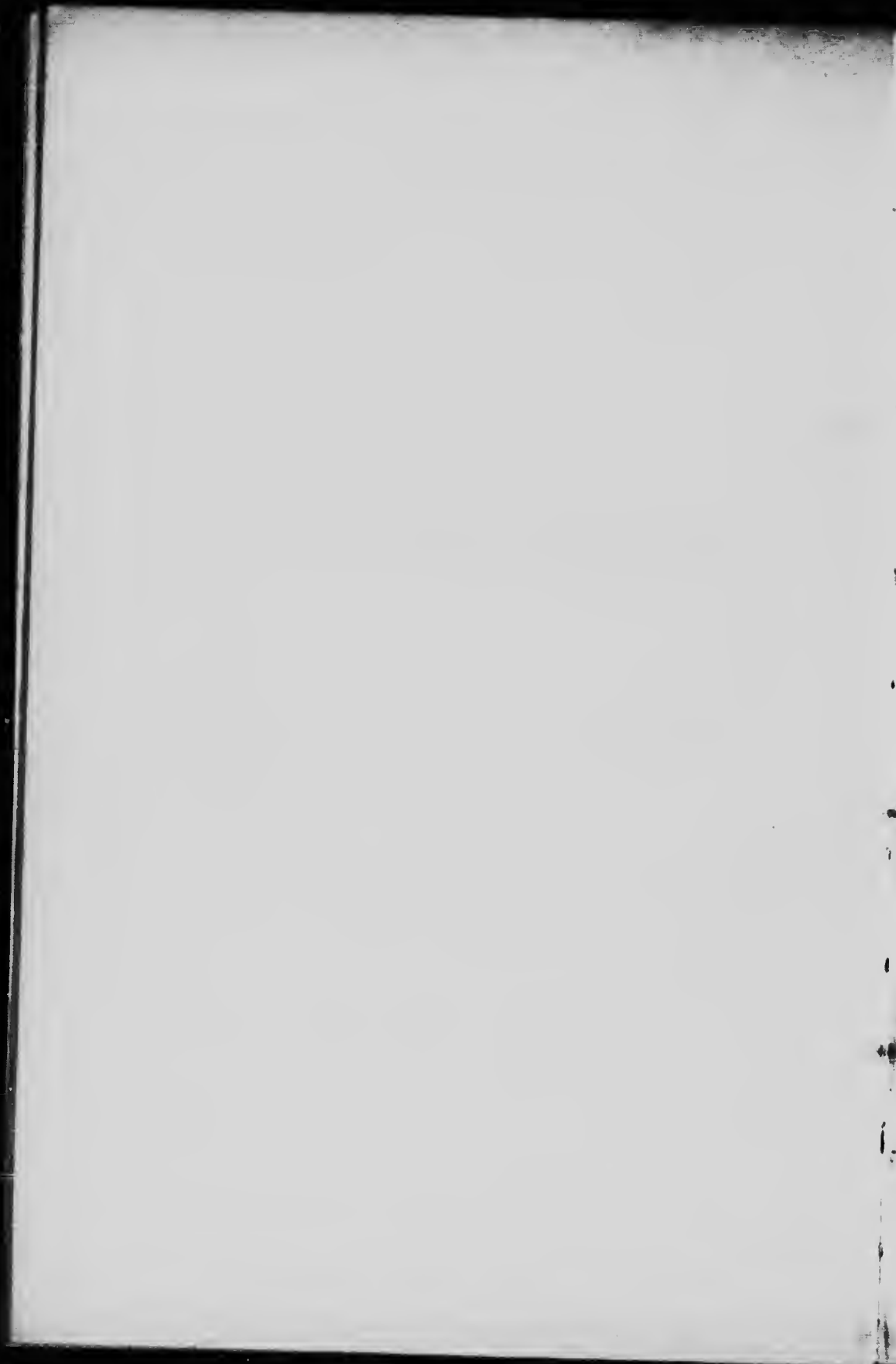
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O strange New World that yit wast ever young,
Whose youth from thee by gripin' need was wrung,
Brown foundlin' o' the woods, whose baby bed
Was provled 'round by the Injun's cracklin' tread,
And who grew'st strong thru shifts, and wants, and
pains,
Nursed by stern men with empires in their brains.

— *Lowell.*



The Maid of the Forest

CHAPTER I

A MESSENGER FROM THE NORTH

I STOOD alone on the banks of a small stream gazing down into the clear water. The sun revealed fish in the depths, and their curious antics held me amused. Mine was still the heart of youth, in spite of those experiences of war through which I had passed in the struggle of the colonies, and my mind could not dwell for long brooding and despondent. It was a relief, a joy to be there alone, my memory reverting to the Maryland hills, and the half-forgotten days when I had roamed them in childhood.

It was a fair, bright morning. Yet, until now, I had scarcely realized this, picking my way through the grim forest, where great trees almost totally obscured the blue arch of sky. Then I had suddenly emerged into open space, gorgeous with wild flowers, exhibiting a prodigal confusion of coloring, and found myself on

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the bank of this clear run. All about was the forest, the trees on the opposite bank dense to the very edge of the water, a vast trackless wilderness, stretching almost unbrokenly to the great lakes. Still held by garrisons of English troops it remained a dark, gloomy expanse, filled with mystery and death, roamed over by savages, and scarcely known to the boldest among those few settlers scattered along the Ohio. In the heart of the tangled thickets this little oasis appeared a spot of rare beauty, with deep blue overhead, the song of birds in the air, and the clear stream of running water singing its song. I had never been there before — perhaps no wandering white foot had ever discovered this hidden waterway — yet I knew the stream, and where it finally found passage to the great river. It should be my guide southward, away from the gloom of the vast woods, and their dark, haunting shadows.

I still stood there, leaning on my long rifle, my thought centering upon the journey homeward, when the bushes opposite parted, and a man stood on the bank scarcely a dozen steps away, with only the stream between us. It was time and place for caution, for suspicion of strangers, and my rifle came forward in instant readiness, my heart throbbing with startled surprise. He held up both hands, his own weapon resting on the ground.

A Messenger from the North

"Not so careless, boy," he called across cheerfully. "There is no war, so far as I know, between white men."

His easy tone, as well as his words, jarred on me, yet I lowered the rifle.

"I am no boy," I retorted, "as you may discover before we are through our acquaintance."

"No? Well by my eyesight you look it, although in faith you are surely big enough for a grown man. I have heard, friend, that they grow giants south of the Ohio, and now I believe it true. Are you of that breed?"

"That is neither here nor there," I said, failing to fall into his humor. "I am as nature ordained. Your words would indicate that you were strange to this country?"

"As I surely am, and may God forgive me for ever coming here. However it was no choice of mine, but yours is the first white face I've seen since I left the Shawnee towns — a weary journey."

"The Shawnee towns!" I echoed, staring at him in fresh wonderment. "You come from beyond? From the Illinois?"

He stroked his beard.

"A longer journey than that even," he acknowledged slowly. "I am from Sandusky, by way of Vincennes."

"Alone?"

The Maid of the Forest

"The Indians who were with me remained at Shawnee; they lost heart. Since then I have been by myself."

I stood silent, watchful, aroused to the importance of this meeting. I could judge little as to the appearance of the man, for he remained well back in the shadow, yet he was not of large build, nor of an aspect to alarm me.

"Come over," I said shortly, "where we can converse more easily."

He stepped into the cool water unhesitatingly, and waded across, a small pack at his back, and a long rifle across his shoulder. There was a reckless audacity about the fellow I could not fail to observe, and, as he scrambled up the rather steep bank, I had glimpse of a face far from my liking. However, ours was a rough life in those days, accustoming us to strange acquaintances, so I waited, my rifle in my hand, determined to know more of this wanderer. He was a man of middle age, with gray hairs a plenty, and scraggly beard, an active body, of good girth, and a dark face, deeply seamed, having an ugly scar adown his right cheek, seemingly from its white center the slash of a knife. The eyes, gleaming beneath the brim of his hat, were furtive, uncanny, black as to color, and bold enough in the sneaking way of a tiger cat. Beyond

A Messenger from the North

these things there was little distinctive about the man, his dress merely that of the backwoods — fringed hunting shirt and leggings of leather, dirty and soiled by long use, yet exhibiting a bit of foppery in decoration which made me recall the French *voyageurs* of the North and their gay ribbons. At his belt dangled hunting knife and tomahawk, but these, with the rifle, constituted his whole display of weapons. Even before he had obtained the level on which I stood I had conceived a dislike for the fellow, a desire to have done with further acquaintanceship. With feet planted firmly on the edge of the grass he scanned me from head to foot with unwinking eyes, that sought only to smile.

“You are surely a big fellow,” he said at last. “Some hand at rough and tumble, I make bold to guess.” His roving glance took in the dead wild turkey lying at my feet. “A hunter — hey?”

“Occasionally, for what I require as food — and you?”

He chose to ignore my question, apparently not yet ready to declare himself, turning over the turkey cock with moccasined foot.

“A clean shot, friend, and a fine bird. My mouth waters for a taste of it, hot from the fire. You are a woodsman, you say?”

“I did not say,” I answered shortly, feeling no en-

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joyment of his probing, "but, at least, I am not lost in them."

"Which is more than I can say," he acknowledged frankly. "I left the trace for a short cut — as my mission is an urgent one — and now know not how far the river may be away."

"The Ohio?"

"Ay, the Ohio. Know you the town they call Marietta?"

"I have been there. It is forty miles to the south of us. You seek the place?"

"There, or thereabouts. Forty miles, you say? A goodly journey yet, and little enough at the end of the traveling. A log house or two amid fields of blackened stumps, a few psalm-singing Puritans, and a church — is that the picture, friend?"

I laughed, but rather at the wry look on his face, than at the words.

"Not quite so bad, yet true it is a settlement of God-fearing New Englanders, not much to your taste possibly. Only I advise you to hold your tongue when once you get there. They were soldiers the most of them not so long ago, and have not forgotten the trade. But you spoke of hunger — you have not eaten?"

He shook his head.

"Nor I: we will try the taste of the cock together,

A Messenger from the North

if we may venture out a fire. Know you if there be any savages in these woods?"

"Not a one. They are in council at Vincennes."

I looked at him suspiciously, noting again the peculiarity of his face, its dark coloring under the tan. I might just as well get at the gist of things.

"You know too much," I said, "about those murderers, not to be one of them. I pick you as a half-breed. Right, am I? And you come from that same council, or another, with some word to those settlers below?"

"There is not a drop of Indian blood in my veins, he answered coldly, "and I would never deny it if there was, for I have found them more to my liking than those of my own race. Come, enough of this play. Let us have frankness between us. I come from the North on a mission of peace, the representative of the tribes, and of Hamilton. There is no reason in this why we should quarrel. You are a bit of a hot-head I take it, but I am too old a borderer to take heed to foolish words. All I ask is fair speech, and guidance — can you deny me these?"

"Not if you talk with a straight tongue. But threats will get you little in these woods. You represent Hamilton, you say?"

"Ay, though I expect little will come from it. I

The Maid of the Forest

would have word with St. Clair and Harmar. Know you either man?"

"Both, passing well. St. Clair is up the river — or was three days since — but General Harmar represents him at the settlement. How happens it, my friend, if the message be so important, Hamilton did not despatch an officer?"

"He had no choice. None volunteered for the task, and I was the selection of the tribes. You question me as though you were Harmar himself; and more, you have the look of it. You're not a woodsman, you say; then I make a guess — you're a soldier."

"I am," I returned quietly, "an Ensign in the regular service."

"Name?"

"Joseph Hayward, of Fort Harmar."

"The gods be praised! Now is the way made clear. You were traveling thither?"

"I am to be there tomorrow."

"In ample time for my purpose. 'Tis easily seen the devil takes care of his own. It was my hope to encounter a soldier, rather than a borderer, who might have prejudice against me. I recall your name, Master Hayward, as spoken by the Delawares. You were at Chillicothe last Spring?"

"I attended the council."

A Messenger from the North

“The very man, and now you can serve me well, if I may journey with you?”

I had an increasing dislike for the fellow and his shifting eyes refused to meet mine. Yet to ignore such a request might invite disaster. If, as he claimed, he represented the tribes, and bore the credentials of Hamilton, the message might well be an important one. Its purport was for others to judge, yet it was plainly enough my duty to give him safe convoy. Yet my aversion could not be entirely suppressed.

“I am not overly fond of white men who turn Indian,” I said coldly. “However I’ll see you safe to the fort gates if you play no forest tricks on the way. And now you might tell me who it is I am to companion with.”

He grinned, showing his teeth, and my eyes noted how firmly he held his gun.

“A pledge is a pledge, Master Hayward,” he answered, insolently. “I am called Simon Girty.”

CHAPTER II

AT THE FORT GATES

I INVOLUNTARILY took a step backward, staring into the man's face. That he was a renegade of some sort, I had realized from the first, yet it had never once occurred to me that he could be that bloody scoundrel, Girty. I ought to have recognized him at the first glance, for his personal appearance had been described to me often enough, but it was hard to conceive that one with his murderous reputation would ever dare to venture thus openly into our settlements. Even as a messenger from Hamilton he faced grave danger at the hands of those backwoodsmen eager to avenge innumerable outrages. No wonder he sought protection, companionship with a soldier, in his daring venture. Ay, and his message must be important to cause him to assume so desperate a mission — he of all men the most hated throughout the length and breadth of our settlements.

There flashed across my mind the stories I had heard of his atrocities: his leadership of Indians in midnight forays; his malignant cruelty; the heartlessness with which he watched victims burning at the stake; his

The Maid of the Forest

outrages on helpless women and children; the fiendish acts of savagery with which his brutal name was connected along the border. And this was the man — this cowardly-eyed dastard, who stood there grinning into my face, evidently amused at my undisguised expression of horror. Protect, and guide him! My first inclination was to strike the man down in his tracks, kill him as I would a venomous snake. He read all this in my eyes, in the stiffening of my muscles.

“No, no, Master Hayward,” he sneered, bringing his rifle forward, “do n’t let the name frighten you. The half you’ve heard of me are lies. I’m not so bad when all is told, and there is more than one borderman who can recall my mercy. Kenton escaped the stake through me, and there are white women and children awaiting ransom in Detroit because I interceded for them. Give the devil his due, lad, and remember I come now on a mission of peace.”

“More likely of treachery,” I interrupted boldly, “and not the first time.”

“Nor likely to be the last,” he admitted coolly enough. “I am more Indian than white. I have learned to war in the fashion of the woods. Yet now I play fair, above-board — see?” and he dropped his gun on the grass, and held out his empty hands. “It is easy to kill me, yet you will not — you are a soldier.”

At the Fort Gates

I stood irresolute, hesitating, half tempted still to come to blows. I cared nothing for what he said; I knew him for what he was, yet his act disarmed me. Beast though he might be I could not kill him in cold blood; I was no murderer, yet it was a struggle to resist.

"Now listen, Simon Girty," I managed to say, at last. "There is no friendship between us, now nor at any time. I hold you a murderous renegade, a white savage, to be shown less mercy than an Indian dog. But I leave others to deal with you as you deserve. As you say, I am a soldier, and will act like one. I have pledged you my word of guidance to Fort Harmar. I will keep the pledge to the letter, but no more. Beyond the gate you proceed at your own risk, for I lift no hand to protect you from just vengeance. I despise you too much to fear you. Pick up your rifle. That is all: now we will break our fast, and go."

He did as I bade him, grinning as though it was all a joke, but with no effort to answer. Whatever might be his real purpose, he had no desire to quarrel, nor to resent my plain speech; indeed, I thought he held my words a compliment, rejoicing in his reputation, proud of those atrocities with which his name was linked in infamy.

I had no need to tell him what to do. He was a woods-

The Maid of the Forest

man, efficient enough, and between us, a fire was quickly made and the cock prepared. We ate silently, our eyes occasionally meeting, but I had no wish to converse, being busy enough with my own thoughts. There was little cordiality to my manner, I presume, and the fellow had the good sense to hold his tongue, although his appetite did not suffer. The meal finished we packed for the trail, and started out briskly down the bank of the stream.

Convinced as I was that Girty actually desired to reach the fort, although somewhat skeptical as to his purpose, I felt no fear of treachery. I was of too great value to the fellow to warrant an attack; so, without hesitation, I led the way, permitting him to follow or not, as he pleased. I doubt if we exchanged a dozen words all day, the two of us tramping steadily. My thoughts and suspicions kept my mind busy, and he must have realized the aversion I felt, and the value of a silent tongue. Words would have inevitably led to quarrel, and without my aid there was small chance of his ever reaching the settlements unharmed. Our passage was open most of the way, permitting rapid progress, although as we drew nearer the river the forest crept down close to the bank of the smaller stream and served to delay progress. We camped that night within view of the Ohio, smoking our pipes in gloomy

At the Fort Gates

silence over the dying fire, after a frugal meal, and finally falling asleep, with scarcely an utterance passing between us.

I had it in my mind to question him, but refrained. What would be the use? The fellow would only lie, in all probability, and one word would lead to another. He would have to be explicit enough once he confronted Harmar, and my duty merely consisted in delivering him safely at the gates of the fort. That in itself was no task to be enjoyed, as I felt an inclination to throttle the ruffian every time I looked at him. To address him decently was almost beyond my power, and the contempt of silence remained my only refuge. The night passed without disturbance, Girty sleeping peacefully enough, but I was restless, rising twice to assure myself he was still there. With the first flush of dawn I awoke him roughly, and by sunrise we were again on the trail, headed south through the woods.

It was noon when we came to the clearings, littered with stumps, but yielding view of the distant river, and the scattered log houses of Marietta. Men were at work in the fields, but I avoided these as much as possible, although they paused in their labor and stared suspiciously at us as we advanced. However I was well known, my size making me notable, and as our course was toward the town, no one objected to our progress.

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We were silently accepted as hunters returning unsuccessful from the woods ; but I noticed those nearest eyed my companion closely, little liking his hang-dog appearance. Yet there was no recognition of the man, who clung close to my heels, and I wasted no time in getting past, eager to be well rid of him.

In truth I felt little hope of getting thro' thus easily. The fellow was too widely known not to be recognized by someone. These men of the fields were settlers, newly arrived mostly, and slightly acquainted as yet with border history, but there would be idle hunters in the village, backwoodsmen from across the river, men who had ranged the northern forests, and to whom the name of Girty meant much. Let one of these look upon the man and his life would scarce be worth the snap of a finger. Not that I cared, except as his safe passage involved my own word. His comprehension of the danger was revealed by the sudden question shot over my shoulder:

“You go through the settlement, Master Hayward?”

“No,” I answered sharply, “I am not seeking trouble. We turn here to the left.”

Hence it was some time later that we climbed the long hill in the sunshine, and attained the level before the fort.

I shall never blot out from memory the view from

At the Fort Gates

the summit of the bluff, although I gave it little enough thought that day with Girty following at my heels. Yet I paused long enough to note his eyes sweep the wide circle as though even his hardened soul felt response to the rare beauty of the scene. The two rivers — the Muskingum, a mere thread showing through the green of the forest, and the Ohio, a broad gleam of gold dazzling in the sun — met far below us, the latter sweeping in a great bend to the northward between shores covered with green forests. It was all wilderness far as the eye could see, except that beneath the bluff little clearings dotted the woodland, and on the nearby bank of the silvery Muskingum appeared the log houses of the settlement. The smoke curling lazily from those distant chimneys, the diminutive figures of men toiling in the fields, the occasional appearance of women and children in the streets of the village, helped compose a picture of peace. Yet as I glanced back into the face of the man beside me, I realized suddenly how close savage war lurked in the depths of the surrounding forest. Torture and death, suffering and hardship, were close at hand, and he was their fit representative.

“Come along,” I said harshly. “I would be done with you.”

We advanced up the road to where the fort gates stood open, a single sentry standing motionless between

The Maid of the Forest

the posts. As we drew near, a group of hunters — a half-dozen maybe — suddenly emerged, their long rifles trailing, on their way to the valley. I recognized the man in advance as the Kentuckian Brady, frontiersman and Indian fighter, and recognizing me he stopped.

“Ah, back again, Master Hayward,” he exclaimed good humoredly. “And with what luck?”

“Not much,” I replied, anxious to get by. “There are too many hunters out, and the game is shy. Perchance I lack the skill of you who make forest ranging a trade.”

“And a poor trade enough,” he answered, “only I know no better. But what is it you have here? No settler of this valley, to my remembrance.”

He stared at my companion, shading his eyes with one hand, his face losing its look of cheerfulness.

“Indian trappings — hey!” he exclaimed. “Some northwest renegade! Stop! I’ve seen that face before!” His rifle came forward swiftly, as the truth burst upon him. “Curse you, you’re Simon Girty!”

I gripped the barrel of his gun, pressing my way between him and the others behind.

“Whatever his name,” I said sternly, “this is not your affair. The fellow comes with message from Hamilton, and has my pledge of safe guidance. Stand back now, and let us pass!”

At the Fort Gates

He gazed at me and at the man beside me, his gray eyes dark with anger. He was not a man I knew well personally, but many border tales of his prowess, and of his fierce, undying hatred of all Indians, had reached my ears. As he stood there now, blocking the passage, tall, gaunt, gray-bearded, his eyes full of defiance, I understood the seriousness of his menace. Those men with him would be swayed by his words — he was their leader. Not a face among them was known to me — Kentuckians all, no doubt; “long knives” scarcely less barbarous than the savages they fought.

“I’ll not stand back,” he said, wrestling to break my grip on his rifle. “Not to let that devil go free. Let go of the gun barrel, you young fool! I’m not one of your soldiers. Here Potter, Evans, do you hear? That is the bloody villain Girty — come on!”

They had hold of me instantly hurling me back in spite of my struggling. I saw the renegade throw forward his rifle, and shouted to him.

“Don’t do that, you fool — run!”

Even as I cried out the order I leaped forward, seeking to get grip on Brady, hurling the others aside with a sweep of my arms. There was an instant of fierce fighting, of blows, curses, threats. I lunged over the rifle barrel, and got grip on Brady’s beard, only to

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be hauled back by a dozen hands, and flung to my knees.

“Sentry! Call the guard!”

I got the words out somehow, boring my way forth from under the huddle of forms. There was a rush of feet, the shouting of an order, the . . . ck of contact, and then I stood alone, wiping the perspiration from my eyes.

CHAPTER III

WITH GENERAL HARMAR

THAT will do, sergeant," I called out, the moment I could gain breath. "Here now, do n't hit that man! Surround this fellow and take him inside the stockade. Never mind me; I'll take care of myself."

The little squad tramped off, Girty in their midst, his head turned back over his shoulder watchfully. I stepped forward fronting Brady, and held out my hand.

"Sorry this happened," I said soberly, "but I promised to bring the man to the fort, and I had to defend him."

"He's a bloody savage!" he retorted, with an oath, and making no responsive movement; "he's worse than any Injun on the border."

"I know all that, Brady. I despise the fellow as much as any of you, although I may not have suffered through his acts as some of you have. But he is here in peace, not war. To injure him now might cost hundreds of lives. Let him give his message to General Harmar; after that we shall know how to deal with the skunk. At least do not hold this against me; I only did my duty."

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Brady loosened his grip on his gun, and took my hand.

"I understand that, boy," he said, not unkindly. "Your fighting was square enough, and no harm done. I like the way you went at it, but I reckon you do n't quite sense how we old Kentuckians feel about renegades o' that stripe. 'Taint natural you should, for there ain't been no Injun war to amount to anything since you come to this country. But I've seen that greasy devil in paint an' feathers; so has Evans here, an' these yer young fellows know some of the dirt he's done. He's led war parties against us, an' killed our neighbors. That skunk stood by an' let 'em burn ol' man Roddy at the stake, an' never raised a hand. It's a hellish fact, true, sir! An' he only laughed at Kenton when the redskins made him run the gauntlet. The ugly cur ought to be skinned alive!"

"I've heard all that," I replied when he stopped, his eyes blazing angrily. "But two wrongs never made a right, men. He came here voluntarily as a messenger. The tribes are in council at Sandusky and sent him. That is why I stood in his defense against you. We must learn what word he brings. If he were killed on such a mission every Indian in the northwest would feel called upon to avenge his death. It would mean raids and warfare the whole length of the Ohio; it would mean

With General Harmar

the murder of women and children; the burning of homes, and all the horrors of Indian warfare for years to come. There is only a fringe of white settlers on this side of the river, Brady, and a mere handful of soldiers to defend them. All the northwest tribes are united together against us, securely backed and encouraged by British agents. English troops still occupy the forts about the great lakes, and furnish their allies with guns and ammunition. Hamilton, and his emissaries, travel from tribe to tribe; his officers and spies scour the woods. All that is needed to touch a match to the magazine is an excuse. Any act of treachery — the killing of a messenger, even a cur like Girty — would be enough. Hamilton cannot control those fiends once they feel the blood-lust. We cannot afford to have war, we are not ready."

"Ready? rot! I am for going in now, an' finishing the job. This new government policy of strokin' those devils on the back, makes me sick. That ain't the way we cleaned up Kentucky."

"Easier said than done, Brady. This is n't Kentucky, and the conditions are different. Those were hunters and backwoodsmen who took possession of that land to the south. They came alone, on foot, rifle in hand, fighting men every one. That was their trade. These settlers who have come in north of the Ohio are

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of a different breed; they have brought wives and children with them, and have come to till the land. They are not hunters and woodsmen; half of them never even saw an Indian. They would be as helpless as babes on a war trail. They are colonists from the East, brought out here by organized companies, and promised the protection of regular troops. And what is there between them and the savages yonder? Two small companies of infantry here at Harmar, and maybe a hundred more men scattered at little posts west of Fort Pitt. And you talk of fighting all the northwest tribes with a handful like that! Ay! and the British garrisons back of them! Start it, my friend, and let me tell you that inside of thirty days there would n't be a white settler left alive along this river. St. Clair and Harmar are doing the best they can under such conditions. They have got to compromise; they do n't dare provoke war. The Indians and the British know this is true; Girty knows it, or he never would have ventured to come in here — what is it, Faulkner?"

The sergeant, a short, stocky fellow, saluted stiffly.

"The compliments of General Harmar, sir, and would you come to his office."

"At once; what did you do with the man you were put in charge of?"

"He is in the guardhouse, sir."

With General Harmar

“ You reported his arrival to General Harmar? ”

“ Yes, sir, and he said he desired to talk with you first.”

“ Very well, sergeant, as soon as I can slip out of these hunting clothes. Am I right, Brady? ”

“ Maybe so,” he admitted reluctantly, “ but that ain’t my style o’ handling Injuns. I reckon we ’ll hang ’round boys, till we see what ’s comin’ out o’ this yer message bearin’. I ’d sure like to be in any fracas whar I could get a slam at that hound o’ hell.”

Fort Harmar consisted merely of a few one-story houses, surrounded by a log stockade. The houses were against, or rather formed the rear defense, and faced the gate, with a considerable open space between, sometimes utilized as a drill ground for a single company. Sentry boxes were at each corner, and a long building of logs, intended as a barracks, but generally unoccupied except as a receptacle for odds and ends, extended across the north side. The commandant’s office was to the south. Altogether it was a rude, primitive arrangement, typical of the hastily erected frontier forts located along the river, intended more for the housing of troops than any stern purpose of defense. Situated as it was, on the summit of the bluff, and surrounded by open land, it might be successfully defended against Indian attack, but otherwise was a mere stockade camp.

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The guardhouse stood just within the gates, and sentries walked a narrow platform from which they could see over the stockade and keep watch in every direction. For those days discipline was strict in the garrison, and the troops were well drilled, as General Harmar was a vigilant commander, delighting in martial order and display.

It required but a few moments for me to shift my hunting suit for a suitable uniform, and this accomplished, I hurried across the parade to the office. The orderly admitted me at once. General Harmar was alone, sitting beside a small writing table, and began questioning me the instant I appeared.

“Close the door, Mr. Hayward. Now, sir, what is it that just happened outside the gate? Fighting with some of my scouts, I understand, over a fellow you brought in with you? I presume there was some cause for this unseemly quarrel?”

“There was, General Harmar,” I replied, standing cap in hand.

He leaned back in his chair, drumming with one hand on the table, his stern eyes on my face.

“Then make your report, sir.”

I went over the events of the past few hours rapidly, but clearly, and there was no interruption until I ceased to speak.

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“Who did you say the man was?”

“Simon Girty, sir. That was the name he gave me, and Brady recognized him at once.”

Harmar rose to his feet, and stormed across the room, trying to find voice for his anger.

“And they dare send that bloody fiend in here to negotiate with me! and I will have to see and talk with the dog! If only I had a thousand men to use in defense of this frontier, I'd have him kicked out of the gates inside of five minutes. But what have I? Barely three hundred, and half of them recruits, the scum of city alleys, who do not even know the beginning of the manual of arms. The whole lot are not equal to a single platoon of Continentals in a fight. That is what they give me with which to protect fifteen hundred miles of frontier. And I am expected to keep peace — peace with howling red savages, stirred into frenzy by British agents, and white renegades. And to do it, I must crawl on my belly, and speak soft to this dog Girty. I would St. Clair was here.”

He stopped suddenly.

“What is his mission? Did he say?”

“Not a word, sir, except that he represented the tribes, and bore a message from Hamilton.”

“Think you he lied? Is his purpose to learn our strength and position?”

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"No, sir, I think not," I replied soberly. "There was no necessity; beyond doubt they know that already. I do not think the fellow would dare come other than he said: he is not of that breed."

"A coward?"

"At heart — yes. A savage full of treachery, sneaking and malicious; willing enough to fight with odds in his favor, but not the kind to stand up to it alone."

"You think I should see him, then?"

"You would assume a great risk not to do so, sir. The man may be the bearer of important word."

He walked back and forth across the room, his hands clasped, his head bent in thought. He was a florid-faced, heavily-built man, his step heavy on the puncheon floor. Facing the door, he stopped with sudden decision.

"Orderly," he called, "have the sergeant of the guard bring the messenger here at once. Search him for weapons first."

He turned toward me.

"I do not trust the villain, but I'll hear his tale. I may need you, Mr. Hayward; remain there in the back room until I call."

I could see no door.

"Where, sir?"

"In the den, beyond: the robe hides the entrance. If I need you I will call. The dog is coming now."

With General Harmar

I could see him out through the window, walking beside the sergant across the parade, and stepping back I pushed aside the robe. The door thus revealed was caught by a wooden latch. I opened it, and stepped within.

CHAPTER IV

A GIRL OF THE NORTH

THE interior of this room which I now entered for the first time was a revelation to me. While I had been aware that the office of the commandant did not occupy the entire log structure, I had supposed that the remaining space was merely a storehouse, although in truth I had given the matter no real consideration. I had been at the fort barely a month, engaged arduously in the drilling of recruits, and had paid small attention to anything else. So as I entered I stood, the door closing behind me, and stared about in astonishment.

It was fitted up as a lounging room, a den; yet bearing more resemblance to the tepee of a savage, than any abode of civilization. The trappings of war, the tributes of the chase, were everywhere in evidence. Skins of wild animals decorated the walls, concealing the logs from view, while others covered the floor. Above the open fireplace were huge antlers, while on every side were the heads of bear, lynx, and wild cat, staring through glassy eyes. Firearms of various periods hung between, the collection extending from blunderbuss to long rifle, with many specimens of smaller arms, in-

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cluding a pair of black-handled Derringers. It would have been a sombre scene but for the bright colored flags festooned from wall to wall, and the sunlight which streamed in through the single high window, accentuating the rich glow of various Indian blankets slung over couch and chair. In the center stood a table of walnut with curiously carved legs, upholding tobacco and pipes, together with writing material, and in the fireplace a back log threw out little spits of flame.

I saw all this with a single glance as I shut the door, yet almost with the instant, my entire attention was riveted upon an occupant, and I stood motionless, scarcely crediting my own eyes, as I stared across the table at the couch against the farther wall. It was in shadow, underneath the window, draped by a yellow blanket, and in one cushioned corner sat a girl, her dark head bent low over an open book. So intent was she upon the pages that she had not heard my entrance, or else remained indifferent, thinking me no stranger to the apartment. The light gave me but partial view, and her lowered head left her face in deep shadow, yet surely she was no one whom I had ever seen before — no lady of the garrison, few enough to be well remembered, and no guest at Marietta, unless perchance some arrival from up river within the last three days. That was possible, although no rumor of descending

A Girl of the North

boats had reached my ears. Yet if so, who could she be thus thoroughly at home in this room? A daughter of the General's? A relative of the Governor's?

She was young, scarcely out of her girlhood from the clear profile of her cheek, olive-tinted in the shadow, with a profusion of hair black as night, and a figure slender, but not tall. I saw a shapely hand, sunbrowned and ringless, had glimpse of a rounded arm, and a full throat revealed by the low-cut garment she wore, and suddenly noted that the dress was of Indian style and texture, fringed and beaded profusely, fastened by gay ribbons, and that her limbs were encased in leather, while moccasins, bright with the glitter of beads, served to protect her feet. To me she looked a wilderness fairy, a nut-brown maid of the woods, rather than any product of civilized lands. Even her posture of careless abandon was that of the wild. I could not easily associate such a creature as this with either Harmar or St. Clair; yet who could she be, here, and alone? I moved, rattling the latch to attract attention to my presence, yet the witch never glanced up, turning a page of her book lazily.

"Your pardon," I ventured, and cap in hand, advanced to the table nearer her.

She came to her feet in an instant, the book sliding to the floor, the long black lashes no longer shadowing

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the dark eyes gazing toward me in sudden interest. She was small, swift of movement as a forest hare, yet for the instant I saw only her face, and the unfathomable depths of those eyes. They were full of bewilderment, surprise, laughter. As though some mysterious message had passed between us, I knew she was glad I had come.

“Why, Monsieur,” she exclaimed, hesitating slightly over the words, “I am startled! You should feel my heart beat — so fast. I thought it the General, yes — who else? But I nevaire see you before; you — you are an officier of the Americains?”

“Yes, I belong to this garrison. But the surprise of finding you here was mine also. I was not told the room was occupied — and — you are French?”

She laughed, showing a dimple in either cheek, and a flash of white teeth.

“How you say that, Monsieur?” she questioned archly. “When I speak so good the English. Eet was wonderful you know.”

“Then I am right, Mademoiselle?”

She shrugged her shoulders, with an odd gesture.

“*Mon Dieu!* How should I know? It was the tongue I learned first, an’ this English eet was most hard, most deeficult. I like eet not at all. Maybe you speak my language, Monsieur? Eet make me so happy.”

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I shook my head, yet had to smile at the eagerness of her face.

“Not well enough to be of any help, I fear. All I know of the tongue I picked up along the frontier from stray traders. Back in my home one language answered all purposes.”

“Your home?”

“Yes, in Maryland: back beyond the mountains,” noting her expression of wonderment, and pointing eastward. “I could ask for food, drink, and guidance at a French hunters’ camp, but beyond that am helpless. Your eyes tell me, Mademoiselle, that the country east of here is strange to you.”

“These Mary-land I nevaire know before — non! non! I read in *ze* English book of Vir-ginia an’ of *ze* — what you call eet? — Connec-cut. I thought those the home of the Americans. Ees eet not so?”

I sought to explain, naming over the various newly organized states, and briefly defining their relations and boundaries, but she only gazed at me more puzzled than ever. As I paused she laughed again.

“You try so hard, but I not know yet. Such names! I could not say them — Mass-a-chu-setts, Pennsilva-na — how you say that, Monsieur? Cui, but I cannot so twist my lips: yet I care not, only to remember where was your home — Ma-ry-lan, ees eet not so?”

The Maid of the Forest

“Very well done, indeed,” I answered, falling into her humor, “and do I dare ask now from what part of the land you hail?”

“You not know me, Monsieur?” her eyes drooping, then uplifting again. “An’ you an officier of the Americans?”

“No: I have been absent hunting. I only returned an hour ago.”

“Een the woods? Way out beyond? An’ you saw no Indian, no French *courier des bois*?”

“Not one; only a white renegade I brought in with me bearing a message.”

“From the tribes, Monsieur? From Detroit?”

“From the tribes, yes,” I answered, surprised at her eagerness, yet seeing no harm in a frank reply, “but they were in council at Sandusky.”

“Sandusky!” the word seemed to cling to her red lips. “He — he was a Frenchman then?”

“Who? the messenger? Not he. We can understand the relationship between the Canadian French and the savages. They have always been friends, but this cur is of another breed — warring against his own people.”

She leaned forward, the laughter all gone from her eyes.

“Who — who was he, Monsieur?”

A Girl of the North

I hesitated, wondering at her insistence, her eagerness. She leaned forward almost touching me with her fingers.

“Please, Monsieur: you can tell me.”

“A white dog named Girty; we know him well.”

“Simon Girty!” her hands clasped, her lips unconsciously repeating the name. “And from Sandusky! You say he brought message from the tribes? *Mon Dieu!* ’T is strange they should choose him. He said so, Monsieur?”

“He claimed to represent the tribes, but his message was from Hamilton.”

“An’ he is there — at Sandusky — this Monsieur Hamilton?”

“He was there — yes: at least so Girty reports; but I know nothing as to where he may be now — back in Detroit likely, plotting new mischief.”

“You think ill of heem? Of Monsieur Hamilton?”

“Do I? Pray, Mademoiselle, how could it be otherwise? That country is all ours, ours by treaty, yet the British hold it still, merely because we lack strength to take possession. Their troops continue to garrison the lake forts, protected by a fringe of savages, kept warlike by British agents, promising aid they dare never give. And Hamilton is at head of it all. His red war parties ravage our settlements, kill, rob, murder,

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and then find protection behind the English flag. Their prisoners go to Detroit; their guns and ammunition come from there. There have been occasions when British agents have headed their raids, and Hamilton is the archdevil of the whole conspiracy. Who, but such a man, would dare send Simon Girty here?"

My indignant speech had slight effect on her, for she laughed as I ended.

"Eet was done most well — so fine I laff, Monsieur. But why you say that to me? Because I am here? in this house of the Americaine generail? Bah! we are together: we are alone. My people are yonder in the woods: I serve not these long faces who sing psalms. Tell me, Monsieur," and she touched my hands, her pleading eyes looking up into mine, "why is eet you are here? I can be trusted."

I stared down into her eager face, almost believing I must be dreaming, yet conscious enough of her deep earnestness. What was it she thought or imagined? What strange hallucination had taken possession of her? Could it be she was insane? that she was being held here a prisoner? I drew back, freeing myself from the grasp of her fingers, so bewildered I found speech difficult. Yet, wild as her swift words were, they were not those of one crazed: they were coherent, plain, and the upturned face was eloquent with appeal. Could

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she mistake me for another? be deceived as to my identity? The thought seemed impossible, almost ridiculous. How could it be, when I stood before her in uniform, and had already declared myself an officer of the garrison? The eyes gazing up at me seemed misty, as though they held unshed tears.

“Please, Monsieur,” she urged anxiously. “I am but a girl — a girl of the North — yet I can be trusted. Tell me quick, so I can help.”

“But I do not understand, Mademoiselle, I have told you who I am. Why should you speak like this?”

“Because I know you,” she insisted. “Because I have seen you before.”

“Know me!” I smiled, indulgent of her whim, convinced now I dealt with a mind diseased. “That is hardly possible.”

“But I do, Monsieur Hayward, I do. Have you no memory of me? Of my face? Why are you so afraid to have faith?”

She had spoken my name, and I gazed at her in wide-eyed astonishment. Surely we had never met; yet how could she know?

“Am I not right?”

“Yes, but I have no memory of seeing you before, and you are not one to be easily forgotten. Tell me who you are?”

The Maid of the Forest

The dimples exhibited themselves in either cheek, yet she faced me without a movement.

“Eet is not right you should forget, Monsieur; eet is no compliment. Yet I will answer; I am not afraid, and then you must remember. I am René D’Auvray.”

The name meant nothing, told nothing.

“René D’Auvray?” I repeated dumbly, striving to make the sound familiar.

“*Oui*, Monsieur: now —”

She sprang back beyond the table, one finger at her lips. The door opened at my back.

“Now Hayward,” said Harmar’s voice brusky. “I’ve done with that scoundrel, and would speak again with you.”

My eyes clung for just an instant to those of the girl, shrinking back into the shadows. Then I turned and went out, my mind full of bewilderment.

CHAPTER V

A PERILOUS VENTURE

GENERAL H. HARMAR strode across the room to his chair, and sat down, staring out of the window, his eyes frowning. I closed the door, and stood waiting, swiftly determining to discover the identity of that young woman within, and feeling slight heed of aught else. Harmar turned his eyes toward me, surveying me a moment in silence.

“What do you weigh, Hayward?” he snapped out, as tho’ noting my girth for the first time.

“Two hundred and thirty, sir.”

“Huh! and every inch muscle and bone from the look of you. Captain Rennolls tells me you are a good soldier.”

“I am thankful for his opinio. General Harmar.”

“Yes, I asked him a few days ago, when I signed your application for leave. Had n’t seen much of you myself, as you have only been here a short time.”

“A few months, sir; I brought down the last batch of recruits from Fort Pitt.”

“I know: watched you drill them out there, the louts. Zounds! They are not even fit food for powder.

The Maid of the Forest

Where do you suppose the recruiting officers find such stuff as they send out here? Never saw their breed in the old army; but I suppose you are too young to know much about that?"

"I enlisted in the Maryland Line at sixteen, General, and served through the Yorktown campaign."

"Then you are twenty-seven now?"

"Next month, sir."

"By gad! you do n't look it. However, I'm glad you are no boy, for I've got some serious work picked out for you. How far north have you ever been?"

"To the forks of the Muskingum."

He drummed with his fingers on the table; then pored over a rough map.

"Huh! the hard travel will be beyond, after you leave the boat. Would you undertake a journey to Sandusky?"

"Alone, sir?" I asked, startled at the question, the distance vague in my mind.

"With a scout, who knows the woods," he answered, studying my face, "and an enlisted man to cook, and do odd jobs around camp. A small party is better than a large one on such a trip." He paused, thinking.

"I will obey orders, sir. I am a soldier."

"Yes!" he got to his feet. "But now that is n't what I want. I expect my men to do that. But this is

A Perilous Venture

not strictly a military matter, and I give you no orders. I need a confidential messenger, a man of intelligence and nerve; but he will take his life in his hand, and possibly to no purpose. I half suspect treachery, and will order no officer of my command to such hazardous service."

He stopped, and stood staring out of the window, his broad back toward me. Just for an instant I hesitated to break the silence, my mind busy with stories of that long wood trail through the Indian country, where death lurked in every forest covert, and torture welcomed the unfortunate captive. I understood what acceptance of such a commission meant, yet the spirit of youth, the love of adventure, was strong within me — stronger even than caution.

"You must deem this matter of grave importance," I said, at last firmly, "and need seek no further; I volunteer to go."

He wheeled about, and grasped my hand.

"I thought so, Hayward. I am not often mistaken in a man, and I like your face. Yet do not be too hasty in decision. Sit down here, where we can have the map between us, until I can explain what hell is brewing in the pot of those north woods. What think you honestly of Simon Girty?"

"Everything bad; a scoundrel from head to foot."

The Maid of the Forest

"Ay! yet Hamilton uses him. The man was a messenger, even as he claimed. The Englishman wrote that with his own hand; I have seen the writing before."

He pushed the crumpled bit of paper across, and I read the crooked lines slowly, for the penmanship was almost illegible. Twice I read it, half convinced my brain played me some trick.

"Is this true, sir?"

"Some of it is; enough to make me afraid it may all be. The exact situation is this, Hayward. The tribes of the northwest are ready for war. In spite of the influence of the chiefs many of the young men are already on the war trail. They are in small parties ranging the woods, attacking outlying settlers and hunters. Stories of outrages come drifting in here every day. Nothing prevents a general outbreak but British restraint, and the opposition of the Wyandots."

"A strong nation."

"The most important in the Indian alliance. They are no friends of ours, yet they claim to be Christian, converted by French Jesuits, and thus far the priests have held them on the side of peace. For the first time their chiefs have met in council with the others and threaten war. Do you understand the cause?"

"Not clearly, sir; because of some prisoner we hold, is it not?"

A Perilous Venture

“It was Greek to me, also, until Girty explained. That is where trouble arises. We have no such prisoner, but if I send that word back by Girty, they will believe I lied. But if an officer of this garrison goes boldly to them, in response to their challenge; faces them at their council fire, and says so openly they will probably accept his word. That there is danger in such a trip I do not deny; the Indians are badly wrought up, or Hamilton would never send us warning. You may be held as hostage, or suffer even a worse fate. I can promise no protection, and I doubt if even the British can control the warriors if they think we are attempting deceit.”

“If the Wyandots join the other tribes it will mean war?”

“Yes; the length and breadth of the frontier. I have no force with which to meet them; hundreds of lives — men, women and children — will be destroyed; settlements ruined. I doubt if there be a white man left north of the Ohio in three months if those fiends break loose. This is not my work, endeavoring to treat with those red devils. It is the duty of the Governor. But St. Clair is away; I have no means of reaching him with this information. The Wyandots demand instant reply, and our messenger must reach them as soon as, if not before, the return of Girty.”

The Maid of the Forest

“Do I have my choice of scouts?”

“Certainly.”

“Then I will take Brady, sir.”

“The best man available. I would have named him, only I feared your late trouble had left you enemies.”

“Not at all; it was a fair fight.”

I sat thinking in silence, and Harmar waited. The danger of the journey unrolled before me in imagination — the perilous waterways; the long trail thro' the trackless woods, menaced by roving Indian bands; the hostile tribes in council; the chances of treachery and death lurking in every step of the way. Audacity, determination, the lives dependent on my success, gave me courage. It was a work someone must do. I drew the letter over again, and studied it.

“You are sure, General, this ‘Wa-pe-tee-tah’ is not in our hands? At some of the other forts?”

“As sure as I can be; I heard from Pitt yesterday, with reports from the garrisons between, and no account was made of such a prisoner being brought in. Ham-brouck wrote me from Vincennes two weeks ago — some French *voyageurs* left the letter on their way up the river — and he mentions nothing save his troubles with the Indians of the Wabash, who are most impudent and unruly — the worst of the lot to my notion. I expect the fellow has been killed in the woods.”

A Perilous Venture

“A man, then? A chief?” To my ears the name had feminine sound — “Wa-pe-tee-tah; ’t is as musical as a brook.”

“Ay! it sounds like that; but Girty gave me some other name I have forgotten. Gad! I hated so to talk with the foul-mouthed renegade, that I asked few questions; only you may be sure ’tis no squaw the Wyandots would war over. A medicine man, or something of that kidney, as I understand; Girty said a religious teacher, whom the tribe loved more than a chief.”

“Is that all the story, sir?”

“Except as to when and how the fellow disappeared. It seems he journeyed with other Wyandots to the Miamis on some mission, and then, leaving the others behind, proceeded alone to the Wabash villages. He visited a camp of white hunters on the Patoki, and then disappeared. The other Wyandots searched the forest for leagues about the abandoned camp before they returned North. They reported the hunters to have been soldiers, and the medicine man a prisoner.”

“On the Patoki; that is below Vincennes, and if they were soldiers they would belong to that garrison. Yet Captain Hambrouck makes no report?”

“Not a word, and he is a man to repeat every rumor.”

I crossed the narrow room twice, endeavoring to sum up the evidence clearly.

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“A poor pretense for war, surely,” I said at last, “but might be sufficient to Indian mind.”

“More than one war, even among civilized nations, has been started on less,” he answered soberly. “Besides, it is my judgment all those devils want is an excuse. They may have manufactured this out of whole cloth; to me it don’t look reasonable. But you have all the facts now, Hayward, and can understand what to say and do. Those red devils know our weakness, and are wild to break loose. If I send back a formal letter by the hands of their messenger, denying any knowledge of this medicine man of theirs, and expressing regret at his disappearance, they will consider it a lie. I know Indian nature; they have got to be bluffed at their own game. Show fear, and they are after you at once, the whole pack in full cry; face them boldly, and they hesitate. If you go straight to them, through the woods to their council fire, an officer of this garrison, in uniform, they will interpret your coming as a sign that we are not afraid of their threats. It will mean that to them. Tell the chiefs straight out the truth, and let them understand that if they want war, over such a trivial thing, they will be accommodated. They have no fear of us as soldiers, understand; the men who hold them in check are the Kentucky ‘long rifles.’ They know Brady and his kind to their sorrow.”

A Perilous Venture

“Then I am to talk boldly; threaten, if necessary?”

“With discretion — yes. It is our only chance to avert war. The scheme may not work, but if it even results in delay, it will be worth the effort.”

“When do I start?”

“At dusk tonight. Come here first for final instructions, and a letter to Hamilton. You will go up the Muskingum to the forks by boat, and then straight through the woods. There must be no loitering on the march.”

“There will be none, sir; and what about Girty?”

“I will hold him on some pretext until morning. Your party will have fifteen hours' start.”

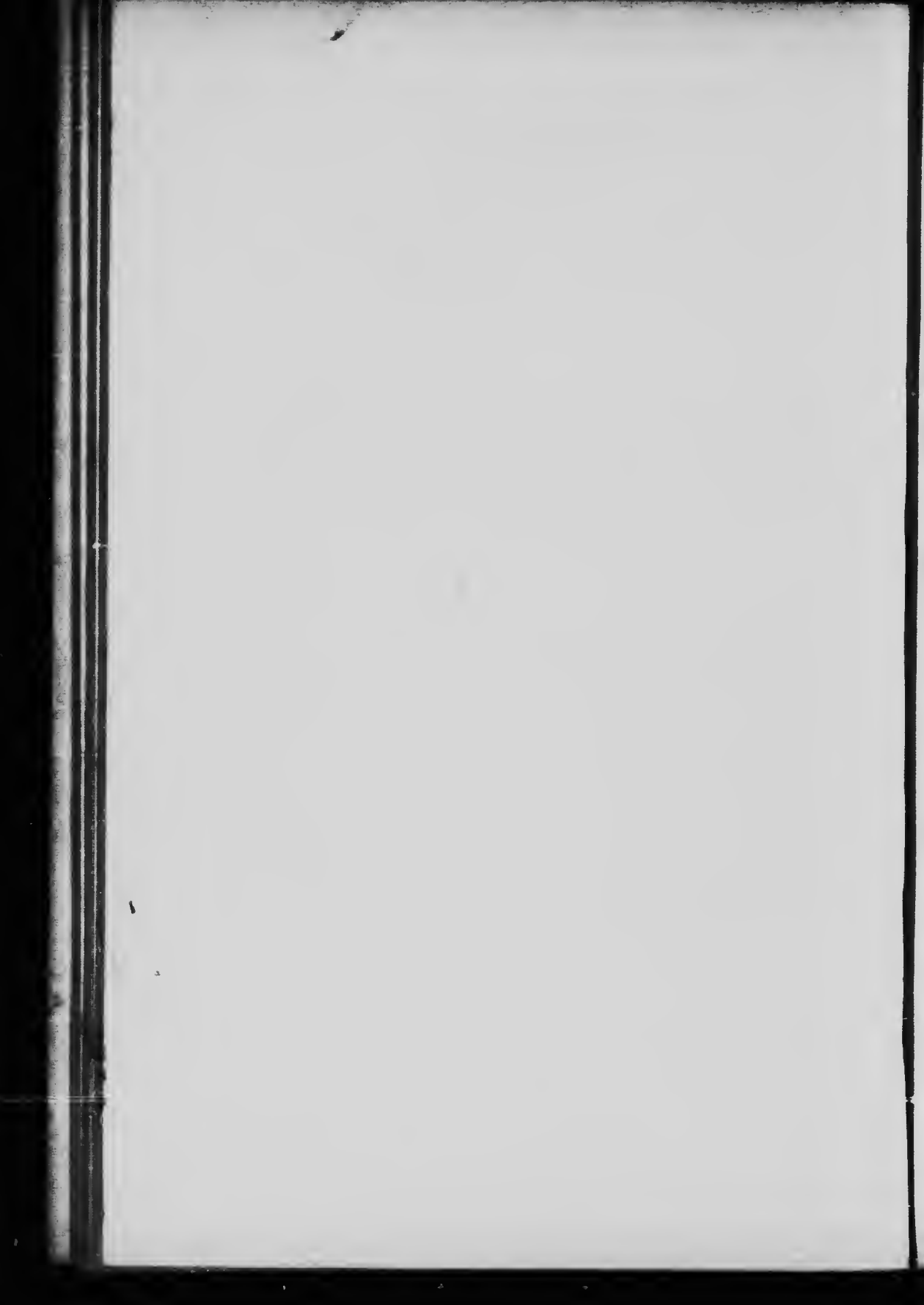
There seemed nothing more, and, after waiting a moment in silence, I saluted.

“Very well, sir; that is all?”

“All at present.”

I turned toward the door, then hesitated, as memory suddenly returned.

“Pardon me, General,” I said impulsively, “but I met a young woman in the room yonder. Might I inquire who she may be?”



CHAPTER VI

THE EVE OF DEPARTURE

HE stared at me with open mouth; then laughed.

“The witch! I never knew she was in there, Hayward, or I should never have exposed you to such danger. A French butterfly, with eyes like stars — is that the lady? And how did you get on?”

“Very well indeed, sir. We were talking together gaily when you came.”

“My Gad; is that so? Why the minx has hardly given me a dozen civil words since she arrived. It’s my gray hairs likely, and then, besides, she’s met my wife. Said she anything about herself?”

“Only her name — René D’Auvray.”

“Huh! that does not sound much like the one she gave me, tho’ by my soul, I’ve forgotten it, ’twas just as Frenchified, and I never dared to speak it aloud. How came she to tell you?”

“That’s the odd part of it, sir. She knew me, called me ‘Monsieur Hayward,’ and insisted I would remember her when she named herself. Then she did, but it was no name I ever heard before, nor have I ever seen the face; I’d swear to that.”

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“And she is not the sort to be forgotten easily. If they raise such flowers in the Illinois country, I would like service there.”

“She is from the Illinois then?” I interrupted eagerly.

“So I judge, although it is little enough the witch has told me in the three days she’s been here. That was the story of the boatmen with whom she voyaged on the river, although they picked her up at the Shawnee towns. Is there a French village of Kaskaskia?”

“Ay, where Clark fought in ’78; on the big river.”

“That will be the place. The tale is, as repeated by the soldiers who talked with the boatmen, that she seeks her father, who left this Kaskaskia a year since with Vigo, on a journey up the Ohio. She stops at each settlement to inquire, and the girl has money — French and English gold in plenty. Yet, if this be the truth, there is small hunting done. Once only was she at the village for an hour; nor has she spoken yet of departure. She puzzles me with her pert speech, and French talk, for she pretends little understanding of English. But that my wife likes her I should have sent the hussy on her way before now.”

“But she spoke English to me,” I admitted. “Her accent was foreign, yet she used the tongue.”

“No doubt,” dryly, “her pretense at not compre-

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hending is all play. I thought as much. But for what purpose I cannot conceive. I am decided the minx shall go up the river, or down, as she may select, by the first boat that lands here. I cannot help liking the lass, with her laughter, and dainty airs, but she's up to some mischief, I'll warrant, and St. Clair would send her packing if he was here."

"But General," I asked, still lingering, "how came she to know my name?"

"Perhaps you spoke it first in her hearing."

"Not I, sir; we spoke of other matters."

"Then there is but one answer — the witch overheard our conversation. I spoke loud, not knowing she was in the room, and her quick ears caught the sound. 'Tis like her to make instant use of what she learned to thus arouse your interest. She is full of such sly tricks. No doubt that will be the explanation, and no mystery to it — only the device of a clever woman."

This seemed natural enough, although I confess, the explanation failed fully to satisfy. Yet my reason told me it was probably the truth, even while memory gave picture to her uplifted face, and appealing eyes. It was difficult to conceive of her in the character depicted by Harmar. I had felt the earnestness of her pleading, and then, bewitched by her girlish manner, I saw her through the eyes of youth, unwilling to confess

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that I was deceived, or had misinterpreted her character. However, there remained nothing more to say, nor to ask. I could enter upon no defense, no explanation; I had no knowledge of her purpose, of why she was at the fort, or why she had pretended recognition of me — only, in spite of all evidence, I believed in her, retained faith that her real object was a worthy one.

Harmar sat motionless, pondering over the map, indifferent to my presence, his thought concentrated on his responsibilities, our conversation already forgotten.

“That is all then, sir?”

He glanced up, surprised, and recalled by the sound of my voice.

“Until just before dusk — yes, Mr. Hayward; the quartermaster will arrange all details.”

I passed out into the sunshine of the afternoon, and crossed the deserted parade to my quarters. In spite of the seriousness of this adventure upon which I was entering my thought lingered with the French girl. Not only her beauty and vivacity — so different from all others I had known — but also the strangeness of her presence, appealed to me strongly. Who could she be? Why was she there? What caused her reticence of speech? She might, indeed, be from the distant Illinois country, for there was that in her dress which spoke of wild life, of frontier training; yet to offset

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this her language was pure, with accent of education apparent in every syllable. How softly musical her voice was; how clear her laughter; how enchantingly the dimples appeared in either cheek, and with what eloquence the dark eyes conveyed their message. "René D'Auvray," the name repeated on my lips, lingered, and was whispered again. I wondered if it really was her name, yet cast the doubt aside indignantly. Somehow it seemed to belong to her, to typify personality, to revive memory. "René D'Auvray"—would I ever see her again? Would God be good? I glanced back at the high window; the sun glared on it, reflecting the rays into my dazzled eyes. My heart sank. I must depart at dusk, and long ere I could hope to return, she would have disappeared into the unknown wilderness. Harmar would know nothing more than he did now; there would remain no trail I could hope to follow; I would never see her again.

For an instant I hesitated, rebelling at the duty which took me away; half inclined to ask the assignment of another. Then pride, the soldier spirit, reasserted itself, and I strode forward to my quarters, forcing the thought of her out of my mind, angry at my momentary weakness. What was such as she to me? A mere waif of the woods, winning passage by virtue of a pretty face, and sprightly tongue. Here today and

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gone tomorrow, a forest foundling, unworthy the memory of an honest man. I would do my work, and forget, and swore between my teeth at the resolve.

All this was years ago, long years, and yet I recall still how I occupied those hours with preparation, striving manfully to banish her from mind by ceaseless labor. Little by little I grasped the seriousness of this mission on which I was embarked. In a measure I was frontier born and bred, and had ranged the woods since I became strong enough to bear a gun. There were few secrets of the wilderness I did not know, yet now for the first time I was to penetrate those dark northern forests, through untracked leagues, and front the red savages at their council fire with a message of defiance. The full extent of peril involved occurred to me suddenly, almost with a shock — the raiding parties of young warriors, scouring the woods, unrestrained in their savagery, the uncertainty of our reception by the Wyandots, the possibility that Hamilton might not be there to protect from violence, the haunting doubt whether our mission would save us from torture and death at the hands of those red demons bent madly on war! It was no pleasant picture painted on the canvas of imagination, and the perspiration beaded my temples, as frontier tales of Indian atrocity flashed to memory. But mine was then the spirit of youth, of

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daring; I had volunteered for this duty, and, under God, would not fail.

I recall changing my clothes, putting on my rough hunting suit, and packing my uniform in a bag. I remember studying a French map, hung on the walls of the barracks, giving rude outline of the country to be traversed, and copying, as best I might, the water-courses along the route, and marking off the estimated distances from stream to stream. Then I sought out Brady, finding him alone outside the stockade, lying on the bluff summit, gazing out at the broad river below. As I drew near he looked up at me, good humor in his gray eyes, but making no effort to change his posture.

"Well, my young cockerel," he said carelessly, "they tell me you and I are to be comrades on the long trail."

"Who told you? General Harmar?"

"No less; maybe an hour ago. 'Tis not likely to prove a pleasant task, as I understand the nature of the message. What said the old man to you?"

He sat up as I repeated word by word our conversation, and I studied the appearance of the man seriously for the first time. He was of the mountain backwoods type, gray bearded, gaunt but strong, his hands sinewy, his lean, tall figure muscular, and vigorous; of middle age, firm lips, sober eyes, intelligent face, bronzed to the color of leather, and long hair, already

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tinged with gray. A lifetime of danger and solitude had left indelible stamp upon him; I recognized him as one who would speak but little, yet act instantly; a man of resource, daring; loving adventure, hating with border intensity, yet perchance, as tender hearted as a child. He listened intently until I finished, his eyes on the dark woods bordering the settlement.

"About as I had it," he commented gravely, "only a bit more of detail. No pleasant job, friend, but the 'old man' is right — there is no other way to deal with redskins. What was the name of that Wyandot medicine man?"

"We-pa-tee-tah."

"I've heard the name before, but don't remember where. I never met up against the Wyandots, save a few at Vincennes; their range is too far north. By any chance do you know that country?"

"Not beyond the forks. Here are some maps," and I spread my rude drawings on the grass, "and some notes on the lay of the land."

He studied these a moment, and then glanced up at me with a quizzical smile.

"Never could make much outer map drawin'," he acknowledged slowly. "Just looks like hen tracks ter me, an' as to readin' I reckon ther want no schools along Stump Crick wher I was raised. Howsomever

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you need n't worry none about that, Master Hayward, for I kin read the woods, an' natur' the best guide. We 'll find Sandusky."

We talked together for some time, although I did the most of it, for he was content to reply in monosyllables, his eyes on the river. As the sun sank, its last rays turning the waters crimson, we went back into the stockade, and ate heartily together in the barracks' kitchen. Then, as dusk drew near, we separated, he going silently down the bluff to the boat, while I reported to General Harmar.

It was almost dark, with a clear, star-studded sky overhead, when I came forth again, the letter to Hamilton in my pocket, and the General's warning instructions fresh in mind. He shook hands with me at the door, and I turned away cheerfully enough, rifle across my shoulder, and the pack in my hand. I had caught no further glimpse of the girl, nor had any reference been made to her. In truth, for the moment, the memory of her presence had been banished from mind. I had convinced myself of her unworthiness, of the small chance of ever seeing her again, and concentrated my thought on the adventure in hand. God knows, I realized that it was serious enough to require every attention. Harmar's final words of instruction had brought this home anew, and I strode through the dark-

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ness toward the barred gate, oblivious to all else except my duty. Then, all at once, she came to me, a slender shadow stepping forth from the gloom of the stockade, into the star gleam. I saw the face uplifted, white in the silvery glow, and the dark uncovered hair.

“Monsieur Hayward,” she said softly, “you will speak to me?”

CHAPTER VII

I FACE A REQUEST

I CAME to a sudden halt, my heart throbbing wildly. "Most certainly, Mademoiselle," I stammered in surprise, "although I have little time to spare."

I could see her features clearly enough in that starshine, and somehow, as I looked, every dim suspicion vanished. I could not gaze into those uplifted eyes and think evil. Whatever might be the mystery surrounding her she was no sport of the woods, no wilderness plaything. Behind the girlish beauty of that face dwelt strength and character — something which restrained. Even then, as I dropped my bundle, and lowered my rifle, I could not touch her; dared not venture such familiarity. Some invisible power held her inviolate, held me motionless, unnerved.

"I know," she returned; waiting to be assured I meant to say no more, "you voyage into the North — you, and the great hunter."

"You know that? How?"

She smiled, yet with eyes on mine in frank confidence.

"Have I not ears, Monsieur?" she asked swiftly.

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"Did you think me old and deaf when we met before? Perhaps the light was poor, and you saw ill; if so look at me again, now, Monsieur."

"You mean you overheard?" and I stepped back, tantalized by her witchery.

"How could I help? It was but a word now and then, but that American general he talk so loud, like he speak to an army. I did not catch your voice, Monsieur, not one word. Yet I knew well what eet was you say: I know from my own heart, how eet beat; an' from your face, so strong, so like the face of a man. You would go back to the North, back to my people."

"To your people!" I echoed incredulously. "Good God! Are you Indian?"

"Does Monsieur care what I am?" she questioned more gravely. "And does he not already know? We are alone here in the night," her eyes deserting mine to sweep a swift glance about over the bare level of parade. "Need there longer be deceit between us? Why you not trust me?"

"I do trust you," I returned impetuously, intoxicated by her presence, by the pressure of her fingers on my arm. "In spite of all that is strange I cannot pretend otherwise. But I do not know you, as you would pretend."

"Yet I know you, Monsieur."

I Face a Request

"So it would seem; at least you spoke my name as if from memory."

"It was from memory; yet you forget me? My name? My face also? I cannot think this so. Have you so soon blotted out the Miami council at Three Rivers, Monsieur Harward?"

"I was not there," I answered slowly. "It was held with the English officers of Ultron."

She stared into my face, her dark eyes wide open. Then she laughed softly.

"You think to fool me! All right; I laugh, an' I pretend, but I never believe what you tell. Have I not eyes to see your face? ears to hear your voice? 'Tis not long ago, only six moons since then. Why all this I not understand, maybe; why you English officer today an' Americaine officer tomorrow. You not tell; I not ask any more. We be friends just the same? Ees that so?"

"With all my heart," I replied, relieved at the sudden change in her manner, and grasping the hand held out. "But you are wrong in thinking I assume two characters."

"Yes; well, did I not say I laugh an' pretend? *Voilà!* eet was to me nothing. Yet there is danger, Monsieur, much danger. Indian never forgive, nevaire forget. You go as hunter, an' scout?"

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“No, as an officer; my uniform is in this bag.”

“To the Miamis?”

I shook my head, wondering at her swift questioning.

“The Wyandots.”

“Ah! that then is not so bad. The chiefs will not know; they will believe. But 'tis most odd why you will do all this — this, what you call masquerade?”

“No more odd surely than your own, Mademoiselle.”

“Why is eet you say that? You ask the Generail about me?”

“Of course.”

“You care enough then? you interest enough to ask heem who I was? Where I come? You try learn all about me? Ah, *bien!* an' what he say, Monsieur?”

“That you were from the Illinois country — Kaskaskia — seeking your father a *voyageur* with Vigo, from town to town.”

She laughed again, her hands making an eloquent gesture.

“The poor man! Eet was quite sad, Monsieur. I know not I tol' eet so well. *Non, non,* eet not I who told heem; eet was the *voyageurs* with whom I came. I tell nothing. Eet was hard to tell nothin', Monsieur, when he want to know so much; when he ask question, an' roar in hees loud voice. But eet was fun, too; I laugh, an' talk about ozzer things, an' he get so mad,

I Face a Request

ze Americain Generail. He put me in ze guard-house, only I was a girl."

I had to smile myself, reflecting the enjoyment of the uplifted face, the picture arising before me of Har-mar's discomfiture sparring with her quick wit.

"But, Mademoiselle; if that was not the true story, why should you not tell?"

She shook her head, the dark hair like a cloud.

"Why should I? He would not believe — that man. I could not prove to heem what I say. So what ze use?"

"And you are not from Kaskaskia? Not seeking your father?"

"Why you ask that? You still pretend you not know, Monsieur Hayward?"

Her persistence in claiming former acquaint'ance angered me for the instant. It revived my old suspicion, made me wonder, and caused me to answer roughly.

"Let us drop that," I said sternly. "I never saw you until three hours ago, but you surely have some object in stopping me here. Tell me what it is, and have done with the play. I am not a child to be amused with fairy tales, and there are others waiting me."

"You are angry?"

"No," hesitating, sorry already at my rude speech, as I looked down into her eyes. "But I am a soldier on duty; under orders to the North."

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"To my people."

"So you said before. What does it mean? You are not Indian?"

I was conscious I asked the question with a choking throat, a vague dread of her answer. There was no apparent reason why I should care, and yet, deep in my heart, I did. It seemed to me she waited long, the silence oppressive, before her lips answered.

"And if I am, Monsieur? Will you not be my friend?"

My heart sank, yet I managed to smile.

"I would serve you, of course, in every way possible. That would make no difference."

"Oh, yes it would; your face told that. To you Indian blood is a disgrace, a symbol of savagery."

"I have the prejudice of a borderer," I acknowledged, "and prefer my own people."

She looked at me steadily, her breath coming swiftly.

"So do I, Monsieur," defiantly. "And I am not of your people." Her head went up proudly. "I am French and Indian. You must take me as I am, or not at all. I will not lie to you, and, whatever my blood may be, I am a woman."

"Your father was French?" I stammered, shamed by her words. "You bear his name — D'Auvray?"

"I am of quarter blood; my father was officer of

I Face a Request

France who died in battle. I was born in an Indian tepee."

"But not brought up an Indian? You possess education; you have known civilized life."

"I have been at Montreal and Quebec, Monsieur. I was three years at the convent of the Ursulines."

"But came back into the wilderness?"

"I returned — to my own people; the great woods called me."

I could scarcely realize it, looking into her face, listening to the soft tones of her voice. Indian! my whole conception of the race had been associated with cruelty, ruthless barbarity. Hatred for the red marauders of the border had been instilled into me almost from infancy. The wild stories of the frontier, as well as my own experience, had only served to fan the fires. They were to me enemies to be fought and destroyed. Yet here before me stood a slender girl, with eyes shining in the star-light; with gentle voice; pleasing even in its defiance, bearing herself proudly, her face fair to look upon, her language that of refinement — and an Indian! I did not doubt, or question; I realized she would never have told me this had it been untrue. But the suddenly acquired knowledge of this barrier of race between us held me speechless.

"You do not like me now?" she questioned, almost

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timidly. "What I have confessed has changed your interest?"

"No, it is not that," I replied, ashamed of my own hesitancy. "Only it is difficult to break away from old prejudices, and — and — why, I cannot realize even yet that you are actually of Indian blood; that — that you belong to the wild tribes, those that we war against. You do, do you not?"

"I am a Wyandot."

"And here at Fort Harmar, under a false name, pretending to be from the French settlements?"

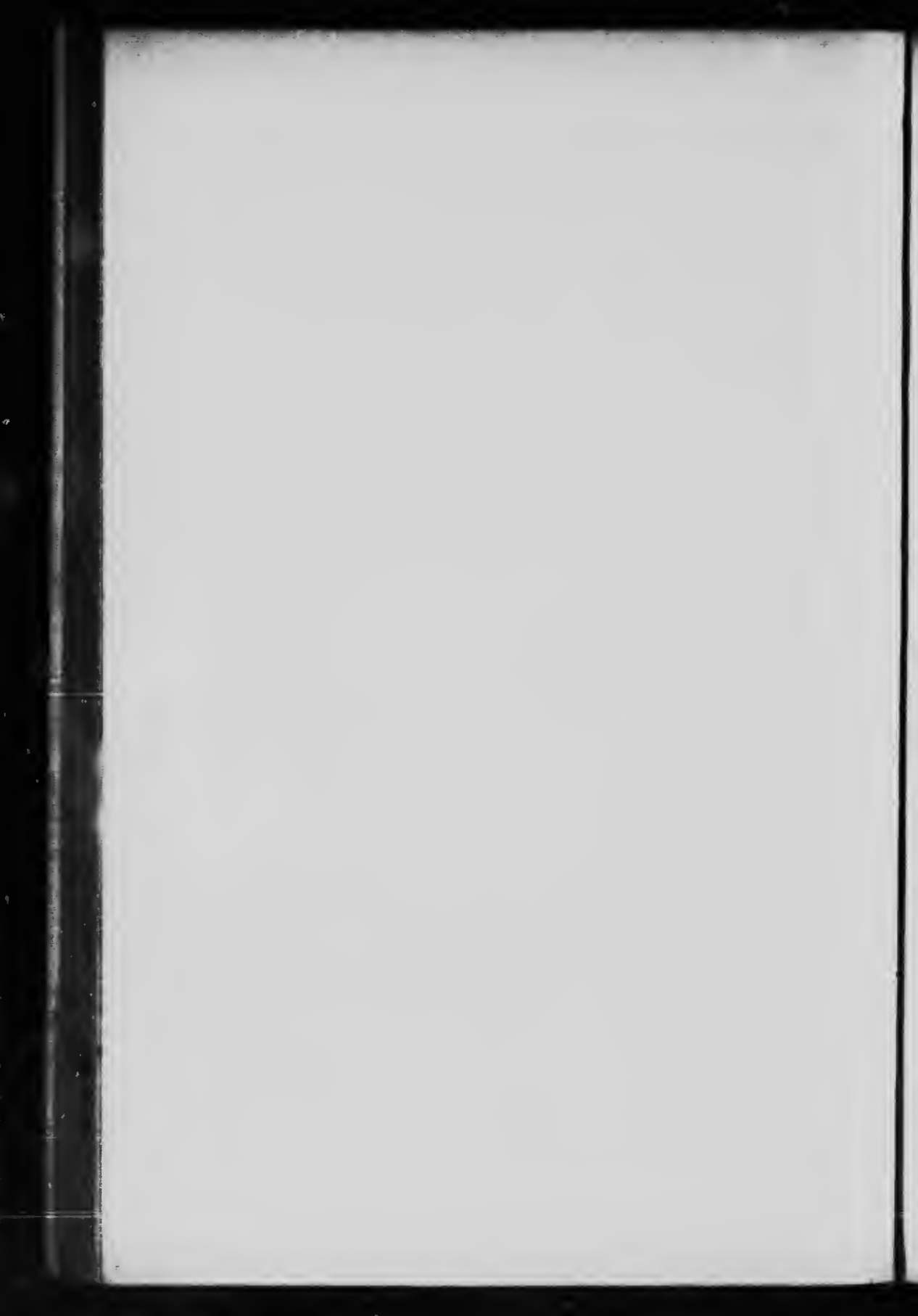
She touched my hands, where they gripped the rifle barrel, and her whole manner changed.

"I am not here under a false name, Monsieur, nor for any purpose of evil," she exclaimed eagerly. "You must not think that of me; I will not permit. 'T is my name, René D'Auvray, and I came to this fort from the French settlements. I cannot tell you why, but there is no harm done. All I seek now is the opportunity to return to my own land. That is why I came here to meet you; why I waylaid you, and told you the truth. I heard enough of what was said by the American general to know that you were going north thro' the forests to my country, to hold council with the Wyandots. That is so, is eet not?"

"Yea."

I Face a Request

"Then, Monsieur, take me with you! No, listen; you must; you shall not refuse. I know the way, the woods, and all their secrets. I can guide you, and travel faster than your Kentucky hunter. Let me go, Monsieur."



CHAPTER VIII

UP THE MUSKINGUM

I HESITATED just a moment, actually tempted by this opportunity to have her with me, to learn more of who and what she really was. Yet the knowledge that Harmar would never approve of such an arrangement, and that he would surely learn of the matter if I smuggled her into the boat, decided me. She read the decision in my face.

“You will not? You will leave me behind?”

“I have no choice,” I answered gently. “You forget; I am a soldier under orders. To take you with me might peril the whole venture.”

“Peril it! No; it would save it. It is for your sake as much as my own I would go. Have you forgotten I am a Wyandot?”

“Nevertheless I cannot take you, Mademoiselle. There are reasons in plenty, but I cannot stand here and discuss them. You will let me pass now?”

She drew back, but with eyes still on my face. She must have read there that no pleading would change me, for she only said regretfully:

“I have angered you? You do not trust me, because I am Indian?”

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"I do trust you," I burst forth. "I hardly know why, but I do. It is hard for me to say no, but I must. I wish to remain your friend, Mademoiselle, to — to meet you again somewhere."

Her face, white in the star-shine, smiled.

"You shall, Monsieur," confidently, and she pointed with one hand into the North, "yonder in the villages of the Wyandots."

"You mean you will go there alone? all those leagues alone?"

"Perhaps; there would be nothing to fear. I have traveled as long a wilderness trail before. Yet I need not go alone; there is another here who must return to Sandusky."

"Simon Girty! Good God! Would you dream of companionship with that foul renegade? Do you know what he is?"

"Yes, Monsieur," quietly, "and he knows what I am. He is not reckless enough to offer me insult; did he do so he would be torn limb from limb. You do not know my people, but Simon Girty does. I do not fear him, yet I would rather go with you."

"I cannot consent; it would cost me my commission to take you. I must say good-by."

She held out her hand.

"Good-by, Monsieur."

Up the Muskingum

I left her standing there, a slender, dark shadow in the star-light, feeling yet the firm grip of her fingers, and seeing yet in memory the upturned face. That she really meant what she said so confidently I did not truly believe. Her threat of traveling in company with Girty, or even alone, was merely uttered in the vague hope that it might influence me. She could not be in earnest. In spite of her assertion I was not altogether convinced that she was an Indian, a Wyandot. She was so young, so girlish, so soft of voice and civilized of speech, I could not associate her with savages, or those dark, haunted woods. I even laughed grimly to myself, as I went down the bluff, at the thought. She had endeavored to deceive me, to win me over to some mad scheme. Her earlier claim that she knew me had failed, and so she had attempted another scheme of escape. Her pretended acquaintance with Girty was doubtless of the same character. But what could be the cause of all these efforts to get safely away from Fort Harmar? Who was the girl? Why had she come there? I stopped, half way down and glanced back at the dim outline of the log stockade, tempted to return, and compel an answer. Yet that was the General's business, not mine; I was out of it altogether. I had made my decision, and left her behind. 'T was not likely I should ever see her again, and at that moment I was not sorry. De-

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spite a pretty face, and much else that appealed to me, it would be best to forget. She had a double tongue, and was unworthy to be remembered. I swore to myself, and went on down the steep bluff, angered at my own weakness.

The boat was in the dark shadows of the bank, a sizable canoe, three Indians — friendly Delawares — grasping the paddles and kneeling in the bottom, and two men holding it steady against the current. One of these, tall and straight, would be Brady, but the other, a mere shadow in the dark, was unrecognizable.

“You go with us?” I asked.

He straightened up, with the motion of a salute.

“Yah, der captain he says so, don’t id?” the words strongly Dutch.

“Oh, yes, my man; you are the cook. Is there an extra paddle in there, boys?”

An Indian voice grunted a response, holding it up.

“All right; take it, and get in. What is your name?”

“Johann Schultz.”

I remembered him, a private in Brown’s company, as poor a choice as could have been made for such an expedition, but it was too late now for an exchange.

“In with you, Schultz,” I ordered sharply, “behind the last Indian, and bend your back; this is to be no

Up the Muskingum

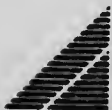
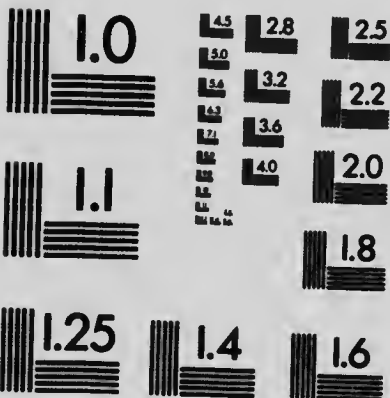
pleasure trip after wild flowers. All ready, Brady?"

He stepped into the bow of the craft, without answering, and crouched down, his long rifle showing above his shoulder. I pushed off, and found room at the stern. There was a flash of paddles in the dark water, and, almost noiselessly, we swept out into the stream. My eyes glanced up the face of the bluff, to where the shadow of the stockade appeared dimly outlined against the sky. Not a light was visible, not a sound heard. Then we rounded the bend in the bank, the water ahead shimmering in the star-gleam. The paddles rose and fell in long quiet sweeps, the narrow canoe leaping forward against the downward flow of the stream. In response to a low spoken order, we skirted the eastern shore, in the deeper shadow, barely beyond the bushes upon the bank. There was little to be seen of Marietta, only the shapeless smudge of a few log houses beside the river, already dark, although the night was young. Distant voices, and the wailing sound of a violin, reached our ears, but the canoe slipped by unseen. For the space of a mile, perhaps, we skirted the clearing, the river a stream of silver under the stars, the land on either side, disfigured by blackened tree stumps, making a desolate picture. Then the canoe slipped silently into the forest waterway, the dense



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The Maid of the Forest

woods on either bank obscuring the stars, and plunging us into darkness. Brady bent over the sharp bow, his eyes watchful for any obstacle, for any swirl of the current, and I could faintly distinguish his voice in low-spoken warning to the Indian paddlers.

From where I rested in the stern, my rifle between my knees, I could perceive little except the broad back of the Dutchman toiling manfully at the after-paddle. I could watch the mechanical lift of his arms, the flash of water following his strong stroke, his quick recovery in unison with the others. The remainder of the boat was but a blur, the banks on either side meaningless shadows of thick foliage. A grim silence brooded over all, not so much as a leaf rustling, the sharp stem of the canoe barely rippling the water. Occasionally, sounding clear in the still night, some prowling beast of the jungle rustled its way through the underbrush, and once, rounding a sharp turn in the bank, I saw two eyes, like balls of fire, glaring at us from the depths of a thicket. The loneliness, the darkness, the mechanical movements of those stolid paddlers, sent my mind drifting this way and that.

At first it was my task to be thought out, and planned anew. The old French map was fresh in my memory, and I could trace our progress across rivers and through forests, calculating distances, and choosing sites upon

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which to make camp. Then I reviewed again Harmar's instructions, and words of warning, together with Brady's suggestions, yet felt in no way alarmed as to our success. The gloomy night, the grimness of the black forest had effect on me no doubt, yet I was not aware of any fear, any shrinking of the heart. My mission was to a tribe still at peace, who only needed to be assured that we were also friendly. The danger did not lie with the Wyandots, but with those stray raiding parties from other hostile tribes whom we might encounter by chance along the way. The Wyandots! the recurrence of that name brought back instantly a recollection of the young girl just left behind at Fort Harmar. I endeavored to cast the memory aside, to think of other things, yet she would not leave me, refused to be blotted out. At last I surrendered to her presence, seeing again her face in the darkness, and listening to the soft caress of her voice. I was not by nature a dreamer, and had ever been slow to make new friendships. Yet I could not drive from me a dull faith that we were destined to meet again. I even hoped. There was no lingering indifference in my heart; however I might condemn myself for a fool thus to hold her in memory. I could not break away. I suspected everything — that she was a light-o'-love, an adventuress, one unworthy serious thought. She had de-

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ceived Harmar, and attempted to deceive me, to make me her dupe. That she was really French and a daughter of the frontier, was beyond question, but I hesitated to believe the rest — that she was also Indian. There was no testimony to this in either face or manner. Someway I cast the possibility from me, as though it were a thing accursed. I would not believe that, even if she swore to it. I recalled the clear cheeks flushed with health, the slender, agile form, the dark hair and eyes, the soft voice with laughter rippling in it, and could not connect her with wigwam and council fire. A squaw! a Wyandot! I laughed the thought away indignantly, yet angry at the remembrance that she had actually tried to make me believe so. And why? So I would take her with me, of course. Yet, if it were not true, what reason could she have for desiring to go? To be sure the French settlers of the Illinois country, and Vincennes as well, were hand in glove with the savages. No doubt she would feel safe there, perhaps had friends, for, it was well known, there were Frenchmen in every tribe — squaw-men, scarcely less barbarian than the red-skins among whom they lived. I had heard of such again and again with war parties, heartless as the most ruthless raiders, and occasionally leaders of the murderous, thieving bands. It was hard to associate her with such renegades, yet this explanation was far more likely

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than that she was herself of Indian blood. Indeed she might know such in friendship — have met them innocently enough at Vincennes or Kaskaskia — and yet not be contaminated. They were simply her people, hunters and traders, making their homes in Indian camps, but otherwise respectable enough. And what more natural than that she should seek them? No matter the reason for her being at Fort Harmar; her one object now was to get away, and it mattered little whether the escape was made down the river, or through the woods. In either direction were friends — her own people.

Convinced this must be the explanation, this the real key to her strange conduct, I lay there, staring at the dark forest slipping silently past, and listened again to every word she had spoken, recalled every expression of her eyes as they met mine. Slowly it dawned upon my consciousness that she was more to me already than any woman before had ever been. I felt a fierce longing to turn back, to find her again, to force her to confess the whole truth with her own lips. I had to struggle with myself to remain silent. No! my duty lay to the northward; the lives of hundreds of innocent women and children depended on my mission. Whether or not the swing of events ever brought us together again, now I must forget, and go on. Yet my feeling was not wholly one of despair; something seemed to assure me

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that out of that wide sweep of wilderness we would find each other again; that destiny never meant to keep us apart. Her threat to go with Girty impressed me not at all; if I even recalled it, it was only to be as quickly forgotten. I could not, would not, associate the two together. But I meant to find her, for she could not disappear utterly, and I repeated over and over again, "René D'Auvray."

It was a boy's dream, perhaps, yet companioned with me all through the long hours of the night. Only as the gray dawn brightened the east, yielding form to the forest shrouded banks, did I again arouse myself to a realization of where we were, and the perils of our journey.

CHAPTER IX

THE INDIAN COUNTRY

THE paddlers were still steadily at their task, the Indians keeping their tireless stroke, but the soldier plainly exhibiting evidence of fatigue. Brady sat silent in the bow, his eyes on the water ahead. We were hemmed in by wilderness, the narrow stream bordered by great forest trees, with branches overhanging the current, and huge roots projecting from the mossy banks.

There was little or no underbrush; indeed, as the light grew stronger, the vista stretched far away between the gnarled trunks of oak and hickory to where the land rose in low bluff. It was a sombre scene of gray and green coloring, save that here and there were clusters of wild flowers yielding a brighter hue of blue and yellow to the dull background. The silence was profound, the river noiseless, except as the waters occasionally foamed over some obstacle in their path, or murmured softly about the sharp prow of the canoe. High up above the early morning air fluttered the leaves, yet so gently that no sound of rustling reached me. The woods themselves were desolate, apparently

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uninhabited, without even a fleeting wild animal to break their loneliness.

I sat up, rubbing my cramped limbs, and stared about down the forest aisles, impressed by the sombreness of our surroundings, yet with every faculty aroused. The Dutchman's languid movements, and the perspiration streaming down his face, told of a hard night's work.

"Put her into the bank there, boys, to the right," I commanded. "Beyond the roots of that big oak. We 'll breakfast, and then rest awhile."

This was accomplished with a sweep of the paddles, and we stepped ashore, the Indians drawing the light canoe well up into the mud, Brady stamping about to restore circulation. Schultz collapsed in his seat, and I stopped to shake him.

"Tired, man? Move about and you 'll feel better."

"*Mein Gott*," he moaned, rolling his eyes up at me imploringly. "I vos mos' ded mit der tire-ness. Mein feet von't move already."

"Oh, yes they will — come on, now. I thought you were a paddler, Schultz," and I helped him to stand, gripping one arm tightly. "Look at the Indians; they are seeking firewood already."

"Yah, maybe they do dot, but mine legs was all cramped mit de boat. It could not be."

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That the man's limbs were cramped, and useless, was evident by his effort to step forward, while the expression on his round, honest face implored mercy. The fellow had performed a hard night's work, and his plight appealed to my sympathy.

"That will be all right, Schultz," I said kindly. "I'll help you ashore, and you can rest awhile, until you feel better. I'll do the cooking this morning."

His eyes followed my movements like those of a grateful dog. That was a day of iron discipline in the army, not only as a legacy of the great war just closed, but because of the worthless nature of the recruits dispatched to the frontier. It was probable the man had never before received a word of consideration from an officer, and now could scarcely credit his own ears. No doubt he had rather expected to be roundly cursed, and driven to his work, regardless of the pain he was suffering. I could read his surprise in the puzzled expression of his face, as he clung to a tree, kicking his feet against the roots to restore circulation to the benumbed limbs. His odd appearance, now that I observed him more closely by daylight, amused me. He was short, and broad, not fat, for he seemed all muscle, but built with a peculiar squareness, more like a stunted pillar than the ordinary form of a man. He was straight up and down, with short, thick neck, supporting a round

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red face, his light hair cropped short, and standing out like so many bristles, his blue eyes small and wide apart, with broad nose, decidedly pug, and ears that stood straight out from his head. It was a stolid, yet pugnacious countenance, exhibiting some sense of humor, yet securely veiling any suspicion of intelligence in its possessor. The man impressed me as almost a fool, and I wondered why he had been selected for such a journey.

"I remember seeing you before, Schultz," I said, stirring the fire into blaze. "Brown's company?"

"I vas mit Captain Brown," he rumbled, with big mouth endeavoring to smile. "I vork mit the kitchen."

"Oh, I see, detailed as cook. You are not a recruit then?"

"It was for five year I servⁿ mit der army — ever since I come to dis countries. I enlist maybe der second day I land, for I vos soldier before dot."

"You mean you had served in Holland?"

He nodded.

"Dot vos so," solemnly, his eyes expressionless. "I like dot soldiering, but not vot de kind you do here. Maybe you let me do dot now? I vos all right, altreaty," and he moved forward stiffly, but determined.

"See, I show you how it vos done quick."

I resigned my position without regret, stretching

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myself full length on the bank to watch him puttering over the fire. Brady joined me, silent and speechless, sitting with back against a tree; his long rifle between his knees. Across from us, nearer the canoe, squatted the three Indians, waiting patiently. The Dutchman whistled tunelessly as he worked, but there was no other sound, the great woods closing us in on all sides, the thin spiral of blue smoke disappearing in the branches overhead. We were still too close to the settlements to be in very much danger, and felt little necessity for guarding our presence. White hunters penetrated as far north as the forks, and any raiding parties of hostile Indians would have been reported. Brady shook his head when I mentioned the possibility, smoking calmly.

"There ain't no red-skins down in yer," he returned confidently. "Or some o' the boys along the river would o' let me know. We 're liable ter see plenty after a while, I reckon; but they don't range this fur south lately, less they 're on the war-trail. It's too nigh the settlements."

"How far have we come?"

He spoke to the Delawares, and one of them replied in his own language.

"He reckons 'bout fifty miles, though it would be less than that straight across country. It takes maybe

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two days an' a night ter make the forks with good paddling."

The disinclination of the backwoodsman to converse was plainly evident, and I realized that the less questioning I indulged in the better he would serve. The greater portion of his life had been passed alone in the solitudes, and those years had left him chary of speech. So we ate our breakfast almost in silence, and then lay down on the ground for a few hours' rest. As none of the toil of our progress up stream had thus far fallen upon me I remained on guard over the tired sleepers, cleaning away the debris of the meal, and packing the cooking utensils back in the canoe. Nothing occurred to disturb us, the wood aisles leading in every direction becoming more clearly revealed as the sun mounted higher into the sky above the trees. The men slept soundly, although I noticed how any movement, even the slight rustle of leaves in a sudden puff of wind, served to rouse Brady or the Indians to instant consciousness. They possessed the instinct of wild animals, ever alert to danger. But the stolid Dutchman never once stirred from where he lay curled up into a ball, his round face hidden on his arm. It must have been fully noon when I aroused them, and we again headed the canoe up stream, Brady willingly taking the soldier's place at the after paddle, while I lay back in the

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stern, my coat serving for a pillow, and finally fell asleep.

The river narrowed rapidly as we advanced northward, until the great trees on either bank nearly obscured the sun overhead. Obstructions made night travel slow and dangerous. Once we passed a party of hunters headed for the Ohio, their canoes piled high with pelts. There were three of them, all strangers, silent, suspicious men, who answered our questions rather grudgingly until one among them recognized Brady, and became somewhat communicative. They had been above the forks, but had seen no Indians, although they had come across "sign" sufficient at least to convince them that raiding parties were in the neighborhood. For the past week they had depended on traps for game, rather than risk the firing of rifles, hiding their night camps, and now were glad enough to get safely away. They left us at sunset, disappearing swiftly around a sharp bend of the river, and we decided to push on through the dark night, spelling each other at the paddles. While such progress might be slow, yet every mile thus gained was an advantage, and Brady expressed an anxiety to reach the Wyandot council before there was any possibility of Girty's return. Besides, the Delawares were already exhibiting a disinclination to proceed, and we were compelled to

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hold them by threats to their work. Each mile of advance northward added to their terror, and made our task more difficult. Once Brady struck the chief, driving him back to his place in the canoe. This was when we discovered unmistakable signs that a party of Miamis had crossed the river only shortly before we passed the spot.

However, we ran the gauntlet safely, a mere silent shadow slipping along in the dark shade of the protecting bank, and thus finally attained the forks, and landed on the west shore. It was dark when we got there; but the Delawares were so eager to return, that we immediately put ashore all we intended to pack with us, and parted with them gladly. The canoe shot swiftly away into the gloom, leaving the three of us alone. Bearing our loads with us, we groped a blind way through the forest, back toward the foot of the bluff, where we made camp, as best we might, at the mouth of a ravine, well sheltered by underbrush, and lay down, without venturing to light a fire. For some time, scarcely a memory of René D'Auvray had remained with me, my mind being fully occupied with the increasing peril of our position; yet as I lay there in the silence, looking up at the stars, her eyes seemed suddenly to smile again into mine, and I dreamed of her as I slept. The dawn found us safe, seemingly alone in the wilderness.

CHAPTER X

THE TRAIL OF A WAR PARTY

BEFORE the sun's rays touched the summit of the bluff we were climbing the sides of the ravine, with light packs on our shoulders. Brady led the way, tireless and watchful, his long rifle held ready in the crook of his arm, his alert eyes searching out the ground ahead. Behind him lumbered Schultz, heavy-footed, and grumbling Dutch oaths at every misstep, yet somehow managing to keep up; while I brought up the rear, my gaze intent on the surrounding ridges. There was no trail. Yet we kept our course to the northwest, as directly as the nature of the ground would permit, and pressed forward hour after hour without the exchange of a word. The forest growth thickened perceptibly beyond the crest, but the underbrush largely disappeared, and our progress was rapid. Brady seldom hesitated, but the Dutchman was a slow walker, not from any lack of strength, but from sheer awkwardness, and I was frequently obliged to order the guide to less exertion. He looked about at the figure behind, a quizzical smile in his gray eyes, but took slower pace without answering. Indeed I have no recollection of his

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speaking once during the entire course of the day, not even while sitting, pipe in mouth, watching the breathless Schultz prepare food. It was at this occupation that the latter demonstrated his real worth, his cooking, to my notion, making full amends for any lack of marching ability. However, in spite of the hard traveling, and the required rest, we must have covered twenty miles that first day, meeting with no adventures worthy of record, and noting no signs of Indian prowlers. We camped that night on a small island of the Mohican, as near as I could determine from my rough map.

The three following days were largely a repetition of the first, but the Dutchman seemed to travel somewhat better as he grew accustomed to the woods, and the nature of the country exhibited some slight change. The forest growth was all about, yielding only narrow vistas even from the hill summits. We merely looked forth over leagues of tree tops stretching to the horizon, and pressed forward through dark, gloomy aisles, into which the light of the sun seldom penetrated. Yet that third day of travel brought us occasionally into little openings, green with grass, and flower strewn, restful and inviting after long hours of grim forest shadow. Once we skirted the shore of a lake, the overhanging trees reflected in the margin of blue water. We saw much of wild game, but shot little, fearful that we were

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not alone in the wilderness. At night we rested far back from the embers of the camp-fire, snugly hidden away in some covert. Lying there in silence, staring about in the black night, listening to the mysterious noises of the forest — the rustling of leaves high above, the crackle of a twig under the paw of some prowling creature — I grew to realize more definitely our loneliness, and the terror of our mission. We were but three men, already plunged deep into the very heart of the hostile country, helpless, except for the few weapons in our hands. To be sure there was as yet no open declaration of war, perhaps would not be, yet this in no way lessened our immediate peril; for irresponsible bands of young warriors, drawn indiscriminately from a dozen tribes, eager for distinction, crazed with blood-lust, roamed across this neutral ground, making swift forays on exposed settlers, or attacking stray hunting parties of whites. Scarcely a week passed but stories of such outrages reached the Ohio, curdling the blood, and causing many an oath of vengeance. Nor was the fault altogether with the red-men. Scarcely less savage indeed were the irresponsible white rangers of those dark woods, Indian haters, rough borderers, with whom fighting was a trade. In truth, murder and outrage lurked everywhere in spite of a pretense at peace, and every league of forest might hide a lurking enemy.

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Yet for three days we encountered nothing to alarm. Brady purposely kept away from all trails, trusting implicitly to his instinct as a woodsman to discover a safe passage. Twice we crossed faint traces leading north and south, but he paused only long enough to determine the length of time since the last party had probably passed, and then plunged aside again into the untrodden wilderness. Even as he pushed rapidly forward, his keen, searching eyes seemed to read every faint sign; not a broken twig, or disturbed grass blade escaping scrutiny. The woods were to him an open book, to be hastily scanned, and ever after remembered. I believe he could have followed our trail backward, step by step, recalling in sequence each hillock, or distorted tree. Every sound, every occurrence of nature had its meaning — the flapping of bird wings above, the moss on the tree trunks, the skurrying of hares among the underbrush, the murmur of distant water — and all brought some message to his alert ears, and served as guidance. Not till then did I know what woodcraft really meant, nor how keen became the sense of those silent men whose lives were passed alone in the wilderness. I observed his skill with increasing amazement — his certainty of direction, his swift decision, an unerring instinct. At night I questioned him, and his brief answers only served to convince me what little things

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served his purpose — things that more civilized men would pass by unnoted, yet which to his mind, trained by years of woodcraft, meant everything. He possessed the instincts of the wild, the subtlety of the savage, born of constant peril and loneliness.

One night, when we camped in the thick mazes of oak trees, he told me bits of his life, chary of speech as ever, and merely giving glimpses here and there, in short drawing sentences, in response to my questioning. I had to piece these together as best I could; yet, by persistent interrogation drew forth enough to make me better understand. Born in the Blue Ridge, of pioneer parents, who were killed in a raid of Shawnees when he was twelve years old, he was held in the Indian villages until he was sixteen, and then recaptured by a party of Kentucky riflemen. From then on he had lived the life of a border hunter, in constant movement and danger; had taught himself to read and write; had been with Clark to the Illinois; and passed months at a time among the tribes, or alone in the wilderness. Three times he had run the gauntlet, and once had been tied to the stake, only to be saved by a French renegade who he had befriended in Vincennes. All this, of personal interest, I had fairly to drag from him, but he spoke more freely of the famous border men he had met and associated with — of Boone and

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Kenton, McCray and Clark; of Sevier, beside whom he had borne rifle at King's mountain, and Zane. His mind was well stored with tales of these men, their exploits and adventures, and he told them with a simple gaiety which gave them new zest. Sitting there, with the firelight on his face, and revealing his long iron-gray hair and beard, calmly telling of adventures which made me shudder, he seemed like a man from another world. And I remained there on guard, watching while he slept, reviewing again what he had just told me so simply, with every nerve throbbing, and my eyes peering about into the dark woods, terrorized by every sound that disturbed the silence of the night.

Once, where we forded a considerable stream, which I think now must have been the Vermilion, we came upon the blackened remains of a camp-fire, apparently deserted but a few hours before. Brady examined it with great care, trailing the party to the river bank, and then making a wide circuit of the woods, before he finally returned satisfied.

"Less than three hours gone," he said soberly, "and traveling north."

"Do you know who they were?" I asked. "How many were in the party?"

"Miami and Ojibwas, I reckon, and they had a prisoner, bound to that small tree out yonder; see here,

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Hayward, the fellow had boots on, and not moccasins. From the trail they made here on the bank there must have been twelve or fifteen Indians; ay, and a white renegade," he bent down again to study a track in the mud, "for this is no red-skin's foot, with the toes turned out." He swore, the only oath I had heard thus far from his lips, plucking a few long hairs from off a spittle of underbrush, and holding them up into the sunlight. "A war party all right, with scalps. One fellow brushed against this bush as he came down the bank; from the color they must have been raiding the German settlements."

I stared at the floating hairs, shuddering in horror, and hands gripped hard on my rifle.

"Good God! and they are going our way?"

"That need n't trouble us, while they leave a plain trail behind. Those devils feel safe enough now, or they 'd take more care. We are in no danger while they keep ahead of us."

We followed their trail for several miles, Brady scanning each foot of the way, and picking up scraps of information from little things that I failed to even notice until he pointed them out — a feather here, a print of a heel in soft dirt, a bit of cloth flapping from a low branch, a scrap of paper with German print, a broken arrow, which he instantly said was of Ojibwa make.

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"They are a long ways from home, those fellows," he commented soberly, turning the tuft over in his hand. "Never knew they got down so far as this. Young bucks likely."

He chuckled, pointing to the arrangement of feathers and a peculiar notch in the shaft.

"Every tribe has its own form of arrow making," he explained gravely. "I saw some Ojibwas at Detroit onct, 'bout three years ago; it allers pays in the woods to notice these things, for they likely come in handy. Now I did n't much expect to ever meet the Injuns of that tribe agin, for their huntin' grounds are 'way up north, yet here I am followin' the trail of a bunch. However, we 'll take a side track, an' see if we can't reach Sandusky point ahead o' these murderers. They 've got prisoners, an' are travelin' slow."

We made a detour to the right, plunging straight forward into the unbroken woods. Brady led at a fast gait, his trained iron muscles tireless, while I urged the breathless soldier to new exertions, frightening him by constant reference to the raiders so close at hand. The perspiration rolled down his face, yet he kept close at Brady's heels, falling flat on the ground during our brief halts, but determined not to be left behind. There was certainly good stuff in the fellow, although he swore stiffly, and had a tread like an elephant. Just

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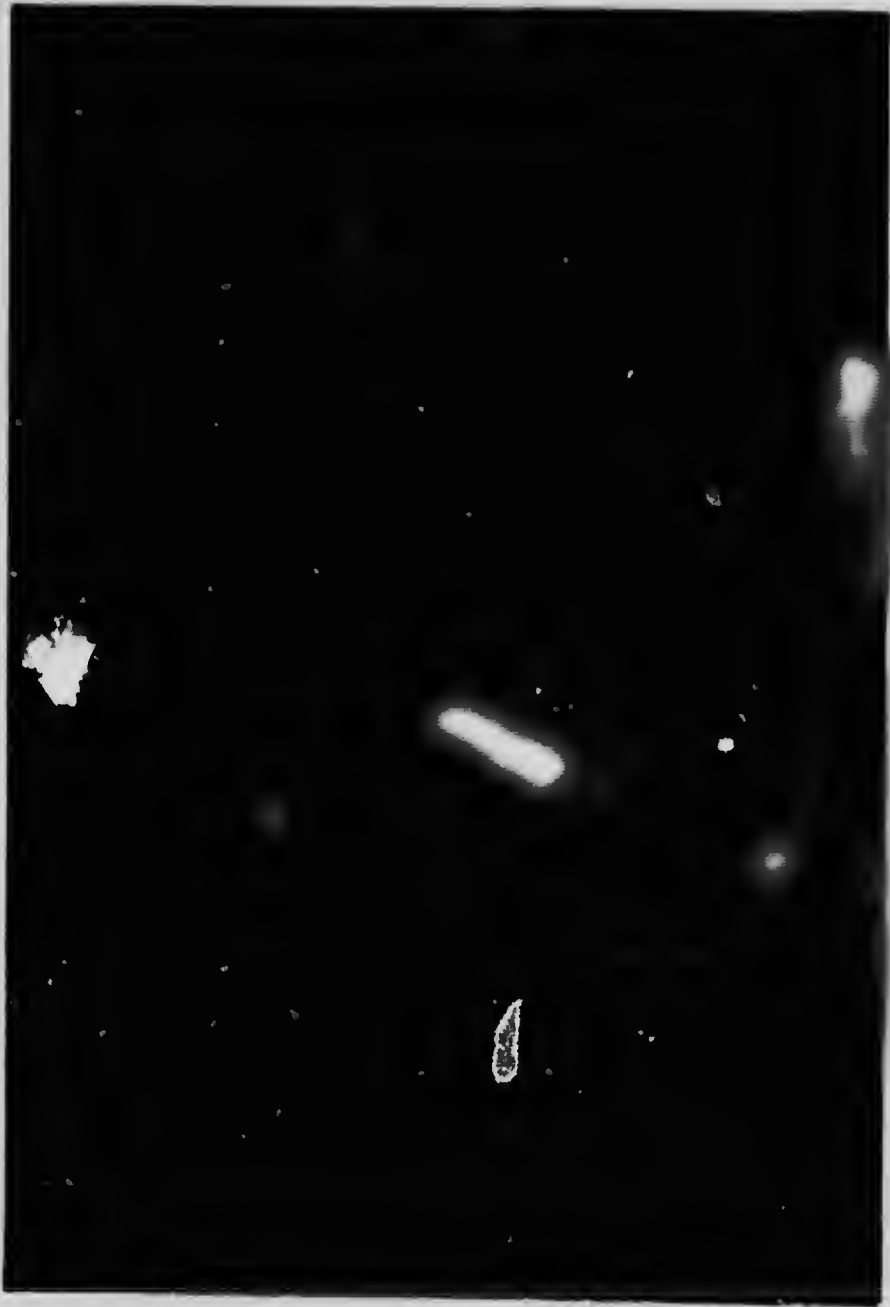
before dark, the forest about us already in gloom, we suddenly emerged from out the shadow of great trees, and stood on the shore of a lake girded with woods. It burst open upon us so unexpectedly — the pressing aside of low branches, then the dazzling gleam of water — that for the moment the three of us stood there irresolute, staring across the calm surface in speechless surprise. It was not a large expanse, probably not more than a mile or two in either length or width, yet a fair body of water, effectually blocking our passage. And it was beautiful, the wide surface scarcely rippled, a silver shield held upward to the sky, across which streamed the last rays of the sun, and all about the dark frame of giant forest trees, their great branches outlined in the clear water. Lonely, solemn, it lay before us like some picture rather than a reality, with no semblance of life anywhere along its curving shore. A few hundred feet from where we stood a small rocky island, dense with trees, rose above the mirrored surface. After one swift glance about the line of shore Brady's eyes rested on this haven, as though questioning its feasibility as a night camp. There was a yellow tinge to the intervening water, suggestive of shallowness, and I spoke first.

“It will be dark in a few minutes more; is n't that a sand-ridge leading out yonder?”

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"It looks so to me," he replied quietly, "but the only sure way to tell is to test the passage. In my judgment we better get out there if we can, for there's no knowin' where those Injuns may be."

He led the way, and we followed in single file, our packs and rifles held high overhead. The water deepened until it reached Schultz's armpits, but there was no perceptible current, and the sand underfoot was firm as rock. Deep purple shadows seemed to shut us in, as we clambered up the steep bank of the island, our clothes dripping. Brady with outstretched hand helped me to climb, clinging with his other to a sapling. Then he pointed across the darkened surface toward the lower end of the lake. In the distance there was the red glow of a fire, barely visible.



Our packs and rifles held high overhead



CHAPTER XI

THE LONELY CABIN

WE stood there in the tree shadows for some time, staring at that far-off light, the evening settling darker across the water, the stars beginning to peer forth in the arch above. It was scarce more than a red star itself, yet, even at that distance, the flame revealed dimly the surrounding trees, while occasionally a dark form would pass between us and the gleam, a mere outline, vanishing instantly. The thought of us all must have been with the hapless white prisoner, for the Dutchman gripped my arm suddenly.

“*Mein Gott!* Maybe dey burn heem? Vot you tink?”

I glanced at Brady, standing straight and motionless, hands gripped on his rifle, his face stern, his eyes on the distant flare.

“There is little danger of that now,” he said slowly. “They are after ransom, or they never would have brought the man so far.”

“Do you suppose we could help the poor devil?” I asked in sudder pity.

His gray eyes met mine boldly.

“That is what I am goin’ to find out, Hayward,” he

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returned dryly, "when that fire sorter dies down, an' they 're all asleep. 'Tain't likely they 'll keep watch, fer they ain't no reason ter think there 's another white man this side o' Harmar an' 'tain't my natur' ter let Injuns alone. Then maybe that pore cuss is a friend o' mine; there a heap of 'em huntin' north o' the Ohio."

"But the risk, Brady," I protested.

"Thar ain't much, just fer me to sorter scout around, an' find out who the pore cuss is. I reckon if it was me, most any o' the boys would take the chance. Do n't yer worry none: I 'll take keer o' myself." He looked about, evidently dismissing the subject. "Now let 's make camp, but we won't dare to light no fire. Come on, Dutchy, let 's git back behind them trees: those redskins might prow around a bit before they settle down."

We carried our packs with us, moving silently between the tree trunks, darkness steadily increasing as we advanced to the slightly higher ground inland. The island was wider than I had supposed, and must have contained fully five acres, densely wooded, with no sign of a trail anywhere. Apparently we were the first explorers to penetrate its thickets. Suddenly we came to the edge of a small opening, sloping down like a saucer, grass covered and treeless, open to the sky, but with a dark irregular something at its center. So shapeless

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was this black blotch that I took it at first to be a clump of brush, but the scout gripped my arm.

"Hayward! there's a log house!" he whispered, pointing. "Do you see? Keep the Dutchman back."

I dropped to my knees, and studied the dim outline, which the night rendered so indistinct. Little by little it assumed more definite shape — a one-story log hut, with an extension at the rear, and an outside chimney forking up beside the roof. It was a gloomy looking place, with no glimmer of light showing anywhere.

"What do you make of it?" asked Brady in a whisper, as tho' doubting his own eyes.

"It's a house, all right," I answered. "Some French hunter's shack."

He shook his head negatively.

"They do n't build like that. It beats me, but whoever built that house put it up to live in. Howsomever I do n't see no sign o' anybody thar now, an' I'm a goin' ter find out what the shebang looks like. Dutchy, you stay yere, an' watch these things, while the two o' us scouts 'round a bit."

He dropped his pack on the ground, and I flung mine beside it, smiling at the readiness with which Schultz found a resting place propped snugly between.

"No smoking now," I admonished sternly, staring down at him, "and keep your eyes open."

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“ I jüst have von pipe,” he pleaded plaintively. “ I vos mos’ ded mit not smokin’.”

“ Well, you ’ll be entirely dead if you try it now,” I returned shortly. “ There is to be no light, or noise, until I say so — you understand? ”

“ Yah: eet vos vat you say; I do eet.”

Stooping low, so as not to be so easily perceived in the darkness, the two of us, grasping our rifles in readiness, stole across the open space toward the house. There was no sign of life so far as could be seen or heard, yet if the place was deserted it could not have been for long, as there were no appearances of decay or abandonment of the premises. The log walls were firm, the clay between resisting the pressure of our fingers in an attempt to dislodge it, and the only door noticed was tightly closed. We hesitated to open this, uncertain what mystery might await us within, and listening anxiously for any sound. The stillness was so profound as to be painful, and, whispering to me to stand back, with rifle poised Brady silently lifted the strong wooden latch. The door slid back in grooves, the sound of movement barely perceptible, and we stared into the black interior, seeing nothing except a little section of dirt floor, dimly revealed by the stars overhead.

“ We ’ll feel it out, boy,” muttered the scout, his hand gripping my arm. “ Nobody at home, I reckon,

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but it won't do to risk a light. You take that side, an' I'll take this, an' see what we find."

Our soft moccasins on the hard dirt floor made no noise as we groped our way cautiously forward. I held to the right, following the log wall, impressed by the discovery that the logs had been roughly squared, evidently by an axe. No mere hunter's shack would have been erected with such care: beyond question this isolated house had been erected as a permanent home. But by whom? But one answer appeared reasonable: only some outcast, or recluse, seeking the loneliness of the wilderness, would have chosen such a spot in which to hide himself effectively from companionship. The Indian trail undoubtedly passed along the lower end of the lake, where the distant fire flamed, and here in the heart of this wooded island was absolute solitude. Years might pass with no red or white foot pressing these shores. Accident alone would reveal the presence of a house in such a situation.

I moved forward slowly, foot by foot, feeling blindly with one hand, the other grasping my rifle. I came to a rude bench, home-made without nails, touched a small table with crossed legs, holding nothing but an empty pewter bowl, felt the shaggy skin of some animal fastened against the log wall, and then a few articles of warm clothing dangling from wooden pins. These were

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rough garments, made of skins, with a single coarse shirt. Beyond them my fingers came in contact with the latch of a door. As I touched this the menacing growl of some animal broke the intense stillness. I stepped back, startled, unnerved, and in my recoil, came into contact with a man. A hand like iron gripped me, but it was Brady's voice that spoke:

"From the other room," he said shortly, "a dog."

"A dog! then why has n't he barked?"

"Because he is not that kind, I reckon; a big brute from his growl. Did you find anything?"

I told him briefly.

"Fireplace on my side, two chairs and an axe in the corner," he added shortly. "Nobody home but the dog, I reckon, but we will have to fight it out with him, before we take possession. Stand where you are until I feel out the door."

I waited scarcely breathing, seeing nothing, but listening to the big brute sniffing at the crack, occasionally giving utterance to a deep growl as he caught fresh scent of our presence. Once he leaped against the door, clawing at the wood fiercely. He would need be a burly, savage beast indeed from the disturbance he made. Then Brady whispered:

"Leather hinges, and opens this way. Here, Hayward, take hold of the latch; we'll have to brain the

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brute. Do n't open until I say so, and then only about a foot. Brace yourself to hold it firm, and keep your gun ready; I've got the axe."

I took my position, but with heart beating rapidly, and waited. The dog, as though realizing danger, flung himself with full force against the door, and gave one deep bark of savage ferocity. Brady touched my hand, locating the opening. Then there was an instant of silence.

"Now!" he said.

I lifted the wooden latch, gripping with both hands, my shoulders and foot braced. There was a fierce leap of the brute, so sudden as to cause me to give back, the thug of a descending axe, a howl of pain and rage, the ugly snap of jaws. Coarse hair swept my hands: there was another blow, the sound of a falling body: then the helve of the axe struck my foot. Back and forth on the dirt floor man and brute struggled, crashing into the table, and overturning it. Brady uttered one oath: then the dog snarled, and lay still, while I stood with the axe poised, unable to tell which was which in the darkness. Something moved, and I took a step forward.

"Brady!"

"All right," he said breathlessly, "I — I had to knife the brute — he — was as big as a calf, and — and

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he got my shoulder. Did you find a window on your side? ”

“ No.”

“ There was none on mine. We ’ll have to risk a light, I reckon, for I ’m bleedin’ considerable. Try the fire-place yonder.”

I felt my way along the wall, discovered some tinder, and, with flint and steel from my pocket, coaxed a blaze. There were a few pieces of wood piled up on the hearth, and a moment later, the curling red flames revealed the entire interior. Brady rested against the bench, the sleeve of his blouse ripped into shreds, blood dripping from his fingers, and sinking into the earth floor. A few feet away, a great mass of shaggy hair, lay the dog in a heap, his lips still drawn back in a snarl, revealing the cruel white teeth, the shaft of a knife protruding from the throat. He was a massive animal, terrifying to look upon even in death. Yet I barely glanced that way, assured that he was dead, and all my interest centered on Brady, his face ghastly under the brown tan. There was a water bucket half filled on a low bench, and I tore down the shirt from the peg, and swabbed out the wound. It was a jagged, ugly gash, the print of each tooth revealed, and the man clinched his hands in agony as I worked rapidly. The blood staunched somewhat I bound it tightly with a silk neckerchief, and

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gave him a drink of brandy from my pocket flask. This brought a little color back into the man's face, and he found strength to sit up, resting against the bench, his eyes on the dead dog.

"Mastiff," he said, "and the biggest devil I ever saw. I hit him with the axe the first blow, but in the dark failed to strike high enough, I reckon. What do you suppose he was guardin' so savage?"

I shook my head, glancing about at the open door. Brady's eyes followed mine.

"Get a light of some kind, Hayward, and take a look," he said slowly, "and then have Dutchy bring in the packs."

I did as he suggested, finding a bit of pitchy wood that burned freely, and holding it out before me as I peered curiously through the opening. A glance about told me that the lean-to was used as a shed, for it was half filled with split wood, opened boxes, and various odds and ends. This knowledge came to me in a flash, but the sight which riveted my eyes was the body of a man lying directly beyond the doorway, face upward, his skull cleft as if by the vicious blow of an axe.

CHAPTER XII

CAPTAIN D'AUVRAY

WHAT is it?" asked Brady, startled by my sudden exclamation, and striving to get up. I glanced back at him.

"A dead man; stay where you are; he is dead all right. I'll be back in a moment."

I stepped within, and held the torch down closer, the ghastly yellow light falling full on the upturned face. He was a man of seventy, or over, a sturdy looking fellow for his years, in the garments of a French *courier des bois*; his features strong, refined, bearing even in death a certain peculiar dignity, increased by a snow-white beard. Apparently he had not been dead long, nor was there slightest evidence of struggle: the hands were empty, and, judging from the ugly gash in his head, he had been struck from behind unexpectedly. It was a ghastly wound, and the man had probably died instantly. The blow must have been a treacherous one, delivered by some person acquainted with the cabin: otherwise the dog would have sprung to his master's defense. Plainly this was murder, and the assassin had taken his time: had closed the door, locked in the dog:

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had even washed off the blade of the axe, and left it standing there against the wall. What could have been the object? Was it revenge? robbery? I felt in the pocket of the loose blouse, finding nothing, but my eye caught the glimmer of a medal fastened to the front of the shirt. I unpinned it, and held it up to the light of the torch, studying out the French inscription, letter by letter, half guessing at its meaning — it was a medal of honor, given for special gallantry in action at Fontenoy to Captain Rael D'Auvray.

I stood staring at it, and then down into the face of the dead man. D'Auvray: Her name! The same name she had given me! The face of the girl came back instantly to memory, distinct, living. There was a familiarity, a resemblance, now that I thus connected the two together. She had told me her father was a French officer — but dead, killed in action. Perhaps she thought so; had been deceived into this belief. Yet I was convinced now that this was the man: that he had been living up to a few hours before, and had met his fate here in the wilderness by a foul and treacherous blow. Her father! The knowledge seemed to shock me, to leave me helpless: I could not divorce my mind from the remembrance of the daughter. Where would she be that night? Safe at Harmar? or in the dark woods with Girty? Did she know about this hidden cabin? this island rendez-

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vous? Surely this could be no mere coincident of name and history, yet what was the mystery that enveloped both? Why was this Captain D'Auvray hiding here? and why did she deny that he was still living? The more I thought, the more tangled grew the skein. Brady called me, and I stepped back into the other room, still dazed, grasping the medal in my hand.

"Well, what is it?" he asked gruffly. "What have you found out?"

I told him briefly, describing the appearance of the body, and handing him the medal. He turned it over in the light of the torch.

"French, ain't it? What does it say?"

"An army decoration for gallant conduct given to Captain Rael D'Auvray, Fifth Cuirassiers."

"You think it belonged to him?"

"Beyond doubt: it was pinned to his shirt — the one thing he treasured in his exile."

"D'Auvray," he repeated, as if the name had familiar sound. "I've heard of him before. Wait a bit: now I have it — he commanded Hamilton's Indians at Vincennes when Clark took the town. I saw him once."

He got to his feet with my help, and braced himself in the doorway, looking intently at the upturned face, as I held the torch extended.

"That's the man," he said soberly. "I remember

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the white beard: someone told me the Wyandots called him the White Chief. And he was in the French army? An officer? Poor devil! I wonder what happened to drive him to this."

He stared about among the shadows at the miscellaneous articles littering the shed, his trained eyes noting things I had overlooked in my excitement.

"He was murdered all right, lad," he commented slowly, "and by a white man. This was not Injun work. Here is the imprint of a boot heel: you can even see the nails. That's odd: I didn't suppose there was a boot worn in this country except by British officers. What is that red garment lying on the box? I thought so; an English infantry jacket, made in London, and it never belonged to D'Auvray." He held it up. "It was a big fellow who wore this coat, about your size."

"An old garment thrown away."

"I'll wager something it has been on a man's back within twenty-four hours," he returned swiftly. "Here is tobacco in this pocket, and a pipe. Hold your torch closer: there is writing on this bit of torn envelope."

We endeavored to decipher it together, but without much success. The words were English, written in a plain hand enough, but conveyed no meaning.

"Some secret message in code," I said at last. "All I can make out is the date."

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“Written ten days ago at Detroit. Well, we know something then. It would take the fellow five days to travel that distance, with good luck. He must have come directly here to D'Auvray. He wore boots and a uniform, and left in such a hurry he forgot his jacket. He'll be the man who did this job, and we'll find other signs when it gets daylight. I've lost too much blood to hunt around, now. So bring the Dutchman in.”

I found Schultz where we had left him, resting against the packs, but wide awake. The long wait alone had affected even his phlegmatic nerves, and he began to protest, but I stopped his tongue sharply, and, between us, we lugged the packs into the hut. Brady had found a chair, but one glance into the Dutchman's vacant face, as he stared about him, led to an explosion.

“Come on you lout, get busy,” he growled. “Do n't be standing there staring around pop-eyed, as if there was nothing to do. I'm hungry. Hayward, wake the fool up with a kick.”

I laughed, but ordered Schultz, who was far too surprised to get angry, to drop the packs in one corner. Then, with the torch still burning, I helped him lift D'Auvray's body out of the way, and drag the dead dog into the shed. As we did this I explained briefly what had occurred, paying small heed to his guttural exclamations, but anxious to get the job over with.

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"Now get busy at the fire," I ordered. "There are no windows, and nothing to fear. I'll clean up this litter."

As he worked, I went across to Brady, who sat with head bowed on the table.

"Does your wound pain badly?"

"It bites a bit," but he lifted his face and smiled. "I'll be all right if Dutchy ever gets supper ready. I was tryin' to argue this affair out, but it is sure some mixed up mess. What's a British soldier doin' down here anyway, and why should he come with orders to kill this Frenchman? That's what I reckon that writin' meant, though maybe it did n't, an' they just naturally got into a quarrel here alone. But it somehow do n't look like a fair fight, to me, but deliberate murder. Then this D'Auvray livin' here all by himself, looks almighty queer. This yere house was built to stand, an' hidden away on this island fer some purpose. It did n't just happen. D'Auvray used to be with the Wyandots, so they told me, but this ain't their country; it do n't really belong to no tribe, unless it's the Miamis. Looks like he 'd broke away, an' was playin' a lone hand."

I drew up the bench, and sat down.

"There is more to this than you have discovered, Brady," I said, determined to explain. "Did you chance to see a French girl back at Fort Harmar?"

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He shook his head.

“Not as I remember; who was she?”

“That is what I would like to know. I hoped you might have picked up some information. She was at General Harmar's office — a young girl, not much over twenty, I should judge, with dark eyes and hair, speaking broken English, her dress half Indian and half border French. Anyone would call her a beauty, bright and vivacious, but with an independence that made you careful. She could take care of herself, and he would be a bold man who risked an insult. She was one in a thousand, to my thought. What name do you suppose she gave me?”

His eyes, interested, questioned me, but he sat silent.

“René D'Auvray; and she explained her father was a French officer, killed in battle.”

“And her mother?”

“A woman of the Wyandots, but a half-breed.”

“D'Auvray! The same as the dead man yonder! And he was a soldier. 'T is an odd case. What else do you know about her?”

“Precious little, indeed, for she seemed an adept in deceit. She even pretended to know me, and actually spoke my name before it had been told her. How she ever learned it is more than I can guess. The little minx is full of tricks, but plays them so saucily it was

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not in my heart to become angry. By heavens! one glance in her eyes would disarm any man — ”

“ Yes,” he interrupted, “ but whence came she there? and for what purpose?”

I told him all I knew, and he listened eagerly, his eyes on Schultz pattering about the fire.

“ Huh!” he commented, “ the lady told each one of you a different tale.”

“ She did not seem to care,” I explained. “ It was as if it were all play, all masquerade with her; as if she sought merely to complicate mystery. Only once did I deem her truly in earnest; when she begged that I take her with me on this journey.”

“ Yet she must have jested in her threat to travel hither with the renegade.”

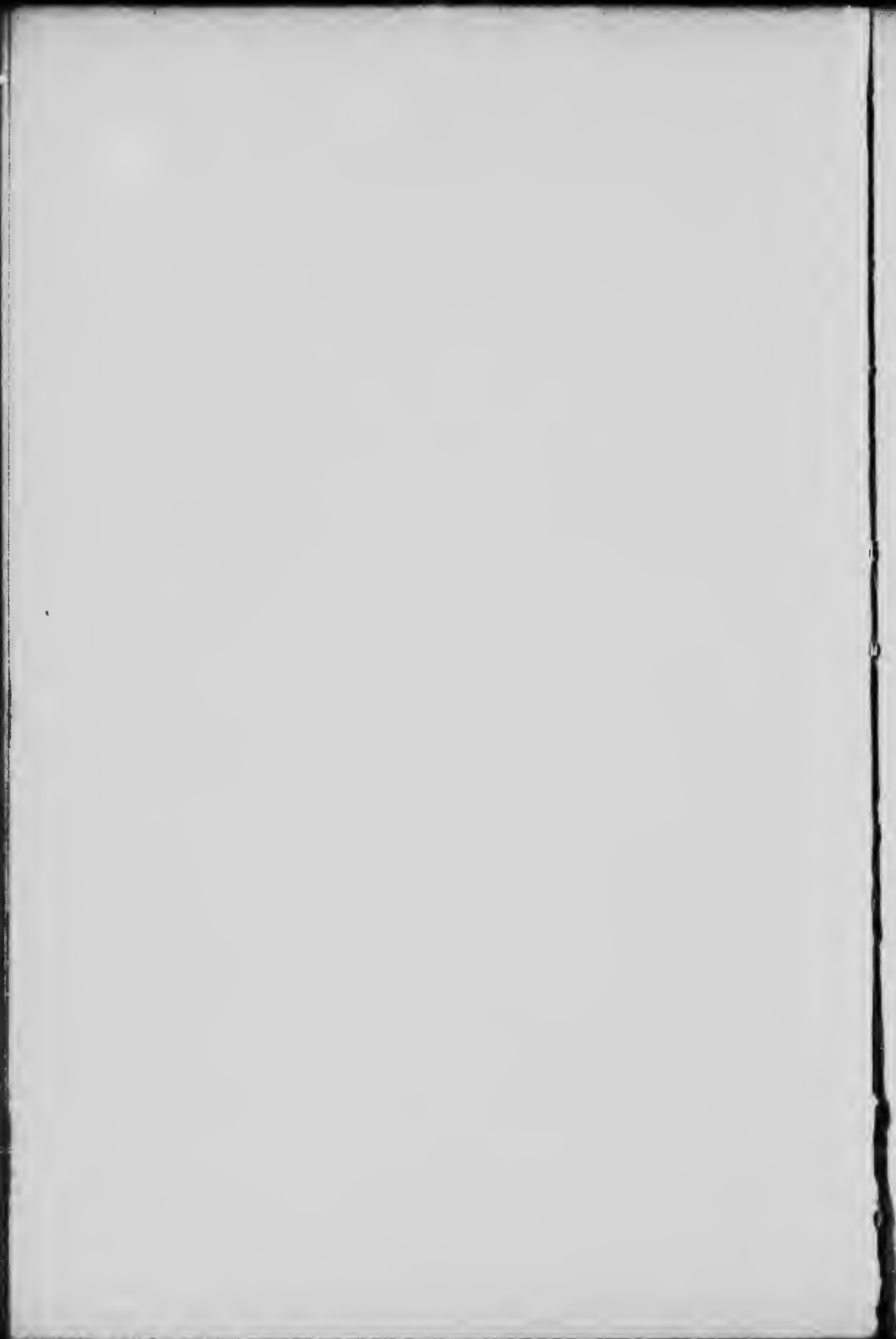
“ I fear it was not jest,” I said soberly. “ She was in a mood to do even that, and I do not think she feared the man. They may be on our trail now; ay! close at hand, Brady, for they both know these woods better than either of us. ’T is my thought, now, the dead man yonder was the lass’s father, and she would know his cabin.”

His eyes turned to the door, and then to the food Schultz was placing on the table before us, but whatever his thought it remained unuttered. As we sat there eating, he was apparently turning it all over in his

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mind, trying to draw the tangled ends of the skein together. The Dutchman asked questions which I answered briefly, enjoying the puzzled look on his round face, and the struggle of his lips to find fit expression. As we finished the meal, some newly awakened curiosity caused me to glance out again into the rear room. It was gloomy with shadows, the bodies of man and dog beyond view; yet what I perceived brought from my lips a sudden exclamation.

“Brady, someone has been in here! The outer door is unlatched — yes — and the soldier’s coat is gone!”



CHAPTER XIII

I TAKE A PRISONER

WE searched the room carefully, but discovered no sign of its having been entered, except for the door standing slightly ajar, and the disappearance of the red coat. We dare not carry a torch into the open, and the night was too dark for us to trace marks on the ground. Brady stole out, and circled the small clearing twice, but discovered nothing. He even made his way through the fringe of trees as far as the shore, and assured himself that the distant Indian camp fire was still burning at the foot of the lake. He returned, baffled, yet inspired with fresh determination to solve the mystery into which we found ourselves plunged.

He stood in the glow of firelight, looking to the priming of his rifle, his face shadowed.

"I am going out awhile, Hayward," he said finally. "Yes, I am all right now. I meant to take you along, but, I reckon, it will be safer not to leave the Dutchman here alone. However, I do n't think there will be any more visitors tonight."

"You believe the murderer came back?"

"Who else could it be? There was only one object

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in such a visit — the recovery of the coat. The fellow knew that would condemn him if ever discovered, and so he took the risk of coming back to get it. He found us here, and will never return unless," he hesitated, as he turned the thought over in his mind, "well, unless he is connected with those Injuns out yonder, and brings them along with him. That is what I am goin' to find out."

"But that would be impossible, Brady," I interposed.

"Why?" calmly. "They were some hours ahead of us, and must have made camp long before dark. There was time enough for the fellow to have come up here and do the deed. The man was not dead long when we discovered his body, and we have proof enough now that the assassin had not gone far away. It's my thought he either belongs to that raiding party, or else has gone to them for refuge. The British are hand in glove with those devils, and they'll protect a red coat every time. Anyhow I mean to find out before we're trapped in this place, and, likely enough, charged with the murder."

He slipped out the back way, disappearing instantly, and I picked up my own rifle, bade Schultz remain where he was, and followed, with the purpose of scouting about the island. Brady's suspicion had left me un-

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easy; I could perceive the new danger we were in. Suppose the assassin, eager to save himself from suspicion, should be attracted to that camp of raiders, and, relying on their friendship for protection, charge us with the murder of D'Auvray. What mercy could we hope for at their hands? Beyond doubt the band was composed of ambitious young warriors, who had already tasted blood, and under control of no chief able to restrain them, if their wild passions should be appealed to. The very fact that two different tribes were represented would offset any chief's authority, and it was well known that both Ojibwa and Miami were in British pay, the open enemies of our settlers. A single word spoken to reveal our presence on the island would be sufficient, and to such as these our papers would be merely mockery. They could not read them, nor would they care what they contained. My first impulse, as all this flashed across my mind, was to hasten after Brady, order him to return, and then depart from the spot before it was too late. We could travel all night, concealing our trail, and by dawn be well ahead of our pursuers.

But I emerged into darkness and silence. Quickly as I had made this decision I was too late. The scout had already disappeared across the narrow open space, and vanished into the fringe of trees. There was noth-

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ing to guide me, except a vague sense of direction, yet I felt my way forward through the dense tree growth, hearing no sound of movement, and compelled to move slowly until I emerged at the shore, and could perceive the stars reflected on the surface of still water. Brady must have moved more rapidly than I amid that tangle of bushes, for I could discover no trace of him anywhere. In my eagerness I ventured to signal, whistling a wild wood-bird's note I knew he would recognize, but waited in vain for a response. The dark woods opposite gave no sign, and, as I searched them with straining eyes, I caught glimpse of the distant Indian fire, no longer blazing, but merely a red glow showing dimly thro' the night.

It was a dismal, lonely spot, the stretch of water looking ghastly in the star-shine, the upper limbs of the great trees overhead sighing in the wind, and all about black, silent gloom. An ill-defined sense of danger was in my heart, of unknown peril lurking close at hand. The black thickets were full of terror and mystery. There arose before me the dead face of D'Auvray, the skulking figure of his cowardly murderer. Perhaps the latter was still hiding on the island, crouching in some dark covert, waiting another victim; perhaps he had even waylaid Brady with sudden knife thrust; or, if he had departed, he might be by now in that encamp-

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ment yonder, telling his lying story to the easily aroused warriors, and exciting them to revenge. The glare of that far-off fire told nothing; I could perceive no moving figures, no sign of any presence. Somewhere along shore an owl hooted dismally, a mournful sound piercing the silence so regularly, as to make me suspect it a savage signal. Yet what could I do? To remain there was positively useless, and, with heart thumping, and nerves throbbing, I crept slowly back under the forest shadows to the edge of the clearing.

From there I could barely distinguish the outlines of the log house blotted by the dark woods beyond. Not a glimmer of light appeared between the closely set logs, and, only as I watched closely, could I make out the slight spiral of vapory smoke rising lazily above the chimney. However, as I lingered there clear of the woods' shadow, my courage gradually returned, and our situation appeared less desperate. Whoever the fellow was who had killed D'Auvray he might have as much cause to fear the Indian raiders as we did. The mere fact that he wore a red coat was no direct proof he was a British soldier; doubtless many a forest renegade had picked up bits of discarded uniform. Besides, why should any soldier desire to kill D'Auvray? He had led his Indians to action under Hamilton. More likely the fellow was French, and the murder the end

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of some private feud. His only desire then would be to get away safely, to escape unseen. Brady would learn all this, and he would be back presently. He was too thoroughly a woodsman to be taken by surprise; too cautious to fall a victim to treachery; the slightest sound would put him on his guard, and send him back with ample warning. Heartened by these thoughts I circled the house cautiously, my rifle ready, searching the shadows with keen eyes, determined to remain outside until I should know the whole truth. It would not be long — an hour, perhaps two — and, in the meanwhile, if the fellow was still lurking about, I wanted to get hand on him.

I do not know how long a time passed, only I had circled the house twice, skirting the edge of the woods in my rounds, keeping well in the blacker shadows, and moving noiselessly, every nerve alert. I saw nothing, heard nothing, except that distant hooting of an owl. This had already become so monotonous as to have lost interest. Back of the house I discovered a mound of earth, heaped as a roof, over an opening in the ground, evidently a cellar of some kind. So far as I could discover, by groping in the darkness, there was nothing concealed within, but the entrance offered a good hiding place, and I sat down there where I could see in every direction, with my rifle across my knees.

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The stars yielded a spectral light, and no one could move across the clearing unobserved. I sat there for ten minutes, seeing and hearing nothing, gradually growing drowsy in the silence, my head sinking back against the earth mound. Yet I remained awake and watchful, although, when I first perceived a figure flitting out of the black fringe of woods, I half believed it a dream. But it was no dream, and I sat up suddenly, my heart beating like a triphammer, and stared. I could see little, not enough to determine whether the intruder was savage or white, merely perceiving an indistinct form, crouching low, yet advancing directly toward me. There was no hesitancy, no evidence of fear, but merely the natural caution of one traveling alone in the wilderness. At first, I believed it to be Brady returning, yet hesitated to step boldly forth, for the figure appeared small and unnatural, barely perceptible against the darker background of earth.

To render myself more secure I drew cautiously back a step within the cellar entrance, and waited breathlessly, bracing myself to meet either friend or foe. I could no longer see the intruder, and the caution of his approach made me certain the man must be an enemy. Surely Brady, even while exercising every precaution, would never hesitate like this, and grope his way forward inch by inch. I felt the hot blood leap in my veins;

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then the fellow, still crouching low, but with rifle barrel advanced, appeared around the edge of the pile of earth, scarcely two yards distant. All I saw clearly was a hat with a feather in it, an indistinct outline of form, and the black rifle barrel. Yet the person was not an Indian, whoever he might be; whatever his purpose, he was white. My rifle came up to the shoulder, and I slipped into the open.

“Stop where you are!” I ordered sharply. “Drop your gun, and stand up!”

I heard a quick breath of surprise, almost an exclamation; the stock of the rifle sank to the ground, but the hands still clung to the barrel, as the startled figure straightened up. I could not distinguish the face, only the white outline shadowed by the hat, yet the short, slender form was that of a boy. The relief at this discovery brought a laugh to his lips.

“What does this mean, lad?” I asked. “Have children gone to war? Come, answer me; you are no savage.”

“It is not a lad with whom you deal, Monsieur Hayward,” replied a soft voice, trembling a bit nevertheless, though attempting boldness. “You know me now?”

She flung the concealing hat into the grass, the silvery light of the stars on her face.

“You here! you!” I exclaimed in swift surprise at

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this unexpected denouement, and feeling the hot blood flush my face. "How is that possible, Mademoiselle? We have traveled swiftly —"

"Ay, but the long way, Monsieur," she interrupted, now quite at her ease. "You forget I know the trails; that I am Indian."

"And your companion a renegade," I returned instantly, ruffled at the memory. "You came with Girty?"

She ventured to laugh lightly at my tone, and manner.

"We traveled together — yes. What of that, Monsieur? The wilderness is not a parlor where we can choose associates. Did I not warn you I would come with him when you refused me? Pardeau! but eet was funny how I stole away from the Americain Generail. He searches for me yet, no doubt, an' swear much. An' you think I did what was wrong?"

"I?" puzzled by her direct question. "What is it to me, Mademoiselle? You would not care what I think. Yet were you sister of mine I would speak plainly enough; we all know what Simon Girty is."

"Oh, no, Monsieur, the Americains do not," and her voice rung with earnestness. "He is to them an enemy, a fiend. He wars on the other side, and as the Indians make war. Why not? He has lived in our wigwams, and sat at our council fires. He belongs with us, save

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for the birthmark of a white skin. To me he is not enemy, but friend. I have known him always, from childhood; there is no fear in my heart; did he desire, he would not dare harm me — I am a Wyandot.”

The swift words were a defiance, a challenge.

“Have it as you will,” I said coldly, “but nothing you may say will ever make me think well of that renegade.”

“You!” she exclaimed passionately. “Why do you say that, Joseph Hayward? Why do you keep up this masquerade with me? We are no longer at Fort Harmar where it was safer for you to guard your speech. I knew you would be here; that was why I came alone — that we might talk to each other, and no longer lie.”

I stared at her face in the starlight, my memory suddenly reverting to the dead man within.

“You knew I would be here?”

“I guessed it, and my instinct was true. Why not, Monsieur? You alone knew the house was here, and who lived in it.”

CHAPTER XIV

MADemoisELLE MEETS HER FATHER

THERE was evidently no use of my groping longer in the dark. The girl was in earnest; she firmly believed me to be another. There could be no understanding between us until this mystery of identity was cleared away. Her discovery of me here had only served to increase her hallucination.

“Mademoiselle D’Auvray,” I said earnestly, and I stood bare-headed before her, “there is a serious mistake being made. I am not willing you should deceive yourself any longer. I am going to be perfectly frank with you, and in return I ask you to be equally frank with me. Who do you believe me to be?”

She gazed straight into my face, answering:

“Monsieur Joseph Hayward.”

“Of course,” smiling, “you heard the name at Fort Harmar.”

“But I did not; it was never mentioned in my presence. I recognized you.”

“Which would imply that we had met before, yet I have no recollection, not the faintest, of such a meeting. You are not one it would be easy to forget.”

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“Unless one particularly desired to do so,” she replied swiftly, “and that I am beginning to suspect is the case.” She straightened her slender figure, throwing back her shoulders and using a clearer English than before, as if throwing off disguise. “You ask me to deal with you frankly, Monsieur; very well, I will. Down in my heart I have never trusted you — never! My father did, and I made pretense to please him. But from our first meeting my womanly instincts told me you were false. Now I know it! You are not with us, but with our enemies; you are a traitor! a spy!”

The words stung; they were like the thrusts of a knife. Was the girl insane? mad?

“When was that first meeting?” I questioned gravely, my teeth clinched.

“When was it?” she laughed unpleasantly, with a gleam of white teeth. “You ask that? Am I then in your eyes a fool, Monsieur? Think you I have forgotten so soon the waters of the north, and the lodges of the Wyandots. You were a red-coat then, and you spoke French — ”

“But wait,” I interposed. “If I tell you in all seriousness that I was never in a Wyandot camp, never wore a British uniform, and have no knowledge of French — what then?”

She hesitated just an instant, yet took one step

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nearer, so I could see her wide-open dark eyes scanning my features. Whatever of doubt my words aroused deserted her face as she gazed, her lips curling in scorn.

"I should believe you lied," she said slowly, "lied deliberately to me. I may not know your motive, yet I might guess it from what I have seen. You can deceive me no longer, Monsieur — you are an American spy. I care not what you think, or what you say; I despise you, hate you. If you dare go on to that council of the Wyandots I will denounce you to the chiefs. I tell you this to your face. I am a girl, but I do not fear you; either turn back, or kill me, Joseph Hayward."

"You call me a spy," I said soberly, as her breath failed, "but I am not. To me this is all mystery. But what about yourself, Mademoiselle? Why were you at Fort Harmar? What purpose brought you there?"

"I went there openly, and in no disguise," she replied, restraining herself with an effort. "I was not a spy, nor a victim of curiosity. I told the truth when I said I was seeking my father."

"Yet you left at once to return North without finding him?"

"Because I had learned he was not there, not in the American forts. I heard the General tell it to you."

"To me! the name was not mentioned. We spoke only of a Medicine man — Wa-pa-tee-tah."

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“Yes, the White Chief. He came to the Wyandots with the Christ message. He was there before the priests, and it is through his efforts there has been peace. Yet why should I tell you all this? You have met him in council, have eaten at his table, and shared his bed. He alone has stood, and blocked your plans of war.”

I did not answer. It seemed useless to struggle against her faith in my identity. I half believed her mad; that some trouble had left her with disordered brain. Yet it was most strange, her knowing my name, and still associating me thus definitely with another. That I might outwardly resemble some officer in British employ was not altogether impossible, but that he should also bear my name was beyond belief. Yet she was positive, as honest in it, and only direct proof would serve to change her opinion. Even as I looked into her face, the hot indignation left me, to give place to sympathy. It was her father who lay dead — foully murdered — within a few feet of where we stood. And I must tell her; must break the news. It was a grim task before which I shrank, the words clinging to my lips.

“Mademoiselle,” I said at last, “let us forget this controversy, this misunderstanding, for it is that, and be friends for this night at least. I wish to help you, and not be held as an enemy. You have been in my

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mind ever since we first met; I have not been able to drive you from memory. I must bring you evil news, but my heart is full of kindness and sympathy. You will believe this?"

How white her face was in the starlight, uplifted to mine. One hand grasped my sleeve.

"News! evil news! of my father?"

"Of Rael D'Auvray; he was your father?"

"Yes! you say 'was'? he is dead?"

I caught the groping hand in mine, and held it tightly in the grasp of my fingers. She made no movement, but I could distinguish her quick breathing, see her dark eyes.

"Yes; you must listen quietly while I tell you all I know. We reached here at dusk. There was a band of Indian raiders camped yonder near the foot of the lake, and so we crossed over to this island to avoid them. We stumbled upon this hut while seeking a camping spot. It was dark, and apparently deserted. The front door was latched, but unlocked, and we ventured inside, feeling our way through the gloom, until we came to a door leading into the rear room. You know the arrangement?"

She did not respond, or remove her eyes from my face.

"When we opened this a huge mastiff leaped sav-

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agely at us. In the darkness he fastened his jaws on Brady's arm — the scout with me — and had to be killed by a knife thrust. Then we procured a light with which to search, and found the body of a man lying on the floor."

"Dead?"

"Murdered; his head crushed from behind with an axe. He was an old man, with snow-white beard."

"How did you know he was Rael D'Auvray?"

"By this medal pinned to his breast," I answered, holding it forth, "a French decoration."

She grasped it, bending her head so as to see better, and, for a moment, her slender form shook with an emotion she could not restrain. Involuntarily I rested a hand upon her shoulder, but the touch aroused her, and she stepped back, standing erect.

"The medal was his; he always wore it. But was that all? Was nothing else found?"

"There was a red army jacket flung across a box; but while we were eating later in the other room, someone stole in through the back door, and carried that away."

She raised her hands to her head, with a gesture of despair.

"I — I believe part of what you have told me," she confessed, her voice trembling. "It — it is in my

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heart to believe all, but — but I cannot. You are not telling me the truth — not all the truth. You knew of this house; you — you came here deliberately, and — and brought your men with you.”

“I deny that, Mademoiselle. We stumbled upon the place by accident.”

“Oh, you drive me crazy with your denials!” she exclaimed passionately. “I will not listen longer. You are Joseph Hayward; you admit that yourself. No! do not talk to me, or attempt to stop me! I am going to my — my father.”

I stood aside and let her pass, yet followed as she entered the door. The interior was black, except for a slight glow as from a dying fire showing dimly thro’ the inner door. The dead dog lay shapeless in the middle of the floor, and she stopped, staring at the grim shadow.

“I will bring light,” I said gently, “if you can permit me to pass.”

She stepped aside, without answering, holding back her short skirt, as though seeking thus to avoid all contact. I stepped over the dog into the other room, hurt beyond words at the action, yet holding a grip on my temper. The fire was a mere smouldering bed of embers, and Schultz, stretched out on the bench, a pack for a pillow, was sleeping soundly. The very sight of

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his round, cherubic face, upturned and placid, brought back my good humor instantly. With difficulty I ignited again the bit of pine we had utilized as a torch, and, with it blazing brightly, returned to the other room, leaving the fellow undisturbed.

“Why that torch?” she questioned. “Are there no candles on the shelf?”

“What shelf? over there? I had not thought to look.”

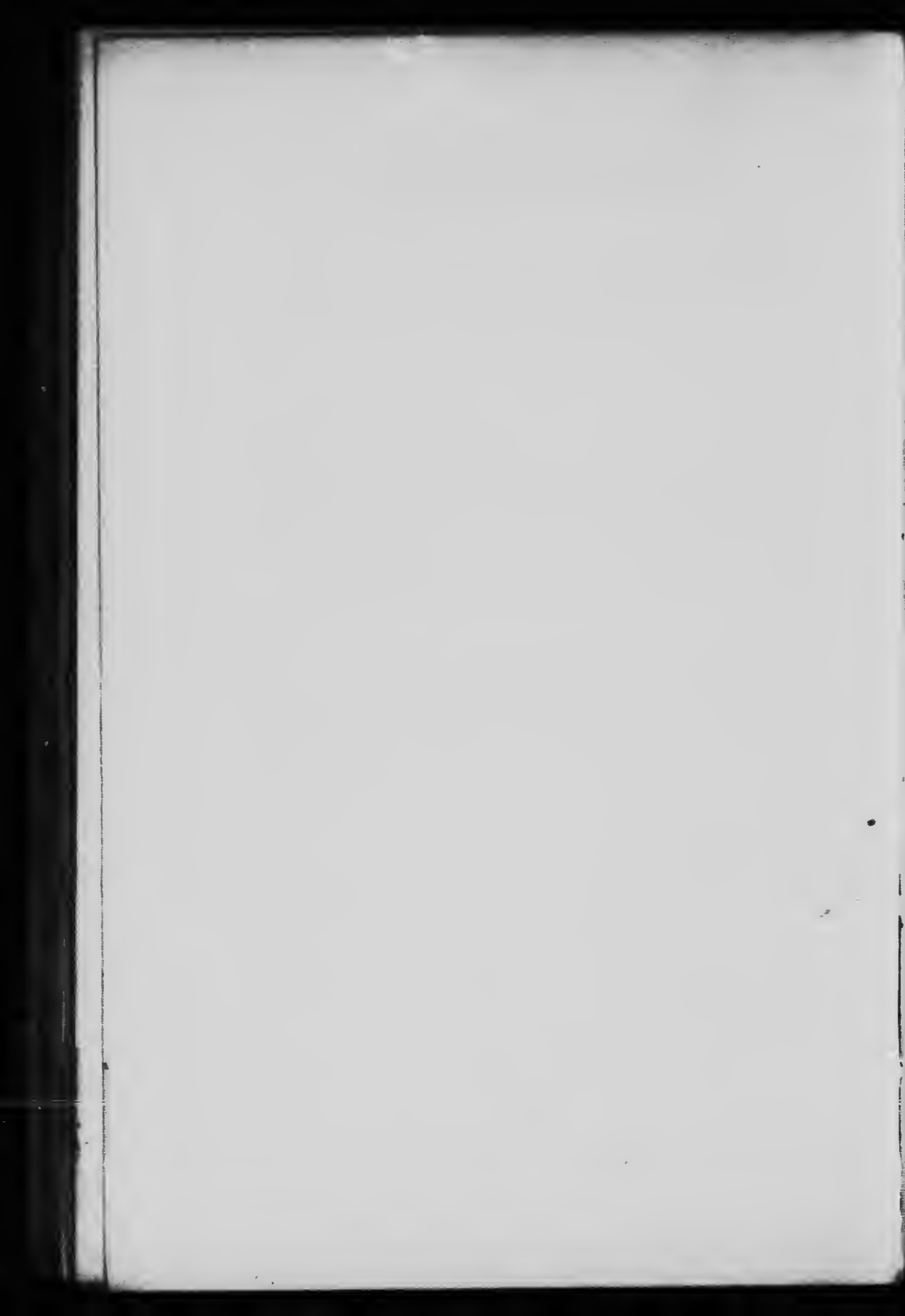
“You had not!” her eyes seemed full of wonder. “Why, you knew they were always kept there.”

Her gaze followed me curiously while I found one, and lighted it, but as the yellow flame illumined the small room, again deserted me, to rest once more upon the motionless figure lying near the wall, which Brady had mercifully covered with a blanket. She stood still, her hands clasped, her face like marble. Still holding the candle in one hand, I bent down, and drew back gently the edge of the blanket, exposing the dead man's face and white beard. In spite of his violent death the features were composed, in no way distorted; he appeared like one lying there asleep. For a moment the girl never stirred, her attitude strained, her wide-open, tearless eyes on the peaceful upturned countenance. It seemed to me she had even ceased to breathe. Then she sank slowly upon her knees beside the body, her head close to the cold cheek.

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"Father! Father!" she sobbed, as if in sudden realization of the truth. "It is you!"

Her hat had fallen to the floor, and her wealth of dark hair unloosened completely hid her face. She had forgotten my presence; everything but her grief. I drew back silently, stuck the sputtering candle on a box, where it burned bravely, and left the room. As I glanced back from the doorway, odd shadows flickered along the walls, and she still knelt there, a vague, indistinct figure. In the other room I found a chair, and sat down, staring dumbly into the smouldering fire.



CHAPTER XV

MADEMOISELLE'S STORY

IN the intense silence, the gloom of that room lit only by those smouldering embers, with Schultz sleeping undisturbed against the wall, my thought could not be divorced from the lonely girl sobbing above her dead. I was tired, every muscle aching, and each nerve throbbing with pain, yet never was my brain more active, or sleepless. The sudden cry which had burst from her lips, thrilling with inexpressible anguish, the pressing of her warm cheek against his cold flesh, the unrepressed sobs shaking her slender form, had brought to me instantly a new conception of this girl of the wilderness. She was no longer a wild thing, reckless, half savage, possibly treacherous, but a woman, actuated by love, tender-hearted and true. For a time it blotted out the past, even the dark stain of Indian blood, the misunderstandings, the inconsistency. I remembered only her grief, her swift surrender to tears.

Yet the misunderstandings came back haunting me like so many ghosts; the mystery grew darker as I pondered. Even the memory of her face flickered before my eyes, never appearing twice alike — now alluring,

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and again repellent. Was she of dual nature, womanly and savage by turn, as the instincts of two races dominated her action? Yet this could never account for her distrust of me, her continued insistence upon having previously known me. Ay! and she meant it! There was no attempt at deceit, no acting in all this; her full faith in the charge was written upon her face, found echo upon her lips. She believed me to be another man, a pretended British officer, a traitor to her people, a scoundrelly spy. Yet she applied to him my name. That was the strangest part of it all. For the moment, sitting there my face in my hands, I was almost again persuaded she was insane; that some ghostly hallucination had taken subtle possession of her mind. But no, that could not be. The very memory of the girl drove away the vague suspicion; it was unbelievable. A thousand questions surged into my mind, no one of which I could answer — who was she? What had been her life? How could the black wilderness bring forth such a flower? Why did D'Auvray lead his life of exile among savages? What would the daughter do now that he was dead? Could it be true she was of Indian blood? A Wyandot? Even so, how could such as she, with her education, her knowledge of civilization, her refinement and beauty, be content with a life in the wigwam? What purpose, what object could compen-

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sate for such a sacrifice as this must involve? And who was this man, this other Joseph Hayward, if such really existed, with whom she confounded me? What was he to her? to her father? Could he have been the murderer? Could it have been his red jacket that lay there, forgotten in flight, certain evidence of guilt?

I arose to my feet, and strode nervously across the floor. These questions had driven from my mind all recollection of where I was, of my surroundings — the gloomy black forest, the starlit lake without, the flame of the distant camp, of Brady skulking in the gloom, the leagues of circling woods about us Indian haunted and treacherous, the council of the tribes toward which we journeyed. She had said the dead man — her father — was Wa-pa-tee-tah. Then why should we go on? Our mission to the North was ended; we bore no longer any message for the Wyandots. But could I desert her? Could I now turn coldly back with this mystery unsolved, these questions unanswered? Could I leave her unprotected and alone to drift back once more to the life of a savage? Yet, after all, what else was there to do? She possessed no faith, no confidence in me; she would never believe even what I had to tell. Nevertheless I would tell it — yes! and somehow compel her to believe! I stood up straight, and determined, my course of action mapped out. Here, now, this very night, as

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soon as her first grief had subsided, and she should again come to me, I would tell her the whole truth, insist upon her doing the same, and then speak to her of the future. There should be no faltering of words, no further concealment between us. I could do no less; as a man I could do no less, and — and, somehow, out of that back room, out of its shadows, loneliness and death, she seemed calling to me, this maiden of the forest.

Even as I stared toward the open door, the girl herself appeared, outlined against the candle flame. She had bound up the loosened strands of hair, and her dark eyes, dry and tearless, looked straight at me. I doubt if she saw Schultz at all as she came forward, stopping only as her hand finally touched the table. As I watched her, my earlier determination died within me; I could only wait in silence for her to speak.

“Joseph Hayward,” she said slowly, the words rasping a little with her effort at self-control. “You confess to that name, do you not?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle,” I answered, my lips dry, my eyes riveted on her face.

“Yet you still claim not to be the same Joseph Hayward whom I have known?”

“I am an ensign in the army of the United States, and have never worn a red coat.”

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She smiled, but the smile was not altogether pleasant. Then she said slowly, "Very well; have it so then. I do not in the least believe you, but am going to speak exactly as if I did. I am a girl, alone, and must turn to you for help. It makes no difference now if I am of Indian blood and ancestry, I am here alone with you. I have got to trust you, rely upon your word, ask your aid. You claim to know nothing of me, or mine. That there may be no possible mistake I will tell you — tell you about him," she pointed backward, with her hand, her voice breaking, "and — and about myself. You shall know all, and then you will dare pretend ignorance no longer. Listen, Monsieur. The man lying dead yonder — murdered — was my father."

She leaned forward, resting her hands on the table, for support, the veins in her throat throbbing. Then, apparently for the first time, she perceived the recumbent figure lying on the bench, and stopped suddenly.

"Who is that?"

"The soldier with us, a Dutchman named Schultz."

"He is asleep?"

"Yes; there is no danger from him. He cannot even understand English unless it be spoken slowly, and, from what I know of him, no ordinary noise will ever wake him."

She hesitated, irresolute, her eyes still on the un-

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conscious sleeper. Then she seemed to master herself, the expression of her face changing as she looked once again toward me.

“I wish you would at least confess a knowledge of my tongue,” she almost pleaded. “It is not in English I think, Monsieur, and it is difficult for me to speak in that language.”

“It would be a pleasure to confess anything that would aid you,” I replied politely. “But I possess small understanding of French.”

Her eyes darkened indignantly, and she made a forceful gesture indicative of her true thought of me.

“You continue to act your part well,” she said scornfully, “even when there is no longer a necessity. Bah! I despise this play acting! it is unworthy a soldier. So you would have me tell over what you already know; you would make me stand here and suffer —”

“Mademoiselle,” I interrupted swiftly, “I ask nothing. All I seek is the opportunity of service. There is no truth I am going to deny. To prove it I will say this — you have remained in my memory since the first hour we met. I desire your trust, your friendship; whatever you may tell me will be held sacred, inviolate. I will serve you though you speak no word, give no explanation. I beg the privilege.”

I thought she would never speak, standing there be-

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fore me in the dim light, swaying slightly, her bosom rising and falling with quick breathing. A great sympathy welled up in my heart, and all unconsciously, I extended my hands. She must have seen them, but she made no response, but the glitter of unshed tears was in her eyes.

"I—I do not know," she faltered hesitatingly, "what to think of you. This is such a strange puzzle. Sometimes I almost believe what you tell me, even though I know it to be untrue. You are the man I claim you to be; there is no doubt of that," her voice firmer with determination. "I would swear to that before a council of my people; you bear his name, you have his face and form. There cannot possibly be two of such wonderful resemblance. Yet, *Mon Dieu!* there is that about you, Monsieur, that I never observed in him—some strange quality which gives me faith, which awakens trust. I—I almost believe you, almost doubt the reality of my eyesight. It angers me to be such a fool." She pressed one hand to her temple, as if thus sweeping away every false impression, and stood erect, the momentarily softness gone from her face.

"What is the use of our talking like this?" she went on impetuously. "Tis as though we exchanged compliments in Montreal. Instead we are in the wilderness, with danger all about us. You are what you are,

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Monsieur, and I am a woman of the Wyandots. Let all else pass; I care nothing whether your thought of me be good or evil. I am what I am; what birth and conditions have made me. All I appeal to in you is whatever of manhood you may still retain. I tell you my story, because you swear you know it not; then listen, and you shall. No, do not move, but hear me; I would not do this without a reason."

She glanced aside at Schultz, and then into the red embers of the fire, her eyes coming slowly back to rest on my face.

"I am René D'Auvray, and my father lies dead there in the next room. He was all I had in the world, yet I knew little enough of him. He spoke seldom of his past life even to me. Still, I have much reason to believe that in his younger days he was intimate at the French Court. I know he was a soldier, an officer of the King's guard, decorated for bravery. He never told me why he was exiled to this land, buried in the far wilderness, made a companion of savages. I never asked, although my heart ached to do so, for he was not a man to be questioned lightly, and I early learned that the very thought brought him pain. But I know this, for I saw a letter once, a yellow, creased letter, which I think he purposely mislaid hoping I would see. He wanted me to know, yet had not the heart to tell me. It was from

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a French comrade in arms, and there was a crest on the paper, and a great name signed. I wept as I read, for the writer loved the man to whom he told the story, and the words came warm from his heart. Whatever else you may know of us, Monsieur Joseph Hayward, you have never known this. It was because of a lady my father loved, a relative of the King. For her sake he fought the Prince de Millier, and killed him in the royal garden. It was a fair fight, but the King saw it not so, for it disarranged his plans, and my father had to flee France to save his life. Then was he proscribed, a price set upon his head."

She paused, and sank into a chair, bowing her face upon the table. I stood silent, unable to speak, the sound of her voice still in my ears. She looked up again, dashing her hand across her eyes.

"I must be far more French than Indian to become so weak," she explained, ashamed of the emotion. "'T is the memory of him lying yonder, Monsieur, with no word — no last word — for me. So it was he came to America, but they would not let him rest in either Quebec or Montreal. They drove him forth into the woods, into the camps of Indians. He told me once about those days; of how he traversed the black waters of the Ottawa and met hardships on the great lakes, his companions *voyageurs* and *couriers des bois*, his only means of sup-

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port the furs he could send back to Montreal. But he might not venture there himself, but was doomed forever to a life beyond civilization. His associations would have brutalized him, made him a fit denizen of those wilds, turned him also into a savage, but for one thing — he was a fervent Catholic. It was this which kept him ever gentle, sweet and strong. He possessed the passion to save souls; he became an evangel to the Indians among whom he lived. He was at Mackinac and Green Bay; he told the Pottawattomies of Christ, but they cast him out; he traveled to the villages of the Illinois, but the Jesuits were already there, and gave him no welcome. At last he found a home with the Wyandots. At first the task was not easy, for they were a savage people. They had tortured Jesuit priests at the stake, and flogged the Recollets who came also. But my father won their confidence; he went forth with them to battle; he went with them against their enemies, and so they finally listened to what he said. He became Wa-pa-tee-tah, the White Chief, and taught them of Christ Jesus. They became Christians because they were proud of him. He accomplished what the priests could not do, and kept the tribe at peace with the whites. The English came, and hated him, for he would not enter into their schemes, nor permit his people to. Only once did he lead them to war, against your Gen-

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eral Clark at Vincennes. Are you a Catholic, Monsieur?"

I made the sign of the cross.

"We were of that faith in Maryland."

Her eyes lighted up.

"I know not Maryland, but I am glad, for I never before asked your religion. Shall I go on?"

"It is of deep interest."

"Truly! It seems foolish for me to repeat that with which you are already partly acquainted; only I must tell it all, or none at all, for you will not admit how much you may know. But I will hurry. Exiled and lonely, abandoning all hope of ever returning to France, or even civilization, my father finally, to increase his influence with the tribe, took for wife a woman of the Wyandots. Although I was born of that union, yet I never saw my mother, who died when I was but a babe. I am told she was of fair complexion, but jet black hair and eyes, the daughter of a French trader and Indian mother, able to read and write. My father loved her, and taught her much that he had learned in early life. When she died he seemed to change, to lose interest in the past, to cease to dream longer of Europe. He became more fully a Wyandot. I was brought up in the camps of the tribe, living in their wigwams, sharing in their prosperity and adversity. I played with Indian

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children, and was cared for by Indian women. I must have been ten years old, Monsieur, before I first realized that I was mainly of white blood, of another race. Yet when this knowledge came it brought with it sudden ambition."

Her eyes were upon the fire now, and her voice had lost its harshness.

"I remember when I went to my father — it was in a camp on the shores of the great lake — and made him tell me more of his own life, and the life of my mother. What he said opened before me a fairyland. I began to dream and hope. He taught me the French tongue, and all the scraps of learning his memory retained. He sent to Quebec for books, and we studied them together. When I was sixteen he sent me to Montreal, to the convent of the Ursulines, and I was there three years. Then — then the Indian blood conquered, and I came back. The woods called me, and my father; besides," she made the sign of the cross, "God called me to the work I had to do."

"An Indian missionary?"

"To my own people. No! I was of no Order — what was that?"

She arose to her feet listening.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RETURN OF BRADY

THERE was utter silence, except for the heavy breathing of the soldier still sound asleep on the bench. I could distinguish no noise without.

“It was like a cry, faint from a distance,” she said, at last, “but I hear nothing now. Did you catch it, Monsieur?”

“I heard only your voice.”

“Then I may have been deceived, although I have the ears of an Indian.”

She sat down again, her hands clasped on the table.

“You will resume, Mademoiselle?”

The long lashes lifted, and her eyes met mine.

“There is little more. That was my life, just the villages of the Wyandots, in the great forests, and on the lake shore. I was a teacher of Christ to my people, and they loved me. I must have helped some, yet I hardly know. The cross is not to them what it is to those of white blood and ancestry. Jesuits came, but the Wyandots would only listen to my father and me. They drove all the others away, but had faith in us because we belonged there. I lived the Indian life, fol-

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lowed the forest trails, paddled canoes on the rivers, and slept in the tepees. Almost had I forgotten that I was of another race. As time passed I saw less and less of my father. He became silent and discouraged, yet only more fervent in zeal. He would travel from tribe to tribe, or disappear for weeks at a time seeking solitude. He built this hut with his own hands, that he might be alone here. Occasionally he let me go with him on his visits to other nations, and twice I accompanied him to this island. But for months and months I was left alone in the villages of the Wyandots. Then the English agents came, and the tribe made war against the Americans."

She stopped suddenly.

"Monsieur, you know the rest."

Some sound caused me to wheel about, and I faced Brady, who had just stepped within and closed the door. His gray eyes surveyed us in one swift glance, settling inquiringly on the girl, who had arisen to her feet. Schultz awakened, sat up on the bench, blinking sleepily.

"Brady?"

"Of course; and who have you here, Master Hayward? A woman surely, by dress Indian, and by face white."

"This is Mademoiselle D'Auvray," I replied, not

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liking his manner of speech, "the daughter of the man we found here dead."

"She was not in the house when I left. Oh, I remember! the same perchance who was at Fort Harmar, the one you told me about, and who threatened to follow us with Simon Girty. Truly, she must have kept her word, for that black renegade is here."

"Here! Girty? you saw him?"

"Ay! in the Indian camp out yonder. Nor was that all I saw. There is something savage on foot, or I am no woodsman. I thought those devils might have other quarry, and come back here to lie quiet in hiding, but I am not so sure now that we are not the ones sought. This girl belongs with them."

She stepped past me, and stood erect facing him, the dark eyes frankly meeting the gray. In the dull light, she looked wondrously fair, her upturned face delicately chiselled and refined.

"Yet I am not one of them," she said slowly in her careful English. "I am Wyandot; those you saw are Miami and Ojibwas, thieves and murderers. My people are Christian, and are not at war."

"You were with them; with Girty," he insisted, but in somewhat kinder tone. "You came here direct from their camp."

"Yes, Monsieur Brady, but unknown to them, even to

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Girty himself. They know me — the Miamis — and I have no fear even of their young men when painted for war. She spoke simply, clearly, as if she would conceal nothing. "This was my father's cabin. No one knew of it but me — not even Simon Girty. It was reported at Fort Harmar that he was dead; I did not know. It was that vague report which made me so eager to get back to my own people; made me reckless enough to risk the trail in company with the white renegade. I do not fear, but I despise him. I knew the woods better than he, and guided our course that I might visit this island in search of my father. It was my thought he might be hiding here alone. Yesterday we came upon that raiding party, and must needs join them as they journeyed our way."

"What settlements had they attacked?"

"Those of the Moravians; they had scalps and booty."

"And their chief?"

"Black Horse, an outlaw of the Ojibwas; Girty knew him."

"Ay! he'll likely know all the dogs of that breed," the frontiersman growled sullenly. "Some of those scalps were of women."

"Yes," her voice low, regretful, "and they had with them a prisoner for torture, a preacher of the

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Protestant." She crossed herself. "I talked with him, or tried to, for we could not understand each other. At sight of my rosary he drew back in horror."

"Our Dutch friend here would be far more apt to reach his ear," admitted Brady scornfully. "They would hobnob together, no doubt. You say the band is composed of outlaws?"

"The Ojibwas, yes; the others are young Miami warriors out hunting, who met Black Horse, and were persuaded to join him. 'T is their influence which has saved the preacher from the stake."

"You left them when?"

"I hardly know, Monsieur," glancing toward me, "perhaps two hours ago; I had forgotten time. They kept no guard, for there had been no pursuit, nor any sign of danger. It was easy to slip away unsecn. None among them knew of this place, not even Girty, and I came alone. There was nothing for me to fear; I knew the way, and I had faith I should find my father."

"This is the truth? the whole truth?"

"Owi, Monsieur," and bowed her head.

"Then you know nothing of any new arrivals at the camp? There were some expected?"

"I am sure not," her aroused interest apparent in her voice. "Did others join them? who were they, Monsieur?"

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Brady looked at her searchingly, leaning on his gun, the lines of his face stern. I could not forbear stepping forward beside her.

"Never you mind speaking, Master Hayward," he said shortly. "The girl needs no defender; I believe what she says. Now listen, both of you, and see what you make of it. I was within twenty yards of their camp, at the edge of the underbrush, and could see clearly all that occurred about the fire. There was no guard set, but the prisoner lay between two Indians, so that any attempt at rescue was impossible. I could not tell just how many were in the band, for some were lying well back beyond the range of light. I saw Girty, however, get up and put wood on the flame. I had sight drawn on the devil, yet dared not fire. Then he lay down again, and I crept around toward where he had disappeared, thinking I might use a knife to rid the world of such a beast. But before I could reach him there came along the shore a considerable body of Indians. The sand made no sound, and they passed so close to where I lay one fellow stepped upon my hand. Yet they passed by, trooping into the camp, and I counted thirty."

"Of what tribe, Monsieur?"

"From the Wabash. I caught words in the language of the Shawnees. They had a white man with them."

"A prisoner?"

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“No; he talked with Girty in English, and then to the savages in their own tongue. I could only catch a word now and then I could understand, but he pointed toward the island, and seemed to urge them this way. I dared not stay there longer, for fear I should be too late, and so crept backward, and got away.”

She stepped forward and grasped his arm.

“What was the white man like, Monsieur? You saw his face?”

“No; never once did he front the fire. I heard his voice, and could see the outline of his figure. He was a big fellow, not unlike the Ensign here, and he wore a red coat.”

For one moment she stood motionless, one hand pressed against her temple, the other grasping his sleeve. The cheek toward me flamed red.

“You — you are sure?” she faltered. “He — he looked like that?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle,” his tone that of surprise. “It was dark but I could see that.”

“And this man is really an American officer?” her dark eyes flashing toward me. “He has never been in the North before?”

A grim smile curled Brady’s lips, as his keen gray eyes swept over the two of us.

“I reckon maybe it was ’bout a year ago I fust met

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the Ensign, Mademoiselle, up at Fort Pitt, an' off an' on ever since we've run against each other along the Ohio. I don't know what all this may be leadin' to, but so far as I can see, he ain't no cause to tell you a lie."

She hesitated, glancing from his sober face into mine; then impulsively held out her hand.

"I — I am glad, Monsieur," her lips trembling. "I — I cannot tell you how glad. It is such a strange thing that you should look so much alike and bear the same name. Can the other be a relative of yours?"

I shook my head.

"Hardly; we are I suppose of English stock, but my family has been a hundred years in Maryland."

"And you forgive?"

"There is nothing to forgive — a mere mistake —"

"Oh, come!" broke in Brady impatiently. "I have no understanding of all this, nor have we time to exchange compliments. There is little enough of darkness left if we are to get away. What is it you know, Mademoiselle?"

"Not so much as what I suspect," she answered quickly. "There is a British agent working among the tribes, under Hamilton's orders, an officer of infantry, who calls himself Joseph Hayward —"

"What?"

"Yes, Monsieur, the same name, with a face strangely

The Return of Brady

like this man's, and a form as big. I thought I knew; thought I could not be mistaken! Nothing convinced me but your word. You are of the woods, and your eyes did not lie. I have heard my father tell of you as a great hunter, a man to be trusted, though an American. You are Stephen Brady? You were with Monsieur Clark?"

"Yes, Mam'selle."

"I know; I heard it all, and when I looked in your eyes I was sure you would tell me true. We of the Great Woods understand each other."

"But about this Englishman?"

"He was ever urging the tribes to war, lying to them, pledging them help. He came to my people — I am a Wyandot — often. He met my father there in council, the one ever advocating war, the other counselling peace. He failed in his mission to our people, yet somehow my father liked him; perhaps it was a pleasure to talk again with one who knew Europe and the late books. And the Englishman, hoping thus to finally win my father over to his side, was most cordial. He played a part that he might keep my father on long journeys to other tribes, while he remained behind to poison the minds of our own people. I overheard his words, his lying promises to our warriors. Yet in spite of all, the Wyandots remained at peace; they alone held back the

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tribes from war. I appealed to them, Monsieur; I, a mere girl, held before them a cross, and they listened, and were afraid. They drove the Englishman from the camp, back to his master."

"And what then?"

"My father still trusted him, and he came back once more. They went away together, as I supposed on some mission to the tribes. I heard nothing, no message came back. I came to this island with two of my people, but there was no one here; the cabin was deserted. There came to me later a report that they were seen together on the Wabash, and I journeyed there also. The Miamis told me a strange story of treachery and death at the hands of the Americans. I half believed it a lie; yet I must know. My Wyandots would go no further: they were afraid, so I came by myself to the Shawnees, and then, with French boatmen, journeyed up the great river to the fort of the American commander. You know the rest, Messieurs."

She was leaning back against the table, holding herself erect by her hands. Her story had been told swiftly, interjected with French phrases where English failed her.

"Yes," I burst forth, "you came here again and found him dead — murdered — and — and you believed I did it."

CHAPTER XVII

THE BARRIER BETWEEN

HER eyes deserted Brady's face and sought mine. "Not now, Monsieur, not now," she said gently. "I was blind then with suspicion. The name, the face, the giant form deceived me. Perhaps I never really looked to be sure, for I never dreamed of any mistake. Now I know, for I can see myself — the eyes and mouth are not his; no! you can smile and sympathize; you are not all deceit. But, Monsieur," and her hands were outstretched, "can you blame me? What could I think else, believing you to be that Englishman? You came here straight as the arrow flies, as if you knew the way."

She stopped, listening to some sound without.

"T is an owl hooting in the woods; but, Messieurs, we must not stand and talk. I am in no danger; they will never lay hands on me, but they will come here seeking you. It will be as the Englishman wishes: he will tell them you are here, that you have killed Wa-pa-tee-tah of the Wyandots. He will point out to them the dead body, and cry for vengeance. They are young warriors, mad already with blood-lust — Miamis, Shawnees, Ojibwas — many of them outcasts from their

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tribes. No words of mine will restrain them, or save you. There will be blood and war. You must not wait, Messieurs; you must go!"

"And leave you here with those demons?"

She made a swift gesture.

"I!— Mother of God, you do not understand. There is nothing for me to fear. They dare not touch me. They know me — I am a Wyandot. To do me evil would mean war. It is of yourselves you must think. I will remain here with my father's body; they will find me alone when they come."

She stepped past Brady to the door, opened it and glanced out into the night.

"T is an hour yet until day," she said coming back. "That will give you time. They will be here with the first light of dawn. There will be no attack until then. You must delay no longer."

Brady picked up his pack, motioning Schultz to do the same.

"The girl is right enough, Master Hayward," he said grimly. "Fate has played us a shabby trick, and we must take whatever chance remains. Our lives are at stake, but I doubt if we make it, for the savages will find our trail —"

"You will not go as you came," she interrupted. "There is a canoe yonder, hidden beneath the bank."

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Cross the lake in that before daybreak and you will have hours the start. I will hold them here as long as possible, and there is no other boat. They will have to march around the shore. Come, I will show you."

We followed her out into the night, across the narrow clearing into the fringe of woods. There were clouds overhead, and very dark, but there seemed to be a path winding through the dense tangle of underbrush. I followed Schultz, keeping close enough barely to distinguish his figure. Twice he ran into trees, but was too frightened to speak aloud. The distance was short, however, and the four of us halted at the edge of the shore facing the water. We could catch no glimpse from here of the Indian camp, and the silence was profound. Only for a moment did the girl hesitate, bending down and listening. Then she led the way around a narrow point of sand, pressed back some bushes, and revealed the sharp prow of a canoe. Brady flung down his pack, and hauled the light craft down to the edge of the water.

"Lay hold there, Schultz," he ordered in low voice, "till we get her afloat."

I stood alone back in the shadow, hesitating, uncertain. It was in my heart to refuse to desert her there. She turned toward me.

"You must get away at once," she said. "There is

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little enough time. Head straight out for the opposite shore."

"But I have no wish to go without you."

"Without me?" her voice questioning. "There is nothing for me to flee from; I have nothing to fear from Indians. Is it so hard for you to recall what I am?"

"Yes, it is, Mademoiselle," I pleaded earnestly. "My thought will not associate you with these savages. Perhaps I might if I knew your people, but not such ruthless murderers as those yonder, wearing the scalps of women. Who is to protect you from that motley crew? Will it be Girty? or that English agent?"

Her eyes met mine even in the darkness.

"I shall need appeal to neither, Monsieur. You do not in the least understand. I am not a mere squaw of the Wyandots, but a teacher they love. There is not a tribe from the Wabash to the upper lakes among whom my name is not known. I have even sat in council with the chiefs, and spoken. Touch me, those outlaws! Not one would dare lay a finger upon me. I am as safe among them as my father was."

"But he was killed."

"By no Indian hand. Please, Monsieur, do not urge me any more. As it is I am balanced between two duties — to go with you, guard you, and see you safe, or remain and condemn my father's murderer."

The Barrier Between

“ You believe then — ”

“ That he was the Englishman who bears your name. That man alone had knowledge of this hut on the island; he alone possessed opportunity. The scarlet jacket left behind, and his sudden appearance in the Indian camp, all point direct to his guilt. I remain to make sure; that is my duty.”

“ And what would you have us do? ” I asked. “ We no longer have any mission to the Wyandots; the White Chief is dead, and, beyond doubt, you will bear his body to the council of chiefs? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Then is there any reason why we should go forward into greater peril? ”

“ No; that was what I meant to tell you. Monsieur Brady! ”

The scout rose to his feet, a black smudge in the night, and came up the low bank to where we stood.

“ You called, Mademoiselle? ”

“ Yes; I was talking with the officer, but perhaps you do not understand all. Captain D’Auvray was known to the Wyandots as Wa-pa-tee-tah. He is dead, and his body will be taken to Sandusky; I shall tell the Wyandots how he died. There is no longer need that Monsieur should meet them in council. It is better that you return to Fort Harmar.”

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"Then why should we cross the lake?"

"So as to hide your trail. The Indians will believe you have gone on. I will encourage that belief. Now mark my words closely. There is a stream almost opposite here, flowing into the lake; it is not large, but bears sufficient water to float a canoe for several miles. It circles to the south, and you must follow its course, leaving no sign. When you reach water too shallow, leave the canoe hidden and strike straight for the Ohio. There will be no pursuit, for I pledge you these Indians will go with me."

She paused, but neither of us spoke, and she held out her hand.

"Good-by, Monsieur Brady."

He accepted the proffered hand awkwardly, dropped it almost instantly, and stepped back.

"I reckon that would be the best way, Miss," he stammered, "so maybe we better go. Are you ready, sir?"

"Yes, run out the canoe; I'll be there in a minute. Mademoiselle."

She turned toward me, as he went noiselessly across the sand beach. Her hand was not extended, but I had the courage to reach out and grasp it in my own.

"Do not say good-by to me," I whispered, feeling my voice tremble. "I go because you wish it, because it

The Barrier Between

seems to be the wise thing to do; but I will not believe we are never to meet again."

"Yet that is not likely, Monsieur."

"If I seek you it might be."

"It will require more than peaceful travel to do that," she replied soberly. "There is going to be war."

"War! the Indians of the northwest?"

"Yes; the time has come — is here. The council at Sandusky was for no other purpose. Girty's message was merely an excuse for the Wyandots to join the other tribes. He confessed as much to me. It was because my father realized his helplessness longer to restrain British influence, that he disappeared. It is war, Monsieur."

"But not between us," I insisted, shocked at the picture. "Mademoiselle, come with me. There is nothing left to hold you to this life among savages. With your father dead, why should you continue to bury yourself in these woods? You have education, refinement, gentleness; why should you not go now, before war breaks along the border?"

"And desert my people?"

"But they are not your people; you are white, not red. That small drop of Indian blood in your veins does not make you a Wyandot. You have nothing else



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in common with them. Why not be yourself, choosing life among those of your own race?"

I thought she hesitated, and I grasped her hand more closely, the hot blood leaping in my veins. In the dim light I could see her lowered face, the eyes downcast.

"No, Monsieur," she said at last, very low. "It is good of you to think thus of me, but — but I cannot do that. You must not urge. 'T is true there is more French blood in me than Indian, and I love those things to which you invite. They tempt me to be false to my mother's people, but — but, Monsieur, I have a duty to which I am sacredly pledged. The Wyandots need me — more now that my father is gone than ever before. They are my people; I was born to them, and played as a child in their villages. They love me, trust me, and I help them by teaching them the Christ. To desert them would be to desert Him. I cannot do that, Monsieur, merely to gratify myself."

"But have I no call upon you?" I insisted in desperation.

"No, Monsieur," and she was looking at me now with some amazement. "'T is scarce an hour since I believed you a murderer. We do not know each other. Let me trust, and believe in you; do not speak like that."

"I meant nothing wrong, Mademoiselle," I broke in

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hastily, stung by her words of reproof. "You have come to me out of the woods like a new life. I know it is strange, all strange, but there is already something between us that can never be severed."

"Is there, Monsieur?"

"Yes; race makes no difference. I thought it did once. When you said back there in the shadow of the stockade that you were a Wyandot it was as if you struck me a blow in the face. I swore then I would think of you no more, yet, even that night, you were in my dreams, and ever since your face has been in my memory."

I felt her handclasp tighten on mine, although her body remained motionless.

"I did not think you would speak like that, Monsieur," she said gravely, her glance sweeping the two dim figures beside the canoe. "I do not wish you to say such things to me. I am an Indian, you an American — an officier, Monsieur. You forget, but I do not. We meet once, twice, and you talk to me as the English do to women of my people. Have I given you cause to believe me a light-o'-love? At first I thought you a spy; then a traitor, later a murderer. Then when Monsieur Brady told me the truth, I endeavored to save you. I — I had even begun to like you, to wish you well, and now you ruin all."

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“ You do not believe me in earnest? ”

“ I! how can I, Monsieur? I think you jest, you amuse yourself. Let us stop it all now. You go back to your people, I to mine, and we will both forget. No! do not say more! I will not listen. Come with me to the boat.”

I followed her down the bank, words burning on my lips she gave me no chance to speak, for she moved with quick decision. The two men had the canoe turned over, at the very edge of the water, and the scout was upon his knees in the sand. He looked up hastily at our approach.

“ I reckon we stay here, Miss,” he said soberly. “ Somebody has smashed a hole through the bottom with a stone.”

She uttered a little cry of alarm, leaning over his shoulder.

“ A hole! how could that be? Surely it was no accident! ”

He arose to his feet, brushing off his knees.

“ That ’s what I told the Dutchman, though neither of us could find the rock. I reckon the Englisher did that job; he had it all figured out, and meant to keep us yere.”

I saw her look up at the man’s face, and then about in bewilderment.

The Barrier Between

“You think that — why?”

“Cause it seems ter me nat’ral. I reckon it’s ’bout what I would a done if I was in his fix. He had proof against us, if he could get some Injuns along as witnesses. Nobody would ever believe what we said, or even wait ter listen. All he had to do was catch us yere, charge us with murder, an’ turn them devils loose. That would let him out slick as a whistle.”

She stood erect, one hand pressed against her temple.

“Then — then what is to be done?” she questioned blankly, “why — what — quick, look there!” She was bending forward and pointing out at the lake. Some dark, moving object was visible in the water only a few yards from shore.

CHAPTER XVIII

WE REGAIN THE HOUSE

BRADY flung forward his rifle, yet hesitated, fearing to fire. Whatever it might be — animal or man — the thing was coming directly toward us, swimming noiselessly. Then it rose up, and we saw a face, with long, stringy locks of wet hair dangling to the shoulders. It was a man beyond doubt, yet for the instant I could not determine whether red or white. As he stood there sunk to his armpits in water, he beheld us for the first time, and there burst from his lips a sudden, guttural exclamation of alarm. With the strange sound Schultz leaped forward, lumbering against me as he passed, and splashed his way out toward the fellow, uttering some exclamation in his native tongue. He reached him, the two voices greeting each other.

“Well!” exclaimed Brady in disgust. “If it ain’t another Dutchman. Come in here, you!”

The two waded ashore onto the sand, Schultz’s heavy hand grasping his companion’s arm, and helping him along. I saw a face white and ghastly in the starlight, lean, smooth-shaven, looking emaciated against the

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long, dank hair, the eyes bright with fanaticism. He was a tall, spare man, shaking so he could hardly stand. The very sight of him aroused my sympathy.

“Don’t be afraid,” I said soothingly. “We’re all white. How did you come here?”

His eyes looked at me as I spoke; then shifted to Schultz’s face in silent questioning. The latter was breathing hard, but managed to explain.

“He not talk English ver’ goot, Mynheer. I tell you vat he say mit me — he vos a Dutch preacher; yaw, mine Gott; yust over py mine own countries; he vos named Adrian Block.”

“Did he swim all the way?” asked Brady grinning, but Schultz kept his eyes fastened on me, held by the one thought to which he sought to give utterance.

“He vos Moravian, Mynheer; vot you call Mis-son-ary—so? He von month in dees country, an’ know only to preach.”

The girl leaning forward, interrupted with a whisper:

“I recognize the man, Monsieur; he was the prisoner I told you of in the Indian camp — the Protestant.”

Block saw her then for the first time, his eyes seeming to fairly pop out of his head, his hands uplifted, his lips pouring forth a torrent of unintelligible sentences. Both Brady and I gripped and shook him.

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“Stop that!” I commanded. “This is no Dutch church. Schultz come here; what in Heaven’s name is the matter with this idiot? Has he gone crazy? What is he trying to say?”

“He’s much afraid of her, Mynheer — that she bewitch him mid dem beads — yaw; dot vos der way of it. He see her in der Injun camp, and not know why she here now.”

“Oh, that’s it? Well you tell him. Do n’t waste your words, man; we have no time to stand here arguing with this fanatic. Find out, if you can, how he got away, and what those red demons are up to.”

There was a gruff growling of tongues, Brady still holding fast to the preacher’s wet collar, while I turned about to look at Mademoiselle, who was yet staring at him curiously.

“An odd fish we’ve hooked,” I muttered in explanation. “He thinks you an emissary of the devil.”

“I, Monsieur? *Mon Dieu*, why the man think that!” and she made the sign of the cross. “Nevaire I see this kind before. Over there he pray, pray, pray, yet do nothing. Was it religion, Monsieur?”

“That is what he calls it. They will not fight — his sort. It’s a wonder to me he ever ran away. Well, Schultz what’s the story?”

“They lef’ him only mit one guard, an’ after while,

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dot fellow he fall asleep. Den he got loose mid his bonds, an' creep down mit der shore of der lake where a boat wus. So he driff out on der water; but der boat leak, an' go down, leaving him mit nottings. Dot vas it, Mynheer. Den he swim som' an' pray mooch, an' so com' here mit us, already."

"Where did the Indians go?"

"Up mit der lake shore — so like dis," waving his hand.

"All of them? the two white men also?"

Schultz repeated the question, and Block answered, never once removing his eyes from Mademoiselle.

"He know not what became of der little man; he see him not for long while, but der big man he go mit der Injuns — yaw, he tells dem der way, an' talk all der time."

"We have got the situation clear enough," concluded Brady, coolly. "Whoever that red-coat is, he evidently knows the best way to this island, and the fix we're in. So far as I can see there is nothing left us but to fight. We can't get away now; the boat is useless, and those Injuns have blocked the ford. That's exactly where they are now, watchin' fer us to attempt to cross. The only question is, Where can we hold out the longest? I'm fer goin' back to the house."

"And I also," I said, deciding instantly, and as

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quickly assuming command. "There is small chance of our holding out long against those fellows, but we'll do the best we can. What about you, Mademoiselle?"

"I go with you," she answered quietly.

"Against your own people?"

"Those are not my people! They are outlaws, renegades, led by the murderer of my father."

"Then let us go back; every moment lost will count against us. Pick up the packs. Brady, you lead off; Schultz, take care of the preacher and keep his tongue still."

We moved forward one by one through the shadows, until we came once more to the edge of the opening. There was still no perceptible sign of daybreak in the sky, yet it was surely near at hand. The urgent necessity for action, the impossibility longer of avoiding actual conflict, had aroused me thoroughly. I no longer doubted myself, or asked advice. I felt the responsibility of command and became insistent. I noticed the girl's eyes turned upon me, as if she also recognized the difference in my bearing, the abruptness in my voice. Yet I hardly thought of this at the time, my eyes being concentrated on what should be done next. My eyes swept the clearing, marking no movement, no sign that the house had been approached since our leaving.

"They are not here yet," I said, "but we must

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no risk of being surprised in the open. Go forward, Brady, and make sure; yes, leave the pack lying here."

He stole forward cautiously, a mere gliding figure, quickly disappearing in the gloom, noiseless as a shadow. We remained motionless at the edge of the wood, and I grasped the girl's arm as she stood next me, almost unconscious of the action.

"You need not fear," she ventured. "They will not come until daylight."

"That's Indian custom," I answered, glancing aside at her face. "But these fellows have a white leader — two of them, for Girty is quite likely in the game."

"I rather doubt that, Monsieur," earnestly. "The preacher said he had disappeared. He has no stomach for fighting, unless cornered."

"Where is he then?"

"Traveling alone to Sandusky; that is my guess."

I waited a moment, then bent over her.

"I do not really know whether I am glad or sorry, that you decided to remain."

"Monsieur!"

"You would have been safe with those Indians; safer still with Girty on the trail north. We shall have to fight for our lives."

"Think you I could companion again with that man?" she exclaimed passionately.

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"And is that all? Was there no friendship for us in your choice? none for me?"

She turned her head and faced me.

"I cannot say yes, or no, Monsieur. The thought was not mine. It was the dead, not the living, who called to me; I cannot desert the body of my father. It is true you are unjustly attacked; there has been as yet no war declared between my people and the Americans. More, you travel to the Wyandots with a message of peace. I belong with you, not with those outlaws. That is all, Monsieur."

Her answer was truthful; I could read that in her face. Only a clear conception of duty had actuated her decision to remain. If, beneath this, there lingered the slightest personal interest in me as a man, there was no outward indication. Apparently my hasty words had already been forgotten, blotted out. Perhaps she did not realize their full significance, but held them as merely the outburst of impulse. She was an Indian, I a white man; experience, no doubt, had long ago taught her what this difference in race meant. To her ears my protestations were but wasted breath, unworthy serious thought. This knowledge came to me in full force as we stood there — she had forgiven and forgotten; her decision to remain and share our fate, was in no way stimulated by any personal interest in me. I was to her

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merely an American, an enemy to whom her honor of protection had been pledged. There was nothing more I could say; she had answered calmly and clearly. I stood rebuked and silenced, impetuous words trembling on my lips, but unuttered, my glance wandering from her face out into the surrounding night.

“You understand now, Monsieur?”

“Yes,” I answered, shortly enough, for I was hurt. “We are merely allies against these outlaws. That is your meaning, is it not?”

“Yes,” very quietly. “I wished you to know.”

The two Hollanders were sitting on the ground behind us, growling eagerly into each other's ears. In front was the open clearing, with the dim outline of the log house beyond. There was no appearance of light in the sky overhead, studded with stars, and yet it seemed to me as though objects about began to show more distinctly. Her eyes, however, were keener than mine.

“The scout is coming back, Monsieur,” she whispered, pointing forward. “See, to the left of the house.”

He approached us noiselessly enough, yet with no effort at concealment.

“They have not crossed to the island yet,” he reported, “but are opposite, concealed in the woods.”

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There would be no chance to get away. They know that, and are simply waiting daylight to close in. I was as far as the shore of the lake."

"The house then offers our only possibility of defense?"

"There is no other protection, sir."

"Then we fight it out there. Bring the packs, men. No, Mademoiselle, I will carry that. Lead off, Brady."

The interior was exactly as we left it, a few red embers on the hearth alone shedding spectral light about the main room, as we groped our way forward. There were heavy wooden bars to fit across the doors, and I secured these as soon as I deposited my pack on the floor.

"Mademoiselle," I said, staring about at the blank walls in some perplexity. "You know this place better than any of us; surely it was not erected here in the wilderness without some provision for defense in case of attack. Are those walls solid?"

"No, Monsieur; they were made tight, so no gleam of light would ever show without, but there are gun-ports here — see."

She slipped aside a small wooden shutter, fitted ingeniously between the logs, revealing an opening sufficient for a rifle barrel.

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“There are four along this wall, and as many opposite. At the rear you must stand on the bench, so as to fire above the shed roof.”

“Leave that preacher alone, and open them up, Schultz,” I commanded sharply. “There is not light enough here now to show without. Now, Brady, see if there are any extra guns in the shack, or ammunition. Lay everything out here convenient. A rifle? good! We’ll give that to our Moravian friend; he may be opposed to war on principle, but, by all the gods! he’ll fight now, if Schultz can pound the truth into him. What is that, Mademoiselle? Powder and ball in the big chest; show Brady where it is. This is n’t going to be such a one-sided affair after all. Five of us, counting Block, who may not know which end of the gun to point.”

I looked across at the man sitting dejectedly on the bench, his long, thin face buried in his hands, but his eyes constantly following the movements of the girl as though fascinated.

“Schultz,” I said, thrusting a weapon into his hands. “Teach your friend how to load this; tell him I’ll skin him alive unless he does what he’s told. A preacher! well what do I care for that? You go, and do what I say.”

He moved forward to his task reluctantly enough,

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but I had other things in mind, and paid small attention to what occurred between them. Brady and his assistant were busily engaged. I picked up my rifle and looked to its priming carefully; then lifted the bar protecting the front entrance.

"I am going to scout outside," I announced, "and see when those fellows cross over."

Brady shaded his eyes to stare across at me through the gloom.

"You'd better let me go."

"No; I'll try it alone; get everything ready, and leave the bar down."

"You will be careful, Monsieur?" There was an unconcealed note of anxiety in the voice that caused me to glance back at her quickly in surprise.

"Be assured of that, Mademoiselle," I returned. "I know the duty of an ally," and stepped without, closing the door behind me.



CHAPTER XIX

I FIGHT A RED-COAT

A SINGLE glance about assured me that daybreak was approaching. The stars were paling overhead, and there was already a barely perceptible tinge of light to the atmosphere; I could see the tracery of limbs along the border of the surrounding forest, and the short grass blades underfoot. Yet it was dark enough still to give concealment, and I ran hastily forward to the edge of the woods where the gloom held as dense as ever. I waited there a moment listening, crouched against the trunk of a great tree, my heart thumping so hard I could hear it in the silence. The house in the center of the clearing appeared black, deserted. The fire embers emitted no light through the small gun ports, and no smoke spirals appeared above the chimney.

Convinced that my coming had not been perceived, and that no Indian scouts were watching the cabin, I pressed forward into the depths of the woods, obliged to proceed slowly because of the darkness. So cautious was I, lest some noise might betray my presence, that I was some moments in passing through the fringe of

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trees to where I could obtain view of the lake, and the dark line of shore opposite.

I emerged somewhat to the right of the ford, and crept out between the roots of a big tree overhanging the water, from which point of vantage I could see in every direction. It was not light, yet a slight radiance from the slowly brightening sky found faint reflection along the surface of the lake so that objects were discernible to eyes trained by the long night vigils. Things appeared out of proportion, grotesque, yet I could distinguish any movement, even at some considerable distance. Nothing, however, appeared within range of vision to suggest human life; the wooded shore opposite remained silent, and seemingly unoccupied. That Indians were there, securely hidden in the coverts, hoping to trap us in an effort at escape, was altogether beyond question. They would wait there in silence until daylight, hopeful that we would endeavor to escape, and thus wander into their ambushade. If we failed to appear then they would cross to the island and attack us. That was Indian strategy, to rely upon surprise rather than numbers; treachery in preference to open warfare.

To better satisfy myself that none had already crossed, I moved slowly along the bank, under concealment of the trees, seeking the imprint of feet on the

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soft earth. I had advanced thus for perhaps a hundred yards, passing beyond where we had attained land the evening before, when I suddenly came to a halt, sinking to my knees, and staring forward across a slight opening in the forest growth. At first I was not sure that what I saw was actually a man, but as the object moved toward me, all doubt vanished. He was not only a man, but a white man; at least he was not clothed as an Indian; and, as he stepped forth into the open, more clearly revealed for an instant, I could have sworn that he wore a uniform coat, with buttons that gleamed dully in the twilight. He looked a giant, a great, hulking outline, but stepped lightly enough, not the slightest sound betraying his cat-like movements as he came steadily onward, with head bent forward, his rifle advanced. I felt sure of his identity almost at once; surely he could be no other than the British agent, whom Mademoiselle held guilty of her father's murder, the man who masqueraded under my own name. I felt my blood grow hot with anger. He would pass within a yard of me; he was alone, seeking his way, endeavoring to plan how he should lead his savages to an assault. If I could get him it would be half the battle.

I rose silently to my feet, hidden behind the trunk of a tree, and waited, gripping my long rifle by its bar-

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rel. I had no wish to fire, because of the alarm. Indians were on the other shore waiting a signal; there might even be others scouting these woods. A shot would bring them upon us, possibly before I could escape; my passage back to the house might be blocked. Besides I felt no fear of the fellow if we once came to hand-grips. Big as he was I knew the game, and had confidence in my strength and skill; then I possessed the advantage of surprise — I could strike before the man even realized his danger.

I watched him closely, peering about the smooth bark of the tree, one foot advanced ready for a spring. He came on cautiously as an Indian, not even rustling the leaves as he passed, and paused, every step or two, to listen for some warning noise. His actions proved that he possessed no knowledge of our movements, or plans; that he feared no encounter. It occurred to me that he might be ignorant of our number; that his present purpose was to find out how many we were. He crossed the open space, drawing closer to me at every step, yet his head was bent forward concealing his face. With one hand he parted the fringe of bushes, and stepped into their cover. He was in the dark now, a mere ill-defined shadow, yet so close I could have touched him with my gun barrel. Some instinct of wild life must have told him of my presence, for he

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stopped still, peering about suspiciously, his rifle flung forward. I dared not delay, yet swift as I was, his quick eye caught my movement. The gun butt swinging through the air met his rifle barrel, slid along the steel, and struck a glancing blow. He reeled back, dazed, half stunned, dropping his own weapon, yet seizing the muzzle of mine to keep from falling. I endeavored to jerk it free, but he hung to it desperately. Scarce knowing how it was done, we were together, grappling each other, the disputed gun kicked aside under our feet.

He swore once, a mad English oath, but I choked it back, clutching his throat in iron grip, straining to force him to the fulcrum of my knee. Then he found grasp of my hair, hurling my head back until the agony compelled me to let go. I struck him square in the face, a blow that would have dropped an ordinary man, but he only snarled, and closed in, grappling my wrist with one hand, the other fumbling for a knife at his belt. By God's mercy I got it first; yet could not strike, for he had me foul, gripped to him as if held in a vise. I could feel the muscles of his chest, the straining sinews of his arms as they crushed me. I gave back, down, my limbs trembling beneath the force with which he flung the whole weight of his body against mine. I had met my match, and I knew it. Yet the knowledge

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gave me fresh strength, fiercer determination. The very conception of defeat crazed me; my brain held no thought save a mad impulse to conquer him, show him who was the better man!

I wrenched aside, breaking that strangle-hold by sheer strength and wrestling skill. Again we gripped, face to face, our muscles straining as we sought advantage of hold. My hunting shirt gave, tearing apart like brown paper, giving me a scant second as his grasp slipped. It was enough, I had him locked at my hip; yet strain as I would his weight baffled every effort. Back and forth we struggled, crushing the bushes underfoot, our breath coming in sobs, every muscle aching under the awful strain. Neither dared loosen a finger grip. Our eyes glared into each other with savage hate. How it would have ended God knows, had the fellow not slipped on a brush root, so that the added weight of my body flung him headlong. Even as he went over, bearing me along with him, his head crashing into the side of a tree as he fell, his lips gave vent to one wild cry. Then he lay still, motionless, a huge black shape outstretched on the ground in the ghastly light of dawn.

I got to my knees, scarcely realizing what had happened, peering down into the upturned face, one hand raised to strike if the man moved. There was not a

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motion. I bent lower — the eyes were closed, blood dripped from the hair. I turned the head, so as to better perceive the features — surely this was not the man for whom I had been mistaken! He was big enough, but marked by dissipation, and wore a black moustache. As I live there was not a resemblance. Who was he then? I got to my feet and searched out my rifle in the tangled brush. Some noise reached me — the splash of water, the echo of a far-off voice. They were coming, the Indians; they had heard his last cry; they were already crossing the ford. I hesitated an instant, staring down at him, listening intently that I might be sure, I turned and ran swiftly toward the clearing. It was already gray dawn, and even in the dense woods I could see to avoid the trees. Behind me rang out a wild whoop of savagery; they had discovered the body! I glanced back across my shoulder, as I ran; burst forth into the clearing, and, reckless of all else, raced for the house. I fell once, my foot slipping on a hummock, but was up instantly, plunged at the door, and leaped within. Brady caught me, thrust the wooden bars down into their sockets, and half dragged me over to the bench.

“What is it? are they coming?” he asked.

It was darker in there than outside, and I could barely perceive his face.

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"Yes," I panted. "They are just behind me. I — I had to run for it. Get — get to the stations; I'll — I'll tell you later what happened out there."

He left me, and my eyes, accustoming themselves to the gloom, began to discern objects in the room. I got to my feet, still breathing heavily from exhaustion, yet with brain active. Brady was close beside me, kneeling on the floor, his eye at an opening between the logs.

"See anything?"

"There are figures moving at the edge of the wood," he answered, without glancing around, "but they won't come out so I can tell what they look like. The way your clothes are torn you must have had a fight?"

"I did — with the big fellow in a red jacket. He's lying out there with a cracked skull. That is why those fellows do n't know what to do — they're short a leader."

I got to my feet, and stared about, seeking Mademoiselle. She was beyond the table, and our eyes met.

"You — you killed him, Monsieur?"

"I do not know; I threw him, his head struck against a tree, and he lay still. I had to run; only he was not your man, Mademoiselle; he looked no more like me than you do."

"You — you are sure?"

"Yes; I saw his face. It was lighter out there, and

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he lay flat on his back. He was big enough, if anything larger even than I am, and gave me a fight for it until his foot slipped. He had black hair and moustache, and his face was full of purple veins. He looked French to me."

"Yet wore a red coat?"

"Ay! and swore in English, the one oath I heard. You know anyone like that?"

There was a shot without, and the chug of a ball as it struck against the logs; then another, and Brady's voice tense with strain:

"They're goin' to try it, an' ther's sure some Injuns out ther; the whol' edge o' the woods is alive with 'em. Get ready now! This ain't goin' ter be no slouch o' a fight."

I sprang across to the nearest opening, yet stopped to be sure of the arrangement within. The gray light stealing in through the small firing holes failed to give distinct view across the room.

"Where are you, Schultz?"

"Here mit der front."

"Oh, all right; what has become of your friend?"

"He vas to load; he do dot, but not fight. Maybe dot help some, do n't it?"

I saw the man then, his white face showing dimly, and before him three rifles lying across the table.

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“ You found more guns? ”

Brady glanced aside to answer.

“ The girl did ; she knew where they were — ah ! now the rumpus has begun ! ”

Reports, blending almost into a volley, sounded without, the thud of lead striking the logs in dull echo. One stray ball found entrance, splintered an edge of the bench, and flattened out against the stone chimney. I dropped to one knee, my eyes at the opening.

CHAPTER XX

WE MEET THEM WITH RIFLES

SMALL as my peek hole was, just large enough to admit a rifle barrel, it yet afforded clear view to east and south of the house. The gray, pallid light of early dawn enabled me to see across the clearing, and into the edge of the surrounding forest. The Indians had not yet broken from cover, but were hovering among the trees, occasionally firing at the house, but careful not to expose themselves. I could perceive dark forms flitting about, more like shadows than flesh and blood, gliding from tree to tree. The constant movement gave me the impression of force, and caused me to believe they contemplated an open attack. No doubt our silence puzzled, for while they were assured of our presence, they possessed no real knowledge as to our numbers, or how well we were armed. Yet, even at that, they must be aware that we were only a small party; this could have been ascertained from our trail, and the Englishman no doubt had partial view of us when he stole back after his coat. Their delay and hesitation was probably mere Indian caution; besides they were of different tribes, possibly without leader-

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ship since my combat with that white renegade. Yet, merciful God! there were enough of them! They could crush us easily if they only dared. It was mystery that held them back — the grim look of the dark, silent cabin, the big log walls, the loopholes invisible, the uncertainty of what hid behind. Our failure to reply to their volleys gave no encouragement; they had learned to respect the rifles of white men, and dreaded to stir up a hornet's nest.

As I gazed, striving to determine what the various movements meant, and from which direction to anticipate final attack, an Indian crept out into the open, crawling on his stomach like a snake through the grass. Others followed, until a dozen wriggling forms began to advance inch by inch, hugging the ground so closely I could scarcely perceive their movement. I heard a slight sound within, as Brady quietly thrust forward his rifle.

“Wait a moment,” I called to him, not venturing to glance about, but holding up one hand in warning, “it is a long shot yet, and we must make every one tell. Wait until the first fellow is half across; then pick your man. Who is at the loophole beyond us?”

“It is I, Monsieur.”

“You, Mademoiselle! Hadn't you better let Schultz take that place?”

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“An’ why, Monsieur?” — the soft voice coolly indignant. “Am I afraid? Am I unable to shoot? Why should I not stay?”

“Those are Indians,” I began, “I thought —”

“Bah! my people! those robbers and cowards. I told you there is no Wyandot among them. You will see, Monsieur.”

“All right then. I take that first one, and you pick the two to the left. Fire when I give the word. Schultz lay out one of those extra guns beside each of us. Ready now; the fellows who are not hit will jump and run for the woods as soon as we fire; give them a second shot before they can reach cover.”

The one in advance, whom I had picked for a shot, had on a war-bonnet, the feathers plainly visible above the grass, making it easier for me to mark his progress. The others slightly behind were not so easily distinguished, yet I was certain there were no more than a dozen altogether in the party, and we were being approached from no other direction. The apparently solid walls of log, windowless, had doubtless inspired the warriors with hope of crawling up unobserved. Once close in they would be safe enough, and could creep around to the door. Back in the forest shadow the main body clustered, waiting the success of this effort, to rush forward and storm their way within.

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Never before had I realized how stealthily an Indian can move on such mission; with what ingenuity he can find concealment. They must have drawn themselves forward by grasping the tough grass roots, for no head was uplifted, no raised arm visible. Only the slight disturbance of the grass made me certain as to their stealthy advance. The feathers of the war-bonnet, worn possibly as a guidance to those behind, were alone conspicuous. They came on slowly, cautiously. Half way across the clearing was the white stump of a fallen tree. The war-bonnet made directly for this, and, once partially sheltered, lifted his head to glance back. I covered him with the sight of my rifle.

“Ready now!” I commanded sharply. “Let them have it — fire!”

The three guns spoke as one, the smoke of their discharge for an instant blotting out the scene, yet not before I saw war-bonnet crumple up beside the stump, and a warrior just behind him leap into the air with both arms flung out. I gripped the fresh gun beside me, and fired again into a huddle of fleeing figures, hearing the sharp crack of the two others, as the blue smoke blew back into my eyes. One Indian fell forward clawing at the ground; another staggered wildly, yet kept his feet. A chorus of yells rent the air, and the fleeing forms vanished into the fringe of woods. A fusillade

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of bullets chugged harmlessly into the protecting logs, blue puffs of smoke rising between the distant trees, but nothing remained visible for us to fire at.

The cabin was dense with powder smoke, which found no outlet except up the chimney. The preacher on his knees was busily loading our discarded guns, and praying fervently as did so. I could see the movement of his lips, and hear the monotonous muttering of his voice. Brady straightened up, wiping the perspiration from his forehead with his sleeve. As his gray eyes met mine through the circling smoke, they smiled cheerily.

“We made our mark that time, Master Hayward,” he said grimly, loading his own rifle. “Although our preacher friend gave me an overcharge of powder. There’s one Injun out there who ought to be grateful for it. I counted five down, an’ the fellow I winged won’t fight again today.”

“Five killed!”

“Ay! the girl got her share. You have some skill with a rifle, Mademoiselle.”

She picked up one of the newly loaded guns, laying down her own upon the bench, her eyes meeting his frankly, and then turning to my face. I thought I read in their depths a regret, as though she doubted my approval.

“It is not pleasant to take human life. Monsieur,”

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she answered softly. "I am not Indian enough to love bloodshed. But — but this was justified, and so I aimed true."

"We are grateful, not critical," I made haste to say. "We are fighting for our lives. Think you they have had enough, Brady?"

The scout shook his head, leaning forward to glance again out of his loop-hole.

"Not if I know Injuns. Did yer hear that yell? They 're mad now, an' crazy for revenge; only they 'll be more cautious next time; ain't that it, Miss?"

"It depends upon who leads them," she answered slowly. "They can be reckless enough if urged to it. I think the next attack will be open."

"Because of white leadership?"

"Partially — yes, Monsieur. You did not think the Englishman killed."

"No; only stunned. I had no time to make sure, but he merely fell against the tree; it was no blow sufficient to kill a man."

"And there are other reasons," she went on, glancing toward Brady who was still gazing without earnestly. "They will be savage for revenge, and they know how few are defending the house. Beyond doubt they have already discovered your trail on the other shore; our firing from three loop-holes will serve to convince them

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that only the three are here; they know nothing of where I am, or where the preacher went."

"He will not help us much."

She looked at him, smiling at his long-drawn lugubrious face.

"*Hélas!* not much of a warrior." Her words broken from excitement. "Never before did I meet such a white man. Why he pray so, all the time, Monsieur?"

"Afraid to die, I reckon."

"'T is droll; an' yet he think he go to Heaven? It should make him glad; was it not so? And he not believe to fight? It was in my Bible to fight, most every page. We have the same Bible; how he find in it what I not find? different as what the priests teach?"

"Do not ask me," I replied, amused by her earnestness. "Perhaps he can tell; he looks as if it would be a great relief to preach you a sermon."

"Him! he cannot talk — no! he only grunt — *houf, houf*, like a pig. I know nothing he say. Why you suppose the man look at me like that, Monsieur? He think me maybe a savage, a mad woman?"

I laughed at the expression on her face as she looked toward him. To me he was simply a wild-eyed zealot, half crazed by religious frenzy, with only one idea floating about in his cracked brain.

"No doubt you appear as strange to him as he does

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to you. There is nothing in common between you, either in religion or race. You represent to his mind all that is evil in the world. You are of French blood, a papist, a consorter with savages — everything he has been taught to despise from childhood. Could the poor fellow speak either your language or mine, we would have a denunciation breathing of hell fire. 'T is God's mercy we are spared."

She laughed, her eyes dancing with sudden gleam of mischief.

"He hate me — the man? He hold it evil that I make prayer with the rosary?" and her hands fingered the beads at her throat. "I show him, I tell him, what the Bible tell me. Monsieur Schultz, you will interpret here."

The soldier turned at the sound of his name, and crossed the room in response to her gesture. All eagerness, her fingers clasped his arm, her voice speaking swiftly, yet tripping oddly over unfamiliar words:

"Monsieur, you talk the Dutch, the English, but not the French — is it not so? Ver' good! I tell you in the English vot I am; how I pray the good God; how I believe, an' you tell it to him vat I say in the Dutch. You hear, you understand, Monsieur?"

Schultz's round, good-humored face, plainly exhibiting his bewilderment, turned questioningly toward me.

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The girl noting his hesitancy, shook her head, and gave utterance to a French exclamation.

"She wishes to explain the nature of her religion to your friend over there," I said slowly. "She asks you to listen to what she says, and then translate her words into your own language."

"To him, mit mine tongue — Mynheer Block? Gott mit Himmel! dot vould do no good. He dink her der child ov der tevil! he stop up his ears mit both hands — see, like dot. But I tol' him; I say to him just vot she say, only she talk slow, so I hear der words better."

He sat down on the bench, rifle between his knees, his blue eyes on her face, patiently waiting. The perplexed preacher never moved, never relaxed his stern features, staring at the two of them, as if already suspecting their purpose. Mademoiselle made a little gesture with her hands, and began to speak, but almost with her first word, the deep voice of Block interrupted. Schultz, his troubled eyes wandering from face to face, answered by a grumbling sentence, then reverted into English:

"He vant to know vat it all vos. Maybe I told him furst, don't it?"

"*Oui, oui!* you say it to him."

Schultz started bravely enough, one hand laid heavily on the preacher's shoulder, as though to hold him steady, slowly ejaculating the message in Dutch. I

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saw the expression of bewilderment upon Block's face turn to horror. With uplifted hands he suddenly gave tongue, the words tripping over each other. It was all Schultz could do to stop him, but at last the fellow sank back against the table, breathing heavily. The soldier wiped the perspiration from his red face, still eyeing his countryman.

"I vos mad mit a religion like dot," he exclaimed fervently. "I not told you vot he said; he go crazy, an' make me mad; he say dos dings I not vould told you. But he leesen now. I tell him I kill him, here, now, mit dis gun, if he not keep still. *Mein Gott!* I vos just as good Dutcher as dot man. Why he call me son of Belial — hey? I tinks he keep still now, or I shoke him gut; he find out vot son I am — maybe yes. You talk mit me, an' I told him. If dot fellow don't shut up quick mit his mouth I smash it. Vat do I care vot he vos! Vy he calls me dot — hey!"

As he ceased from sheer lack of breath, she began to speak. I heard the first few words, earnest, pleading. She was very serious, apparently she saw nothing in the scene to amuse any one, her whole mind concentrated on bringing to these men some measure of her own faith. She was the missionary, forgetful of all else, even the peril in which we were, in her awakened eagerness to tell again the story of the Cross. Her

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face brightened, her eyes darkened; there was about her a strange new dignity, as of one speaking by authority. Somehow as I stood there looking at her, listening to her broken words, watching the changing expression on her face, the flush on her cheeks, as she paused to permit the soldier to slowly translate, her lips parted with eagerness to proceed, she was no longer a girl, a wild thing of the woods, bubbling over with animal life, but a woman, earnest, sincere; one to be loved and trusted — one to be true to the death. I had forgotten also as I stood there, looking and listening, the memory of where we were. The dark forests, the savages hemming us in, the desperate situation almost without hope, vanished. For the instant I thought only of her, heard only her voice.

Yet it was merely for the instant. I have no recollection now of a word she uttered. It was not so much what was spoken as the manner, the reverence of voice, the sincerity of face and expression. She had unconsciously revealed herself. In her eagerness to defend her religion, to bring her own faith to others, she had given me a glimpse of her very soul. Hereafter she might laugh and play, her eyes dance with merriment, but I knew now what was beneath — the heart of a woman. Then, as though aroused from a dream to the reality of life, I heard my name called. It was Brady, glancing about from his loop-hole, and motioning me

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with his hand. I crossed hurriedly to join him, again the soldier.

"What is it? Can you guess what they mean to do?"

"No, but they seem to be forming there to the right; bend down here; see, back among those trees. Ay! and your red-coat is among the devils, I've caught glimpse of him twice."

CHAPTER XXI

WITHIN THE CABIN

WITH eye held close against the opening I possessed a sight of the full length of the clearing. It was bright daylight now, although the sun had not appeared above the trees, and the eye could not penetrate far into the darker shadows of the wood. The clearing itself was deserted, but the dead Indians lay where they had fallen, no effort having been made to recover the bodies. They were well within rifle shot from the house, and those who had been fortunate enough to escape our fusillade, were sufficiently impressed with the fact that we were not wasting powder and ball. To venture into that clearing plainly meant death. The dead could wait for darkness, or until the living had achieved revenge.

I grasped the situation in a glance. Brady moved to the next loop-hole, and knelt down. Behind me I heard the rumble of Schultz's voice as he translated slowly, carefully Mademoiselle's broken English, but my mind was concentrated now on other things. Opposite me I could distinguish an Indian or two, skulking in the tree shadows, well out of range — sentries, no doubt,

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stationed to guard against any possibility of our escape. Yes, and there were others also along the fringe of forest to the left, although only occasionally did a half naked form flit into view. The only place, however, where there was any evidence of numbers, was well to the right. What was going on there was not altogether clear, as my eyes failed to penetrate the thick growth of trees. But there was movement, and enough was revealed to convince me that there was being gathered the main body of our besiegers. They were either in council, or else massing for an attack. Yet it was not at all likely that a council would be held so close, almost, if not quite within rifle shot. The other supposition was far the more probable. Indeed, as I stared at the dimly revealed figures, clustered together, or moving swiftly about, this impression deepened. They were forming for assault, for a swift rush forward, trusting that the suddenness of their attack would put them across that open space without great danger. They had tried stealth and failed; now they would try recklessness. The very choice was evidence of white leadership. An Indian leader would be patient and wait for darkness to creep up unseen, or plan to starve us into surrender. Only a white man, eager and dominant, would thus risk lives in open assault.

It occurred to me they were unaware that we could

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perceive their preparation. They had no thought of exposing themselves until they burst forth from cover, yelling in the fierce charge. It was, indeed, only a stray ray of sunlight penetrating through the leafy covert, which afforded us a glimpse. We could see but little, merely enough to stimulate suspicion — a sense of numbers, figures moving about restlessly, coming and going across that revealing shaft of sunshine; ay! and once I caught the sudden glow of a red coat. More, the place of gathering told its own story. Here a point of woodland pressed out into the clearing a bit nearer to the house than anywhere else. It shortened the distance of exposure by several yards, and besides faced the corner of the hut, thus interfering with direct fire from within. Master Red-Coat knew his business — 't was a pity I had failed to kill him.

“What do you make of it, Brady?” I asked. “Are they going to rush us?”

“Ay!” quietly enough, but without turning his head, “and soon. The guards are joining those others now. They are getting into line already; Red-Coat is flying about giving orders like a field marshal. Lord! I wish he would come out into the open, where I could get a shot at him, the coward!” he glanced about, for the moment losing his temper. “What are those two Dutch fools jabbering away about back there?”

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“Mademoiselle is explaining her religion.”

“Huh! they ’ll know which one is right soon enough, I reckon, without all that palaver. Here you, Schultz, pick up your rifle, man, and go back to your loop-hole. Break up the meeting, Hayward. There ’s plenty for all of us to do besides talk.”

Apparently neither man heard him, for both were talking together, rolling out their interminable sentences. Schultz was red with wrath, pounding on the table with one huge hand, but the preacher’s face was white as chalk, his eyes blazing. Mademoiselle, helpless in midst of all this turmoil which she had so innocently started, stood back of the bench, staring at the two debaters, with lips parted, breathless, and unable to get in a word. Her bewilderment was apparent, nor could she conceive what had caused all this commotion, this thrashing of arms, and loud declamation. Brady strode forward, a fighting look on his face, and gripped Schultz by the shoulder, swinging him half across the room.

“Maybe you ’ll hear me now, you Dutch nuisance,” he growled fiercely. “Pick up the gun, and get back to your place; and as for you Mister, you ’ll wait until you get out of here to do your preaching. Oh! you don’t know what I say, hey? Come back here, Schultz, and tell him — tell him what I say; tell him we ’ll be fighting for life in five minutes, and if he does n’t

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keep those guns loaded and ready, this is goin' to be his last day on earth. You say that to him, an' say it strong; put it in Dutch so it blisters. What's that, Miss? Yes, them cusses is gittin' ready now, out thar' at the edge of the patch; nigh a hundred, I reckon from what little I kin see."

"Where do you want me?"

"Here where I am," I broke in quickly, and caught her hand in mine. "See! they are coming from that corner. You can cover the field from this loop-hole until they near the house. The assault will be in front: an effort to break in the door, Mademoiselle."

Something in my voice, low, spoken only for her ear, caused her to glance up into my face.

"What is it, Monsieur?"

"You will stay here; you will not attempt to come to us if the Indians succeed in breaking down the door. I must have your promise."

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because such a sacrifice of your life would be unnecessary, and would avail nothing. Those savages will not injure you; they will suppose you were our prisoner. They know you as a Wyandot; at least the Ojibwas and Miamis do, and will protect you from the Shawnees. You have done all possible to help us; but I beg you to keep back when it comes hand to hand."

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“But could I not help you even more by facing those warriors alone?” she insisted. “They know me; they will listen. Even those Shawnees have heard my name, it is spoken in their villages. Not one of them would lay hand on Running Water. Let me go out there, now, Monsieur, and tell them your mission is peace.”

“Mademoiselle,” I said soberly, “we are too late for that. There are five dead warriors lying out there, shot by our rifles. It is not in Indian nature to forgive. Nothing is left us but to fight. No words of yours could control those wild beasts, thirsting for revenge. Am I not right?”

Her eyes fell, hidden behind long lashes.

“I—I do not know,” she admitted falteringly. “But—but there is a chance. I could try; if I was only sure of that white man.”

“Ay! but you are not sure, except that he is probably a murderer and renegade. Such as he are worse savages than any of red skin; they are traitors to their own race, cruel and merciless. No! I will not permit such an attempt. Even if they met you with open hands, it would be but a mask to treachery. It is better that we fight it out like men. Only you must promise me what I ask!”

“Must, Monsieur?”

“The word was ill-chosen — I beg the pledge. I ask

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it as a man appealing to a woman. That is what you are to me, Mademoiselle — a woman; a woman to be protected, sacrificed for, loved. I had forgotten that there is a drop of Indian blood in your veins. Yet now I am glad there is — it will save you from outrage and death. I am glad for another reason — it will enable you to understand what I mean.”

She was looking at me now gravely, her dark eyes wide open.

“You mean that the French and Indian combined will understand, Monsieur?” she questioned. “You wish to fight with free hands, with no thought of danger coming to me?”

“Yes, but that is not all. I cannot bear the thought of your being caught in the ruck, if those devils break through.”

She took my hand in both her own, the rifle against her shoulder.

“Monsieur, I know,” she said slowly. “It is you would have me a woman; that I let the men fight for me. You would think of me so: as one of your race, what you call the gentle. Have I not the thought right?”

I bowed, making some answer.

“You would remember me like that; I would be so in your mind — a woman, not a savage. It would give you happiness to think of me like that?”

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“Yes.”

There was a mist like gathering tears in the uplifted eyes.

“Only my father ever say that to me before,” she whispered softly. “He told me of those he knew in France and loved: of *les grandes dames* who were gentle, and bore our name. I tried to understand, and become as he said. But it was hard, Monsieur. The Indian camp teaches other things. Only from the nuns at Montreal did I learn what he meant; they were gentle, kind; often they shamed me. I see it most beautiful then; in their faces, in what they say to me when I do right. They tell me it please Christ, an’ I think so too. But I forget; back in the woods I become Indian again. I see it no more, only when my father tell over his old stories. I find it easy to hate, and hard to love. What chance have I, Monsieur? It was always Indians where I must live; only the French traders, rough men all, an’ the red-coats who would make love to me, an’ care nothing. I have not known white women; nevaire but in Montreal. So I have thought as the Indian thinks, an’ lived as the Indian lives. It is not my blame that I grew up, Monsieur, wild, reckless, but for the faith of the dear Christ.”

“But you will do as I ask now? You will be the white girl, and not the Wyandot?”

Within the Cabin

“It is your wish, Monsieur? you like me better so?”

“Yes, René, I think I shall fight a better fight if you promise me.”

She looked at me long, as though the words hesitated on her lips; then laughed, tossing her head.

“Then I promise, Monsieur. I will do it because to you it is womanly; I — I want you to think of me like that — a — a woman. Is it not strange, Monsieur! Nevaire before, but when the nuns talked, did I care. It was joy to me to be wild, to be forest born and bred, to be a Wyandot. *Poof!* what do I care for what the whites did! They were not my people; I despised them; they were so many fools. But Monsieur, you have not been like the others; *non, non*, you were deeferent. You spoke to me kind, with sympathy; you — you made me feel I was not just an Indian squaw. You were a man like my father — big, strong, good, and — and you care for me a little; do you not, Monsieur?”

I pressed her hands in my own — how strong and brown they were — then, obeying some swift impulse, bent and kissed them. The red flamed into her cheeks.

“It was like that they do in France, Monsieur, in greeting to their fine ladies,” she said shyly. “I have read it in my father’s books. It was better than to speak, Monsieur. I care too. I care so much it make me afraid.”

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“Not of me surely?”

“I know not; it might be of you, it might be of me. Ah! Mother of God! it is the war whoop!”

“They’re comin’, Hayward!” sang out Brady, a sting in his voice. “For God’s sake hurry!”

I was beside him with a single leap, yet, even as I sprang forward, I saw her drop to her knees, and caught the gleam of her lifted rifle as she thrust its barrel through the loop-hole.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FIGHT IN THE CABIN

IT was still, ominously so, without, after that one wild, piercing cry which yet vibrated in my ears. That it was some signal I comprehended at once, and my mind instantly cleared for action. Brady had his eyes at the opening between the logs.

“Where is Schultz?”

“The other side the door; lay your extra gun here; hell will break loose in a minute.”

I pressed back the wooden shutter, kneeling to look out. For an instant, blinded by the bright light, I saw nothing, then, back in the edge of the timber, I could dimly distinguish the groups of savages, stripped for fighting, their naked bodies gleaming. I knew little then of Indian warfare, yet it occurred to me that the representatives of each tribe were gathered together, and I watched the war-bonnets moving from group to group, as final orders were passed among them. Only once did I catch a glimpse of the red jacket, as its wearer stood at the foot of a huge tree, suddenly outlined by a ray of sun finding opening through the leaves above. As I caught view of him, he flung up one red

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arm, a rifle grasped in his hand, and, as if it was a signal, voice after voice whooped in savage yell, the noise blending into one fierce scream, horrible and menacing. Above even this mad volume of sound there was a shout of command, emphasized by the discharge of a dozen guns. Then out of the smoke, springing forth into the open, I saw the devils come. It was as if hell had broken open and belched them forth. Leaping into the air, shrieking, gesticulating, weapons uplifted, red skins glinting in the sun, black hair streaming on the wind, they sprang forward, racing straight across the open.

“Shawnees!” roared Brady. “Give it to ’em!” and he pulled trigger.

Describe what followed no man could. It was pandemonium, uproar, action, no two seconds the same. I fired twice, three times, leaping back to grasp a gun from the bench, and groping my way through smoke. My eyes smarted, perspiration streamed down my face, I heard the bark of rifles, voices calling within, wild echoing yells without. Over the barrel of my rifle I could distinguish the naked forms of savages leaping amid the smoke wreaths, stumbling, clutching at the air with empty hands. Then all at once they disappeared, vanished as if by magic. Smoke clung to the ground, yet amid its swirls I could perceive no movement; the fierce yelling ceased. What this sudden cessation meant

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I could not guess, but my hand reached instinctively for powder and ball. Then another yell, louder, more deadly with ferocity, smote my ears; bullets chugged into the logs, someone near me gave utterance to a roar of pain, and blows crashed against the barred door. I thrust my rifle forward — a tomahawk struck the protruding barrel as I pulled trigger, and I was flung backward to the floor, blood streaming from my shoulder. I could hardly breathe in the thick smoke; I could see nothing, yet out of the babel of noise I was conscious of Brady's voice yelling an order:

“The door! barricade the door!”

I staggered to my feet and dragged the bench forward; someone gripped the table along with me, and together we hurled it on top, our bodies holding it there. I had dropped my rifle, but someone thrust another into my hand. Blood streamed down into my eyes from a cut on my forehead, blinding me so I saw nothing, yet my fingers touched a hand. Even then I felt the thrill of that contact.

“You, René! Go back! for God's sake, go back!” I sobbed breathlessly.

Just an instant she grasped me, clung to me, her head pressing against my sleeve.

“Yes, Monsieur!”

Then she was gone; I reached out for her, but she was

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no longer there. Tomahawks crashed into the wood of the door; there was a sound of splintering. Brady ripped out an oath, a wild yell of triumph echoed without. Through a nearby loop-hole some savage thrust his gun, and fired blindly, the sudden flash lighting the murk. In the instant red glow I caught a glimpse of the interior — of a body lying before the fire-place, of Schultz still on his knees, rifle in hand, of Brady gripping an axe, his head bare, a ghastly wound on the side of his face. Then the smoke hid all.

Something crashed against the door, shaking the whole cabin; again and again the blow fell, the tough wood bursting asunder, the stout bar bending, yet snapping back once more as the sockets held. Amid the din of shouts, the crash of wood, my eyes met Brady's.

"You 're hurt?"

"Ay!" spitting out blood before he could answer.

"Jaw shot. Where 's the French girl?"

I jerked my hand back in gesture.

"With her father's body, I reckon; she promised me to keep out of it."

"Good," his eyes smiling in spite of the intense pain of his wound. "This is like to be our last fight, boy. Do you hear that? Another blow as hard, and those devils will be at us. Do n't quit until you die."

"I know," and I reached out my hand to him. His

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eyes were cool, grimly smiling, and the clasp of his fingers like a vise.

"We are men," he said slowly. "Do n't forget, lad. They will know about this sometime down on the Ohio — here the fiends come!"

The door crashed in, the great butt of a tree coming with it, and half blocking the passage. All that remained was instantly filled with savage figures. Into the mass of them I fired my last shot, the flame of discharge searing the hideous faces. Then I was hurled to the right, shoulder to shoulder with Schultz, gripping my gun barrel with both hands, swinging it like a flail. I crushed the skull of a savage, drove the butt into the face of another; saw the flash of a tomahawk, held up for an instant the soldier's reeling body, only to throw it aside; smashed the red hand held out to grip him as he went down; drew back a step in search of more room, and, with one mighty sweep of my weapon cleared a circle before me. God! it was ghastly, inhuman, devilish! Those behind pushed and yelled; there was no escape! I saw painted faces, naked shoulders; wild eyes glared hatred into mine; tomahawk and knife flashed. The butt of my gun smashed, I gripped the iron, my teeth clinched, and blood on fire. I had no sense of fear left, no consciousness of peril. I wanted to strike, to kill, to bruise those hideous faces, to bat-

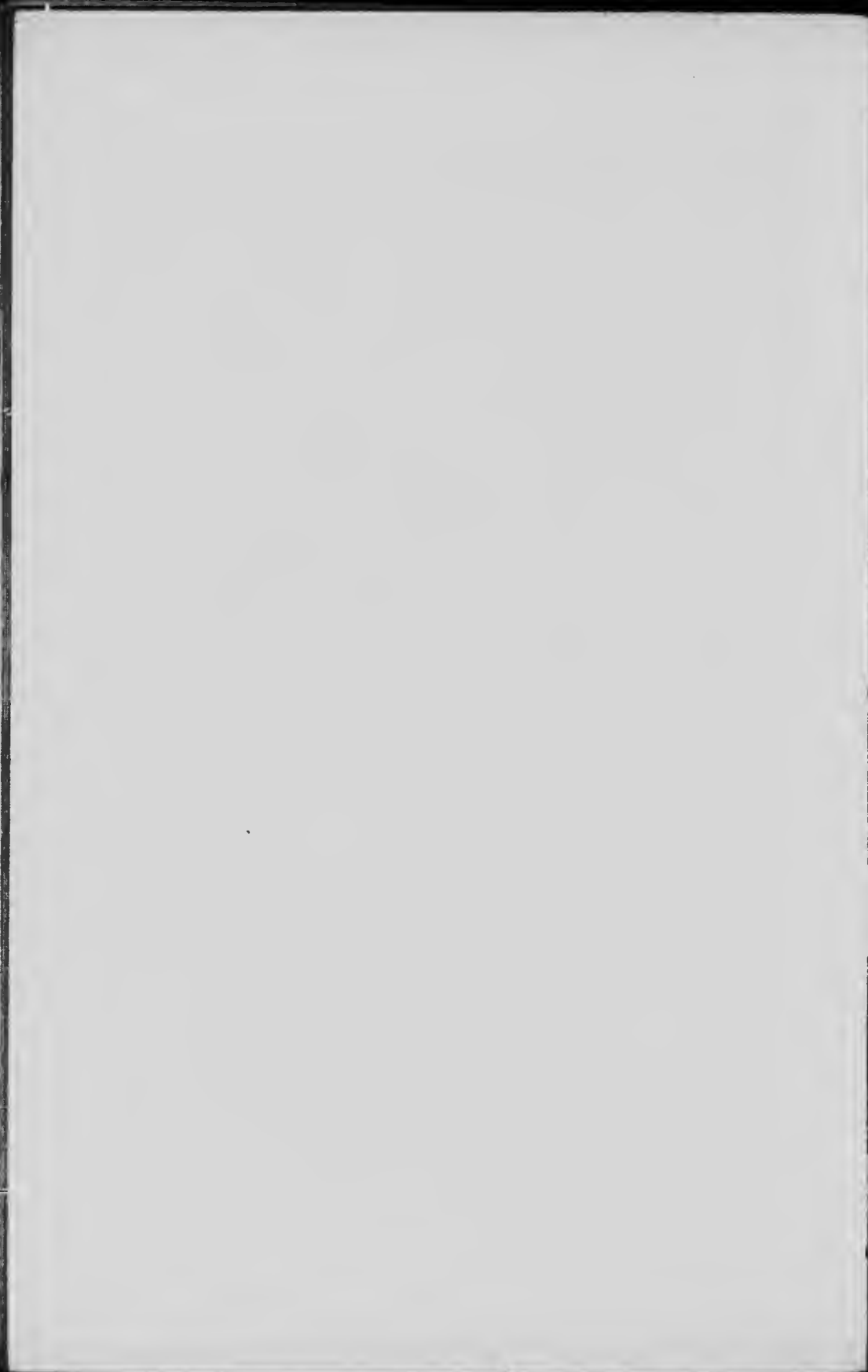
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ter them into pulp. The rage of conflict seized me; there swept over me the ferocity of the insane.

I gave back, compelled by the mere force of numbers hurled against me, yet kept clear a space no savage left unhurt. I felt in my arms the strength of a dozen men, and not the grip of a red hand reached me. The fiends snarled and struggled, but the fierce swing of the iron bar crushed them back. It was twilight where I stood at bay, the narrow opening, almost blotted out by those struggling figures striving to enter, to me, was a mere blotch, an inferno of movement and sound. Through a dim, red haze, where blood dripped before my eyes, I had glimpses of uplifted arms, of distorted faces, of glittering weapons. Once there was a gun shot, the sudden flash flaming into my eyes; twice tomahawks, turning in the air, grazed my cheek; a knife, desperately hurled from out the ruck, struck the iron, slashing my arm as it fell. I felt no pain, no weakness; I was going to die, but it would not be alone. I rushed forward, treading on bodies, battering at shoulders and heads. I heard yells, shrieks, groans, cries of horror and agony. The frenzied war-whoop rang in my ears; an order roared out over the babel. I have no recollection of being touched, yet some force hurled me back. I stumbled over the bodies, yet somehow kept my feet. I was breathless, weak, reeling upon my legs, everything



The fight in the cabin



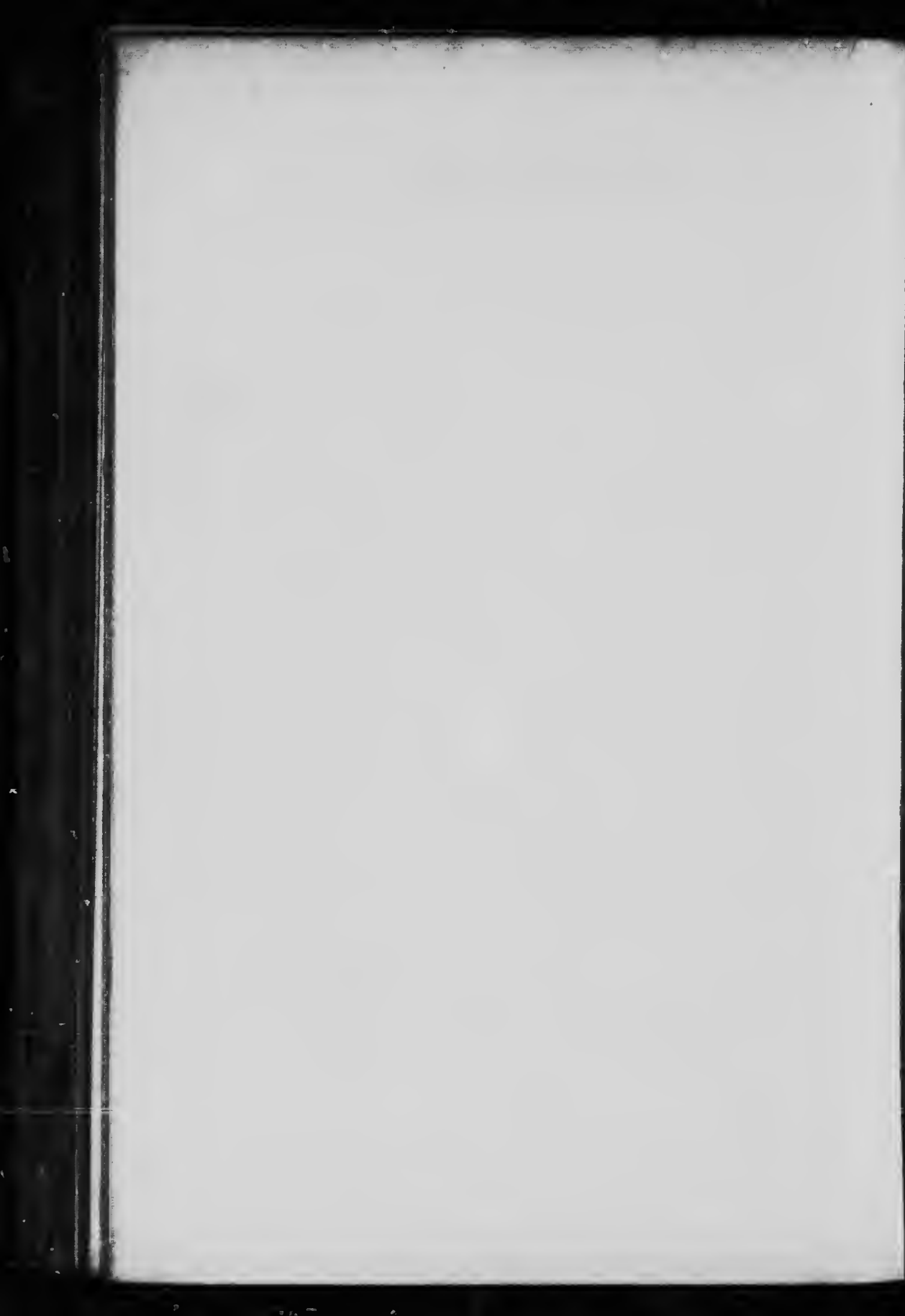
The Fight in the Cabin

before my eyes shrouded in mist. Yet the instinct to fight remained; I knew nothing else.

Suddenly I became aware that Brady and I were together, that we were foot to foot, his deadly axe rising and falling as though he was a woodsman in the forest. Out of the mad din in my ear came the sound of his voice in broken, breathless sentences.

“Good boy! good boy! Ay! that was a blow. Stand to it, lad; they ’ll tell of this fight on the border. Oh, you will, you painted devil — that finished you! Do you see Red-Coat back there, Hayward? Ay! I ’d like one swipe at him, but the coward keeps safe. Strike lower man! they ’re creeping in on us. That ’s the kind. Ah! I thought so; they ’re taking us from behind — quick, lad, back to the wall!”

I got there; God only knows how — but I was alone. I felt the force of the rush that struck him down; it had lifted me bodily and hurled me against the logs. Yet I kept my feet, kept my grip on the twisted iron, and struck blindly. The whole cabin seemed jammed with red demons; they piled on me, jerked the bar from my grasp. Once, twice, I sent clenched fist against painted faces; then it was over with. I never saw or felt the blow that floored me; I went down into darkness, and they trampled me under foot.



CHAPTER XXIII

THE HELP OF MADEMOISELLE

THE sound of a voice speaking, apparently far off, was the first thing of which I was dimly conscious. The language was French, and, for what seemed a long time, no word sounded familiar. My mind was blank of any distinct impression, although there appeared to float before me, in recollection of some former existence, the face of Mademoiselle. Her wonderful eyes were gravely smiling through a strange mist that appeared to hide all else in its circling folds. I could not get away from their silent pleading, their invitation. Then somehow that speaking voice became hers, and I picked out a word here and there, detached, meaningless, and yet recognizable. I struggled to arouse myself to her actual presence.

The struggle must have been physical as well as mental, for I became conscious of pain, a sharp pang shooting through my body, as if a knife had been twisted in a deep wound. The agony brought me wide awake, my eyes open, staring about, yet scarcely realizing where dream and reality met. At first I could not distinguish objects, or separate sounds; everything was blurred,

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formless. There was a red vapor before my eyes, a strange ringing in my ears. Then I knew it was indeed Mademoiselle who spoke, somewhere off there to my right, and once I heard another voice — a falsetto, yet plainly that of a man, interrupting her. Between my poor understanding of French, and the bewilderment of my brain, I could make nothing out of what was said; the very few words I caught seemed meaningless, with no connection between them. I struggled hard to comprehend, but my brain made utter failure of the attempt, a dull horrible aching across my temples being the only reward.

Yet this effort served to arouse my faculties somewhat. There came to me a consciousness of where I was, a vague memory of what had occurred. I began to breathe with less pain, and dimly to perceive objects near by. I was wounded, badly wounded probably, and a prisoner to the Indians. But I was not dead; this was not death and its reawakening. I could not move my limbs; they seemed cramped and lifeless. There came to me in sudden horror the possibility that I was crippled, and then the probability that I was being held for torture. Through a brain half mad with pain there flitted stories of horrible atrocity, of wanton cruelty, of savage vengeance — tales of the gauntlet, the stake, the slow mutilation of helpless victims. And I was in the

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hands of these red devils, wounded, powerless even to move. The thought covered my body with perspiration; I felt a mad desire to cry out, to burst into tears. Yet I clinched teeth and hands, some shred of remaining manhood conquering the weakness. I remembered Schultz and Brady; what had become of them? Out of the dark there floated to me the cheery words of the scout — ay! he spoke them just before the rush came — “They will hear of this sometime down on the Ohio.” The memory was like a bugle call. Yes, they would hear of it; it would become one of the tales of the border. They would know we made a great fight; that we stood up to it like men. Ay! and no lip should ever tell that I whimpered — not even at the stake. I felt the warm blood coursing again in my veins; I took a new grip on my nerves.

The voices ceased talking; all was silent about me, but I could hear noise without, and an occasional yell. Something seemed to shadow my outlook, and my groping hands touched the rough board of the bench, under which I lay. I grasped the edge, lifting my head slightly, but something held my limbs helpless. I glanced down my body, dreading what I should discover, yet determined now to face the truth. Oh, the relief! Two half-naked bodies lay across me, dead warriors, the wide-open eyes of one, ghastly in the hor-

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ribly painted face, staring straight into mine. For an awful instant I believed him alive; then I saw his head had been crushed in by a giant blow. I forced my eyes away, but could see little — there were others lying beside me, and yonder the battered bent rifle barrel I had wielded rested against the bench; the ruin of the broken door was beyond, and half resting on it lay the motionless form of Schultz. I could see the outline of his round face, and a red splotch on his forehead. Somehow out of all that horror only one clear conception clutched me — he had not been scalped. I lifted a hand to my own head, finding the thick hair matted with congealed blood. Why were we spared? What stern authority, what plea for mercy had stayed the vengeful Indian knives? Was it the white man, or the influence of Mademoiselle? I sank weakly back to the floor, yet with a faint throb of hope, bringing me fresh courage.

I could think clearly now, could grasp the situation, and consider my chances. My brain became active, intent. It was the strange fact that we had not been scalped, or mutilated, which left the deepest impression. This was unusual — a fact that required explanation. The reason might mean much to me. If these savages, outcasts of three tribes, were thus under control, they might even spare my life. Their attack had

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been desperate and ferocious enough; it had cost them heavily. Yet here I was untouched and unmangled since I fell. There was apparently not even a guard within the cabin. Of course they thought me dead, but — the query remained unanswered — why were we left unscalped?

It surely must be because of the mercy of Red-Coat, or else the intervention of the girl. It was certainly her voice I had heard speaking. I knew she was alive, unhurt, exercising influence of some kind, even over these outlaws. What could be the nature of that influence? Whence did it come? Never had I heard of such a thing as a squaw commanding warriors; and these warriors were not of her own tribe. Yet there had been the sound of authority in the voice overheard. Although I could not understand the words spoken, the tone was commanding. It was the man who pleaded, and explained. The more I thought the more pronounced became the mystery. There was something here beyond my comprehending. If this mysterious girl possessed sufficient power to hold back these savages from vengeance, why could she not have gone forth and prevented attack? What could have occurred since to increase her authority? She had fought with us in the defense of the cabin; I had seen the discharge of her rifle, and knew that one war-

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rior, at least, had fallen before her aim. Yet now seemingly she was exercising control over the Indians. My heart throbbed in pain, my mind grew confused with unanswerable questions. I struggled in vain effort to release my limbs from the burden of those dead bodies, but was too weak from loss of blood. The effort hurt me, and I closed my eyes, and lay still. I do not think I actually lost consciousness, but seemed rather to drift off into a half dream.

“Monsieur,” the voice was a whisper at my ear; I could even feel her soft breath on my cheek. My eyes instantly opened, and looked into her face as she bent above me. “Do not move, do not speak aloud — but listen, I knew you were not dead; I found you first and kept them away, but there is no time now for me to explain. Are you badly hurt?”

“I cannot tell, Mademoiselle — those heavy bodies will not let me move.”

She glanced about swiftly, as if in fear of being seen; then released my limbs, dragging the two dead Indians aside. I felt cramped, lifeless below the waist, yet as the blood began to circulate I knew there was no serious injury. She stared into my face as I worked the numbed muscles, and her eyes told me that she was frightened.

“We are alone here?”

“Yes, for the moment,” breathlessly. “It is your

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only chance; I have prayed and schemed to get to you. We must n't lose an instant. Can you move, Monsieur? Can you even crawl a dozen feet?"

I set my teeth, struggling to turn over and attain my knees. In spite of every effort I saw on my face with a smothered groan of pain. She lifted my head upon her arm.

"Oh, you must, Monsieur, you must! I cannot lift you, you are too big, but — but I will help. See, I will hold you like this! Please, please try again — we must be quick."

"Where — where do you want me to go?" I asked faintly, inspired to effort by the firm, eager grip of her hand. "Tell me; I'll try."

"There — just to the left of the fire-place. It is the one chance, Monsieur. They will be back, those fiends, they will burn the cabin. *Mon Dieu!* try! try!"

I got to my knees once more, the plea of her voice yielding strength and determination. At whatever cost I would attempt to please her. I experienced no sense of fear; my brain seemed dazed, incapable of apprehending clearly. It held but the one purpose — to accomplish this to please her. She wished me to try, and I would. With teeth clinched tight, I fixed my eyes on the spot indicated and started. Terrible was the effort! Her voice purred in my ear, but I heard

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only the music of it; her firm clasp held me from falling, yet every movement was agony. My side seemed on fire, rubbed by my coarse shirt, and I had to drag my limbs as if they were paralyzed. It was impossible to proceed straight across, for there were bodies in the way; one of them a huge warrior, still wearing his war-bonnet of feathers. Brady's axe had killed him. Beyond, almost in the fireplace lay the preacher, curled up in a ball, his face hidden. I knew him by his long coat and light hair. The sight made me sick, and everything grew black before my eyes.

But I made it inch by inch. I shall never know how the deed was accomplished — only that she helped, and I fought on. I had to; she asked me; there were tears in her eyes. No matter if it did hurt, if I was blind, if I reeled on hands and knees like a man drunk — I must go there. I had not the faintest thought of why she urged me on, of what hope animated her. And when I finally gave out, helpless to advance another inch, my face came down hard on a slab of stone beside the chimney. She uttered a low sob of despair, and left me an instant. I knew she had gone, yet could not lift my head. Then water, cool, reviving, dripped on my exposed flesh, and I struggled desperately to sit up. She helped me, dropping the pannikin of water to the floor. For a second she looked straight into my eyes.

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“I — I am so sorry, Monsieur,” she faltered. “But you must hold out — you must!”

“Is it any farther? What do you want me to do?”

“No, no — only you will need strength; it will only take a minute now. See, Monsieur.”

She gripped the flat stone against which I had fallen, prying it with the broken blade of an Indian knife that lay on the floor, until her fingers found hold, and ended it up against the chimney. A narrow black opening was exposed. I stared down with lack-luster eyes, startled, but unable to realize the purpose. Driven by fear she wasted no time in either explanation or urging. Doubtless my face told its own story, and made her desperate. With a strength I had not supposed her slender body possessed, she dragged me about, until my feet dangled helplessly in the opening.

“Now push yourself down, Monsieur! I say you must! It is not far, not more than four feet — ’t is not to hurt, no, no. You will come easy to the bottom. Good! that is the way. See, I will hold tight to you like this.”

Helped by her, yet exercising all my remaining strength, and now comprehending her plan, I sank slowly into the hole, but so numb were my limbs, that, the instant the girl released her grasp, I sank limply to the bottom, resting there, leaning against the side wall,

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looking eagerly up at her face framed above me in the narrow opening.

“You are safe, Monsieur? You are not hurt?” she asked in trembling anxiety.

I murmured a word or two, for I had exhausted all my strength. She must have accepted this as reassurance, for she lifted her head, and glanced swiftly about. Then she reached down to me the pannikin of water.

“I cannot wait longer,” she whispered. “Someone will come. Here; take this, Monsieur: put it down carefully — ah! that was fine. Wash out your wounds, and the blood from your face. It will be dark, but fear nothing. I will come again to you soon.”

“Where does this tunnel lead?” I asked, as her hand grasped the stone slab.

“To the cave cellar at the rear; where we first met — but you must wait for me to come, Monsieur.”

I saw the shadow of the stone descending, shutting out the light.

“Just one question more, Mademoiselle,” I managed to articulate. “Is Brady dead?”

I could dimly perceive the outline of her face.

“No, Monsieur, he is a prisoner.”

CHAPTER XXIV

WITHIN THE TUNNEL

I WAS in total darkness, not a ray of light finding passage about the edges of the stone slab. It evidently had been so closely fitted into place as to make discovery practically impossible. I felt at first almost as if I had been buried alive, and yet the very knowledge that Mademoiselle had risked all to bring me to this refuge, brought to my mind courage and resolution. Her quick wit had found a way of escape, and I must aid her to the best of my power. That there should be such a secret passage was not surprising. This cabin had been erected in the heart of a wild country, and its builder had reason to anticipate its possible usefulness. Probably the daughter alone knew of its existence, and the discovery by others was not at all probable, unless the outer end, by any chance, had been left open and unconcealed.

I rested there, staring about into the black void, feeling a slight return of strength, and rapidly regaining courage. My mind was already active and clear, and I stretched out my legs, encouraged to discover a better circulation of blood — the strange numbness was disap-

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pearing. My side continued to pain me greatly, yet the very intenseness of suffering led me to feel that the wound was not a serious one. I was aware, however, that my exertions had broken it open, and that it was bleeding afresh. I felt weak, feverish, my hand trembling, as I sought blindly to explore the side walls and locate the pannikin of water. I discovered this at last, and lifted it to my lips, yet contented myself with a few swallows. It was nectar of the gods to my parched throat, and brought new life to my whole body.

Slowly I made effort to explore my wound. This was most painful, as my rough shirt was held to my flesh by congealed blood, and had to be torn away. I possessed no knife, but stuck to the work manfully, my teeth clinched, my face beaded with perspiration, until I separated the last shred, and could explore the wound with my fingers. It proved deep and ragged enough, but had penetrated nothing vital. If I could staunch the flow of blood, and bind it up so as to prevent its being reopened, there should be no serious result. I went at this as best I could in the dark, and, by sense of touch, groaning at the pain, I swabbed out the wound until it practically ceased to bleed, and then bound it up with a silk neckerchief and a strip torn from my shirt. It was rude surgery, but effective. Shut out thus from the air the wound merely dully ached, and I found my-

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self able to move with much greater freedom. Otherwise I was surprised to discover I had sustained no particular injury. My cheek had been grazed by a bullet, but the ball had merely seared the flesh. I must have received two blows on the head, the first gashing my temple; the second, more severe, had been struck me from behind, for my thick hair was matted with blood. I did the best I could with what water remained, and, when the last drop had been used, I leaned back against the wall to rest.

I felt quite like myself again, except that my head throbbed horribly, and I found it difficult to think. Not a sound reached my ears from without. Shallow as the tunnel was, the cabin floor being of earth gave no echo of feet — there might be a hundred in the room, not four feet distant, yet no noise would penetrate to where I lay. I felt the sides and roof curiously; small round trunks of trees held back the earth, and supported broad slabs, cleaved by an axe. A desire to explore the passage, to learn if the outer extremity was open, came to me, but I felt weak yet from loss of blood, and strangely dull, my mind drifting from one thing to another, as if in a dream. So the savages had captured Brady; had taken him alive. Better would it have been for him to have died fighting. They knew him; his was a name used to frighten the papooses in the villages

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of the Shawnaes; there would be no torture too infernal for those demons to exercise, now they had him fairly in their power. I remembered how he looked with that ghastly wound in his jaw, and I shook like a frightened baby, my face buried in my hands. For the first time I realized the miracle of my own escape, the desperate peril of my present position.

How had it chanced that we were left lying there untouched on the cabin floor after we had fallen? To be sure Mademoiselle had interfered between us and savage vengeance; she had exercised her power, her entreaty to spare us from indignity. She had acknowledged as much, and also her knowledge that I was not dead. Yet, surely she alone could never have defended us against the ferocity of those warriors mad with victory. It must have been the unexpected capture of Brady which gave her opportunity. Wild with delight at having him in their power, believing him the leader, in that first mad moment of exultation the savages had left the dead untouched, to taunt and torture the living. Someone had recognized the old borderer, his name had been repeated from lip to lip, and the infuriated warriors had surged about him and his captors, back into the open, forgetting all else in their eagerness to get glimpse of the man they so feared and hated. This diversion had left the girl for the moment free to act,

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and her quick wit had shown the way. Ay! and the white man had lingered in watchful suspicion; she was arguing with him when I regained partial consciousness; in some manner she had succeeded in getting the fellow out of the cabin long enough for her purpose. The whole affair slowly worked itself out in my mind, and, with the knowledge of what had occurred, a deeper admiration for this maid of the forest took possession of me. Foundling of the woods, Wyandot — I cared no longer what she might be by either birth or blood; she was to me the one and only woman.

The thought came to me that I could not remain where I was, cramped in that narrow space, staring blindly into the dark. I must exercise my limbs, put my blood into circulation, and by action of some kind drive morbid thoughts from the mind. How still and black it was; how close the roof and sides pressed. I had to fight away the impression that I was actually buried alive. And I was to remain there until she came to my rescue. Suppose she did not come? that something occurred to prevent — an accident, inability to free herself from observation? My mysterious disappearance was likely to arouse suspicion. When the Indians returned, and found my body gone, what more natural than that they should connect her with its strange vanishing? If she failed to appear what should I do? How

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could I escape? I could not remain long in this silence and darkness; it would drive me mad. I wondered if I could lift that heavy stone from below, and whether or not the outer end of the passage was open. I endeavored to recall the distance between the south wall of the cabin and the cave cellar. This was not clear in my mind, but, as I figured it out, the tunnel could not be less than sixty feet long.

I got to my hands and knees, determined to discover for myself the nature of the passage. Any form of action was better than merely to lie there inert. I had to creep forward, and found barely room for the passage of my body. My wound still hurt sufficiently to make me cautious of every movement, and consequently my advance was slow. There never was blacker darkness; it was like a weight pressing me back, and the silence was like that of the grave. I could hear my own breathing, but my hands and knees made no sound on the earth floor. Whatever of savage fury was occurring above, no echo found way to where I burrowed below. To all appearance the tunnel ran in a direct line; at least I could discover no evidence of deviation. If D'Auvray had constructed it, then he must have known something of engineering, and been in possession of instruments. The work could not have been done by blind digging. Still, it might have been originally an

Within the Tunnel

open ditch, banked and lined with timber, and then covered, and the earth tamped down.

I counted the yards of my advance with all the care possible, but it was blind guessing, except that I determined the tree trunks to stand about a foot apart. I crept along for perhaps ten or twelve yards, undisturbed, feeling no change in the nature of the tunnel. I must have reached a point beyond the corner of the cabin. The narrowness of the passage made progress difficult to one of my size, and the air seemed heavy and foul.

I stopped to rest a moment, sitting cross-legged, my head barely escaping the roof. Suddenly from out that intense darkness before me, came a peculiar sound. Intensified by the long silence, and the contracted walls, I could not tell whether it was cough or groan, gruff exclamation or growl. Perspiration beaded my forehead, my hands like ice, as I stared ahead listening. There was no repetition, no movement. Could I have dreamed the thing? Could it be delirium from the fever of my wound? No! surely not; I was sane enough; my ears were not deceived. Something — man or animal — was certainly there in the tunnel hiding, crouched in the darkness, unaware as yet of my presence. Then it would not be an animal; it must be a man. The instinct of any wild denizen of the woods, its keen scent,

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would have betrayed me long since. An animal would be seeking me, or else endeavoring to escape. There would be some sound of movement; yet, strain my ears as I would, not the slightest echo reached me. Yet if it were a man — what man? How did he come there? The fellow must be in hiding, or he would never crouch there so silently in darkness. The longer I waited, the more I thought, the deeper grew the mystery. I could not even guess a solution. Why should an Indian conceal himself in this hole? and what white man was there to do so? Schultz and the preacher were both dead; I had seen their bodies. Brady was captured — dead also likely by this time, after the horrors of torture.

So impossible did it all seem, that I almost convinced myself it was a delusion; that I had heard nothing, that the odd sound had originated within my own brain. I argued the matter out, and convinced myself this was the truth. I smiled grimly as courage came slowly back; anyhow I would go on, and find out. If it was a man, I had as good a chance as he did; ay, better, for he possessed no warning of my presence. Besides I could not remain where I was indefinitely, cramped in that narrow space, afraid to move a muscle, and tortured by imagination. I would rather face the danger boldly — if there was any to face — and fight it out. I got upon hands and knees again, slowly

Within the Tunnel

and with utmost caution, aware that if I was to escape notice I must advance as stealthily as a wild cat, the slightest sound would carry far in that gallery. I moved forward a yard, two, three yards, extending one hand out into the dark and feeling about carefully, before venturing another inch. Mine were the movements of a snail.

I had almost convinced myself there was nothing there, either brute or human; yet some instinct continually told me there was. I felt an uncanny presence, and an ill-defined sense of danger I could not cast off. I came to a pause, actually afraid to go on, my flesh creeping with strange horror. I rested on one knee, my face thrust forward as I stared blindly into the awful blackness. I even held my breath in suspense, listening for the slightest movement. Merciful God! someone—something—was actually there! I could hear now the faint pulsing of a breath, as though through clogged nostrils; yes, and a meaningless muttering of the lips.



CHAPTER XXV

A STRUGGLE UNDERGROUND

I REMAINED poised, breathless, huddled in the dark, hesitating. A dozen considerations flashed through my mind, as I swiftly decided what to do. I could scarcely hope to move backward without noise; nor, if I succeeded, would I be any better off with him still blocking the passage? There was nothing for it then but to come to hand grips. But the fellow, whoever he might be — whether white or Indian — was doubtless armed, while I was weaponless. To get him right was a desperate chance, yet a chance which must be taken. Fortunately I had him located, his heavy breathing being unmistakable, and evidence also that the man remained unaware of my presence. I shifted one foot forward to get firmer purchase, and then grasped for him through the darkness. My hand came in contact with a shoulder; then gripped a mass of long hair. He gave vent to a sudden cry, startled, almost inhuman in its wildness, struggling backward so quickly my other hand closed on air. But I held hard to what I had, dragged off my balance, feeling his fingers after my throat. There was no room for us to do otherwise than claw at each other.

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After that first cry neither of us uttered a sound, but I closed in on him, getting a stronger grip. He was a man, a white man, for he wore a rough coat, and his face was covered with a growth of straggly, coarse whiskers. Enemy or friend I could not be sure, nor did I find opportunity to discover. We both fought like beasts, resorting to teeth and nails. He was seemingly not a large man, but wiry and muscular. His very lack of size was an advantage in that narrow space; besides I was weakened by loss of blood, and with every movement my wound hurt.

His one object was to wrench himself loose, but my fortunate grip on his hair foiled this effort. Yet both his hands were free, the one clutching my throat; but, in those first breathless seconds, I could not locate the other. He was lying on his side, with right arm underneath. Fearful of a weapon, I let the fellow gouge at my throat with long, ape-like fingers, while I struggled fiercely to expose the hidden hand. If it proved empty I knew I could handle the man; that I possessed the strength to draw him to me, to crush him into subjection within the vise of my arms. Straining every muscle I could bring into play, I succeeded in forcing him over onto his face. But he was a cat, wiry, full of tricks. In some manner he twirled his arm out of my grip. There was a flash of reddish yellow flame searing across

A Struggle Underground

my eyes, an awful report, like an explosion in my stunned ears. Where the bullet went I will never know, but I saw the man's face leap out at me from the darkness — just an instant of reflection, as though thrown against a screen by some flash of light — the unmistakable face of a negro. And his was a hideous visage; the memory of it lingers with me yet. Swift as it appeared and vanished in that burst of flame, I shall never forget the glare of the man's eyes, the malignant snarl of the open lips, the teeth cruel and snag-like, and the yellowish-black of his face. It was as if I held some foul fiend of hell in my grip.

Yet startled as I was by this apparition, his view of me had no less an effect. Even in that single instant of revelation, the hate in his eyes changed to fear, to uncontrollable panic; his lips gave vent to a wild cry, an exclamation in mongrel French, and, before I could stiffen in resistance, or recover from my own shock, the fellow flung his pistol at me, and jerked free. The flying weapon tore a gash in my scalp, but his haste and fear proved his own undoing. Half stunned as I was by the blow, I heard him spring to his feet, the dull crash of his head as he struck the hardwood slab of the low roof, and then the thud of a body on the tunnel floor. In his haste, his desperation, his strange fright, he had forgotten where he was, and attempted to spring

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erect. My head reeled, the blood from this new cut trickling down my cheek. The negro lay motionless in the darkness; I could not even distinguish his breathing, although I hesitated, listening intently, half fearing some trick.

What had frightened the fellow so? What had brought that look of insane terror into his eyes? It was as if he stared at a ghost, the very sight of which had crazed him. I mastered by own nerves, and crept forward along the passage, feeling blindly in advance with one outstretched hand, until it came in contact with the man's figure. He lay full length on the tunnel floor, and I had to find my way over him to reach his head. It was difficult to touch him, to place my fingers against his flesh. The memory of those snarling, wolfish lips, and that yellow skin, caused me to shrink from direct contact. Yet I must assure myself. I could not leave the man lying there, possibly to recover consciousness and do injury. Of one thing I was assured — this French negro could be no friend. Whatever had caused him to skulk in this hole of the earth — even if it was fear of those savages above us in the cabin, promised no help to me. He would prove as merciless and cruel, if given power, as any Indian; his very fear of me would yield him the savagery of a wild beast.

With clinched teeth, I touched the coarse hair with my

A Struggle Underground

fingers; then the forehead. The flesh retained some warmth; yet the feeling was not natural — it seemed lifeless. For the instant this appeared impossible. Why, he did it himself; he crashed his own skull against the slab. Yet I could not make the affair seem real, or probable. And a negro! I had seen few of the race, but had always been told they were of thick skull; but if this man was actually dead, his head must have been smashed like an egg-shell. And it was — I found the gash a moment later, the jagged edge of bone. The fellow was dead, stone dead; there was no beat to his heart, no throb to his pulse. Still dazed by the discovery, I ran my fingers along the roof overhead, hoping to find something there which would account for the mystery. No flat surface could ever have jabbed that wound. Ah! I felt it — the sharp point of a stake protruding between the logs. The poor fellow had struck that with sufficient force to penetrate the brain.

I conquered my abhorrence, and searched him, finding tobacco, a knife — an ugly weapon — flint and steel, a few coins, and some powder and rifle balls. There were no pistol bullets, and the thought occurred to me that that smaller weapon probably did not belong to him; he had appropriated it elsewhere. I crept about, and across the body, searching for it in vain, but I found the rifle, and took time to test its flint, and load it.

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I was still engaged at this task, blindly feeling about in the dark for everything needed, and always conscious of that dead body beside me, when I suddenly detected smoke — not the puff of powder which still clung to the passage, but the acrid, pungent odor of burning wood. Even as I began to breathe the fumes they increased in intensity, the narrow tunnel filling rapidly with the smoke waves, and setting me to coughing. I realized at once what had happened. Mademoiselle's words of warning coming back to mind — they were burning the cabin, and through some orifice the smoke was being swept down into this underground passage. If there were no outlet, no way by which it could escape again to the open air, I must die there in that black hole, choked and suffocated. I might lie there forever beside this hideous negro; lie there until our bones rotted, and we also became earth. The horror of the thought brought me to my knees. Already the air was stifling, my lungs laboring heavily for breath as the smoke clouds filled the passage. Only as I bent my nostrils close against the earthen floor could I find life-giving air.

Even in my terror I clung to the negro's rifle desperately. The entrance leading forth into the cellar must be closed, or the smoke cloud would never be so dense and suffocating. To open it might require

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strength, the blows of the gun stock. If I retained power to burst my way through I must hurry. Already I felt my head reel dizzily, my open lips gulping for air. I crept forward recklessly in the dark, bruising my body against the sides of the tunnel, actually feeling the thickening smoke swirl about me in dense clouds. I gasped for breath, and drew a bit of cloth about nose and mouth in slight protection. I was panic-stricken, overcome by sudden horror, yet some nature within compelled me to struggle on. Suddenly I came to a body lying lengthwise of the passage, the head to the south. This new discovery was a shock, yet seemed to affect me little. I was too intent on my own escape to be halted by a dead man; to even think what it meant, or how the fellow came to be there. To me, at that instant, he was but an obstacle, blocking my progress.

I crawled over him, as though he was no more than a stone in the path, yet as one hand came down in the dark on the upturned face, I experienced a sudden thrill — the flesh was warm, the man lived. Barely had my numbed mind grasped this helplessly, when my rifle barrel, thrust before me, struck the end of the passage, the faint sound of contact signifying wood. Not three feet extended between the man's head and this barrier which blocked us from the outside air. Desperate, half crazed indeed, not only by my own situation, but also

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by my memory of those bodies behind in the dark tunnel, I found scant knee-room in the small space, and fumbled madly about for some latch. The surface was of wood, roughly faced, but smooth, save for what might be a handle in the middle, a mere strip, bevelled to give finger-hold. I pulled at this in vain; then pushed with my shoulder against the oak, but the wood held firm. Weak as I was, and in so cramped a position, I could bring to bear but small strength. To batter the door down was the only hope left; no matter what noise resulted, or the possibility of capture by the savages, I could not lie there and choke to death in that place of horror. Better any danger than such a fate. I drew back and struck, the power of fear giving strength to my arms. Again and again I drove the iron-bound rifle stock against the hard oak. I left the center and attacked the sides, feeling the wood give slightly. Encouraged by this I redoubled my efforts, centralizing my blows on one spot, until certain the tightly jammed door was being driven from the groove. It was hot and stifling; the perspiration streamed from me; the smoke was suffocating, deadly. I gasped and choked, my head swam with dizziness. I felt my strength ebbing away; despair clutched me. Yet I struck — no longer with clear intent, but automatically, driving the heavy gun butt against the slowly yielding wood, with every pound

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of strength I had left. It seemed as if I had struck my last blow — I believe now I had; I believe my body fell with it — I cannot remember clearly — only I know the wood gave way, and I fell forward into light and air, my face without, my body still in the tunnel.

Merciful Mother! how I gulped in those first refreshing breaths; how the clogged lungs rejoiced. It seemed as if I could never get enough. I could hardly detect objects, although I lifted my head, and sought to gaze about, for my eyes were blinded by so suddenly emerging into the bright light after those hours of darkness. Clouds of smoke swept over me, and poured out through the open door of the cellar. As strength and purpose came back I sat up, and began to perceive my surroundings. A glimpse of blue sky, and, sounding far away, a medley of discordant cries came thread-like to my ears. These served to restore my wandering senses. The Indians were still on the island; some might be close enough at hand to observe that column of smoke pouring forth from the cellar door, and wonder how it came there. Yet there was nothing I could do but remain hidden; to venture into the open would only expose me to greater danger. I glanced back into the tunnel, suddenly remembering the man who still lived. If he were out, the door might be forced back into place again, that volume of smoke suppressed.

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I refastened the cloth across my face, and crept back into the tunnel until I was able to grip the fellow's arms. He was a large man, clothed as a white; I even thought I felt braid on his sleeves; and, as I drew him toward me by a mighty effort, the light streaming in revealed a red jacket.

CHAPTER XXVI

I MEET MY DOUBLE

THE probability that the man was a British officer, whose life depended on my exertions, nerved me anew. No matter who he might prove to be, whether friend or foe, he was of my race and blood, and evidently the victim of treacherous attack. First of all I must get him out of that stifling hole into pure air, and discover the nature of his injuries. It was no easy task dragging the heavy body through the narrow entrance, and across the dislodged door. It had to be accomplished by sheer strength of arm, for I worked on my knees, choked by the foul atmosphere, almost blinded by the smoke, and unable to find purchase. Yet foot by foot I won, until, exhausted by the effort, I hauled the limp form free of the barrier, and against the side wall of the cellar.

For an instant I was breathless, again conscious of the pain from my wound, yet the insistent need of immediate action spurred me to final effort. I could think and rest later; with necessary work accomplished I could nurse my wounds and his also. But first this outpouring of smoke must be stopped; the cellar itself

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was full of stifling odor in the fumes of which I gasped and choked, while out through the entrance the clouds poured upward into the blue sky, a signal to any watchful Indian eye. I could stand erect now, and move at ease; the unconscious soldier lay motionless, his face shadowed toward the wall. Obscured as he was by swirls of smoke I could faintly distinguish the rise and fall of his chest, as his lungs struggled for air. He was alive, and I observed no outward sign of wound, but I had no present cause to either fear or guard the man. My one task now was to seal the tunnel. This was not difficult. The small oaken door, unbroken, fitted snugly into the aperture, and was driven back into place by the iron-bound rifle butt. The outer wood had been stained so closely of a color with the tint of the surrounding earth, as to be scarcely detected in that dim light, by any casual search. But for splinters broken along the edge by my rifle stock, my own eyes, smarting from the smoke, could not have determined its presence.

I leaned against the side-wall as the waves of smoke thinned, and drifted out through the open door. At last there was but a thin vapor showing against the blue expanse of sky. It occurred to me the blue was shading into gray, as if with approaching twilight. I retained no sense of time; so much had occurred I felt

I Meet My Double

I had been confined for hours in that tunnel; when I first emerged and perceived light I could scarcely realize that it was yet day; that all had occurred — the fight in the cabin, my rescue, the horrors of the tunnel — within so short a space. There suddenly swept over me the fresh memory of it all; I saw the faces, heard the voices. And they were dead, those men I had companioned with; they had gone the long journey, some quickly, mercifully, and Brady in the agony of torture. How it nauseated me! the swift reaction leaving me sobbing like a child, my hands pressed over my eyes. All at once I experienced the full horror, and broke down as weak as a babe. I remember now how my knees shook, so that I sank down to the earth floor; ay! and how I prayed, my voice a mere senseless murmur, yet, no doubt, clear enough to God's ears.

Anyway this must have brought me courage, for I lifted my head again, and looked about, my mind once more active, that dreadful panic of fear gone. The taint of burning wood still clung to the atmosphere, but the smoke had entirely vanished. It was dull and gloomy in the cellar, which might have measured ten feet each way, the light finding entrance only through the one narrow opening, leaving the side-walls in shadow. These were of solid earth, supporting tree trunks, thatched with bark, and overlaid with loose dirt. The entrance

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led upward, having two puncheon steps. Obeying my first impulse, a desire to discover what was occurring without before night closed down, I crept across, still clinging to the rifle, and cautiously thrust my head up through the opening. The smoke from the fallen side-walls of the dismantled cabin blotted out the view to the east, but in the other direction all was clearly revealed as far as the edge of the woods. The clearing was deserted; no figure, living or dead, appearing within range of vision. I could see where the Indians had charged across the open space, but the bodies of the fallen warriors had been removed. The rays of the sun, now well down in the west, penetrated the outer fringe of the forest, giving me glimpse into its depths, but revealed no movement. I searched every inch, shading my eyes, but could perceive no sign of Indians. I crept up farther, to where I could peer across the mound of earth, but saw nothing. It was apparent the savages had departed; had fired the cabin, and crossed over to the main shore. And the hut was gone, only some remaining logs blazed with fitful flames, fanned by the wind.

What was I to do? What could I do? Mademoiselle had bade me wait—wait until she came. But what might have occurred to her since then? Even if free from all suspicion how could she escape the observation

I Meet My Double

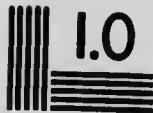
of those savages, and return here? They might be miles away by now, hidden in forest depths, compelling her to travel with them. Some among the band would have missed me, and might have accused her of aiding my escape. Red-Coat knew, or would be likely to suspect. I was lying there apparently dead, when he left her alone in the cabin; when he returned my body was gone. What would he do to the girl? denounce her to his savage allies? hand her over to their fury? Would the white renegade dare do this? I had no means of knowing the risk she had assumed. Did she know this man? did he know her? Was it possible she possessed an authority over these outlaws of three tribes that he dare not question or oppose? Such a supposition seemed hardly possible; they were not her people — there was not a Wyandot among them, and if she was unable to save poor Brady from the stake, she would be fortunate indeed if she escaped unscathed.

I felt tempted to get outside, and discover where the raiders had gone; their trail might reveal much, if it could only be found before night came. I had straightened up, determined to try the venture, when a movement below, and the muffled sound of a voice speaking English, reminded me of the soldier. Descending from out the sun-light I could perceive little in the darker cave-cellar. The red jacket was, however, sufficiently



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conspicuous to convince me that the man was sitting up, his back against the wall.

"I do n't know who you are, friend," he called out heartily, "only you look to be white. By any luck do you speak English?"

"Not much of anything else," I answered, endeavoring to discover his features. "I'm of the blood."

"Ay! with a colonial twang to it, unless my ears lie. Is that the story? So! then what in God's name are you doing here?"

I could not take the measure of the fellow, his face remaining indistinct in the shadows, but there was a reckless ring of good-fellowship in his voice which inspired me to frankness.

"I came this way with a message for the Wyandots. I belong to the garrison of Fort Harmar."

"An officer?"

"Yes."

"Holy Smoke, man, but you certainly stumbled into a hornet's nest. Did n't you know all the northwest tribes have declared war? that it has actually begun?"

"No; it was in the hope of preventing such a catastrophe that I was sent. Word was brought us that the Wyandots would not join the confederation."

"Who brought such word?"

"Simon Girty. He bore a letter from Hamilton, and

I Meet My Double

sought information regarding the disappearance of a Wyandot chief."

"Wa-pa-tee-tah?"

"That was the name."

The man laughed, but the sound was not altogether pleasant.

"There is a touch of humor to your tale, my friend," he said slowly, "although I doubt if you will be able to perceive it. Girty and Hamilton may have had reasons of their own for a bit of byplay; egad! they failed to consult me. But as for this Wa-pa-tee-tah, that chanced to be my business, although just now, and in the presence of the enemy, we will let the discussion go. Diplomacy never reveals its cards, and I have become more diplomat than soldier. What am I then — a prisoner?"

I saw him now clearly, and he must have got his first fair glimpse of me, for he stared at my face in startled surprise that, for the moment, held him dumb. It was like looking at my own reflection in a glass — the eyes, the hair, the nose, the contour of the face, the massive figure, all alike the counterpart of my own. I would not have believed, except for the witness of my own eyes, that such similarity was possible. Even though fortified with sudden impression that this was the man for whom Mademoiselle had mistaken me, the actual

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resemblance was so startling, as to leave me voiceless. We would have passed for each other anywhere, and yet as I stared at him, meeting his eyes fairly, I perceived a difference, faint, elusive, yet noticeable enough — his skin showed marks of dissipation; there was a peculiar insolent sneer to his mouth, and he must be older than I by five years. My mind seemed to grip all this in a flash, before his voice broke the silence.

“Odds life, man! and what’s this!” he roared. “Some play acting, or a dream? Never before did I know I was born a twin. Who are you?”

The look on his face, as if he half suspected he saw a ghost, made me smile.

“My name is Hayward — Joseph Hayward.”

He gasped for breath, his eyes fairly protruding, as he staggered to his feet.

“What! say that again!”

I had full control of myself now, rather enjoying his consternation.

“I am Joseph Hayward,” I answered with grave deliberation. “An ensign in the United States army, and a native of Maryland.”

“Well, I’ll be hanged! Say; do you know that’s my name also? Is this some shabby joke?”

There was a gleam of anger in his eyes, a threat. I leaned on my rifle, and looked him in the face.

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"I was better prepared for this meeting than you," I said, "for I happen to know who you are. It's an odd thing, our resemblance, and the similarity of names, but I was told about you some time ago."

"By whom?"

"Mademoiselle D'Auvray."

"Who? I never met — oh, her!" with a quick laugh, "you mean the Wyandot missionary?"

"I mean the daughter of Captain D'Auvray," I returned with some sternness. "The man the Indians call 'Wa-pa-tee-tah.' She mistook me for you."

"And was not very nice about it I imagine — the little vixen will scarce give me a word."

"Possibly with reason."

"She told you so? She might be in better business than advertising my delinquencies among enemies. The girl has just enough white blood in her to make her act the fool."

"We may differ about that. Anyhow I advise you to hold your tongue. What I am interested in learning now is — who killed her father?"

He started back, bracing himself against the wall.

"Her father! D'Auvray? is he dead then?"

He was not acting; the surprise was real; the expression of his eyes convinced me.

"You had no connection with the murder?"

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"I! Good Lord, no! I know nothing, man — not even how I came to be here. I woke up just now, lying in this corner with my face to the wall, every bone in my body aching. When I finally managed to roll over, I got glimpse of you there at the entrance, and sang out. I do n't even feel certain who I am, let alone what I may have been up to."

"But surely you recall something," I insisted.

"Well," puzzled, "not much. See here, I'm willing enough to tell you all I know. Let 's sit down; my head spins around like a top."

CHAPTER XXVII

I HOLD A PRISONER

HE dropped back against the wall, but much of my old strength had returned, and I remained standing, leaning on my rifle. The man continued to stare up at me as if half doubting his own eyesight.

“Well,” I said at last, growing tired of his silence. “You have my story — or, at least, a good part of it — and now it would seem the proper time for me to hear yours. Once we understand each other we will know better how to proceed.”

“That may be so, and it may not — but I can’t so easily get over the resemblance — it’s uncanny. From Maryland, you say?”

“Yes.”

“Of good English stock I warrant. It seems to me I’ve heard of a branch of our line who emigrated to the colonies. Well, it’s odd how a certain type will survive, skip generations, and then reappear. You and I will be cousins likely, though in faith we have more the appearance of twins.”

“Which may be interesting enough,” I said soberly, “if we possessed all the time in the world to dis-

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cuss the matter. But it strikes me our possible relationship can wait a more convenient season. I'll tell you a thing or two that may hurry your mind a bit. The cabin above has been burned by Indians, who have left the island, but as to this I am not sure. They may know of my escape, and return again in search; I got away through the tunnel leading from the fireplace of the cabin to this cellar. You knew of the existence of that passage?"

"No; I was never here but once before."

"Yet that was where I found you, unconscious, apparently dead; I dragged you out, after battering down the door there. The smoke from the burning cabin would have suffocated you in five minutes more."

He pressed his hands against his head in an endeavor to think.

"I was in there, unconscious and alone?"

"No, not alone; there was a yellow-faced negro with you — a French mongrel, if I know the breed. He's there yet — dead; and I want to know the story."

"Oh, ay! I begin to get the straight of this at last," and his face brightened. "Not that it is altogether clear, but you furnish a clue; perhaps if we put the ends together we may make a tale. A French negro, hey! 'T would likely be the Kaskaskia half-breed, a treacherous whiskered dog. But how ever did he come

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to be here? Ay! I have it! 'The fellow must have trailed me from the council at Sandusky, suspecting I sought D'Auvray; there was hate between them."

"Then 't is likely he killed the man."

"No doubt of it, if he really be killed. Listen to what I know; in truth it is not much other than rumor; D'Auvray had the fellow lashed by Wyandot squaws for some dirty trick, and Picaud — that 's his name — swore vengeance. Saint Denis! that was a year ago, and Picaud has ever since been in his own country. 'T was the coming of war that brought him back. I thought I saw him at Sandusky as we held council there, but his presence was nothing to me."

"He had no quarrel with you then?"

"No; I saw him whipped; he was like a snarling cur. Listen, and I 'll tell all I know. I am not proud of my job, understand, but out here in the wilderness, we work under a double set of orders — one open and above-board, the other secret. 'T is poor work for a soldier, but there 's no help for it, except to resign, and then someone else would turn the trick. You know the game we play — our countries at peace, this land formally surrendered to you Americans, and yet there comes to us — to Hamilton — private instructions to retard settlement, and retain our military posts. Lord knows what the ministry means, what they hope to gain by de-

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lay; we are only pawns in the game being played, yet what England says, we do. Yet how? There is only one weapon left to our hands — the savages. We cannot fight you openly, much as we might prefer, but if we can keep the Indian tribes hostile, we can hold back your settlements to the Ohio, until England can act openly. You knew all this?"

"Yes," I acknowledged soberly. "The policy is clear enough."

"And it was easily enough carried out," he went on, "but for the Wyandots. We were hand in glove with the tribes, and they hated the Americans. Our emissaries were in all their villages, and made the chiefs presents and promises. Raiding parties of young warriors swept through the forests clear to the Ohio, doing much damage, and driving the whites to their forts. But we needed open war, the alliance of all the tribes, and we were blocked in this — the Wyandots refused. I was sent there, and when I failed, Hamilton went himself, but with no better success. You know the reason?"

I shook my head, afraid to interrupt for fear he might remember how convicting such a confession was, and refuse to continue. But apparently the man failed to conceive the depravity of his acts.

"The influence of D'Auvray — ay! and that daugh-

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ter of his. Saint Denis, but I believe she was the worst of the two. I actually made love to the witch hoping thus to win her over to our side, although even the love-making might have been serious in the end, if she would even listen. But you know the lass, you say?"

"We have met, yes; a fine girl to my thought, despite her drop of Indian blood."

"Ay! fine enough," with quick glance of suspicion, and hardening of the mouth, "for those who like that kind. To my mind it makes a bad combination, French and Indian, and worse yet when adulterated by religion. I might have married her—who knows?" shrugging his shoulders, "but she certainly would n't listen to anything else. Lord, the wench was proud as Lucifer; ay! and laughed in my face, and mocked me, until even Hamilton had to grin, when I told him the story. 'T was then I made up my mind to win in spite of her."

"To win her, you mean?"

"No, no! There was but one way of doing that, and it chanced I possess a dislike for Indian blood. I can't win the Wyandots to our scheme. 'T was Hamilton's plan, that I suggest to her a visit to the Wabash tribes, for she was ready for any sacrifice to spread her faith among the red-skins. Ay! and by good luck the scheme was successful."

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"That then was what took her south?" I asked, deeply interested.

"Yes; I fixed up a fine story, and the priest gave her his blessing. Oh, it was safe enough; no Indian would dare lay hand on her in evil. Where did you meet the girl?"

"Fort Harmar."

"What!" in surprise. "She got so far? she ventured there? What was her purpose, think you?"

"Of that I know nothing, yet it was there we met first, and she mistook me for you. Go on; I would hear the rest of your tale; it is growing dark."

"The rest is short enough, but the girl's actions puzzle me. Once we were rid of her, the father had to be attended to. 'T was no easy task, for D'Auvray was a chief, and quick to quarrel. 'T is small odds now how the trick was played, but I knew of this cabin, and once here I held him prisoner, while Hamilton used his disappearance as a whip to drive the Wyandots to war."

"He spread the rumor then that D'Auvray was captured or killed by Americans, knowing what had occurred?"

"Partly that," with a chuckle. "He knew not where the man was, only that I had him safe."

"And by means of this lie you deliberately plotted to ravage the frontier with Indian outrage," I exclaimed

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indignantly, "to turn loose a horde of savages against unprotected settlements, to kill women and children. 'T is an act of cold-blooded murder you confess."

"Nay, not so fast, friend," his eyes hardening with anger. "'T was war; we but obeyed the orders that came from England; made use of the weapons at hand."

"I care nothing for the excuse. There was no war, and it was murder. Do n't call me friend! I am no friend of yours. Though you may be of my own blood, of my own name, the act was murder — foul, treacherous murder. Yes! I wish I had left you to rot there in that hole."

He was on his feet, his face flaming with passion, but I flung forward my rifle.

"Ay! I mean it, Joseph Hayward, if that be your name," I went on, coldly enough now. "And I would say the same to Hamilton if he were here. Stand where you are, or I will kill you as I would a mad cur. Only a fiend would boast of such an act of treachery. Now go on, and tell me the rest. I want no lie, but the truth — how did D'Auvray meet his death?"

He stood glaring at me over the rifle barrel, his hands gripping in desire, yet knowing well that any hostile movement meant death.

"Hanged if I'll tell you!"

"Then you die where you are, you dog," and I meant

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it. "You have said enough already to condemn you. I believe you killed D'Auvray."

"I did not," he burst forth. "I did not even know he was dead. I am not afraid of you, or your threats, but I will tell you what occurred here. I'm ready enough, as you will discover yet, to answer for whatever I do, but I am not going to bear the blame for the dastard act of another. I was friendly enough with D'Auvray, even if I did seek to trick him in this matter. There was no intent to take his life."

"Well then, go on."

"I held him prisoner here," he said sulkily, "although there was no violence or threat. The man did not even realize he was under guard, yet I saw to it that he retained no arms, and was never out of my sight. 'T was my orders to hold him quiet until I had message from Hamilton. He suspected nothing, and there was no trouble; not so much as a word of controversy between us. Once a day I made circuit of the island to assure myself we were alone. Occasionally he went with me, but the last time I left him in the cabin asleep. It was dusk when I returned; I had seen nothing suspicious, and was careless. I remember approaching the rear door, without thought of danger. I must have passed the opening of the cave here, when suddenly I was struck down from behind. I saw nothing, heard

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nothing of my assailant. When I returned to consciousness I was lying here. That is all."

"'T would be Picaud who struck you?"

"Beyond doubt, and then, thinking me dead, dragged me into this hole. Yet how came we both in there?"

"I could barely distinguish his face in the dim light."

"We can only guess at the rest. My theory would be that the negro was interrupted by our arrival at the cabin. He discovered the entrance to the tunnel, and dragged you into it, thinking to escape himself. To make sure who we were he crept into the cabin, and recovered your jacket — you left it there, did n't you?"

"Ay! it was a warm night."

"The fellow must have seen something that frightened him, that drove him back into hiding. Later I stood there in the cave mouth, looking about. Perhaps it was then he crawled into the tunnel, and replaced the door. Ah, I have it — he did that later when he recognized the voice of Mademoiselle."

"Of who? Mademoiselle?"

"Mademoiselle D'Auvray; she joined me as I stood there. Her presence would account for his fear."

He leaned forward, as if endeavoring to decipher my face.

"Are you telling me truth?" he asked hoarsely. "Is

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that girl here? What could have brought her to this place? What does she suspect? What does she know?"

"That I cannot tell, except that she believes you killed her father; the discovery of your coat convinced her of that. As to how she came here — she traveled with Girty from Fort Harmar, seeking to reach the Wyandots in advance of me. She came to the cabin alone, hoping to find her father, but instead found us in possession, and D'Auvray's dead body. It was she who thrust me into the tunnel, and saved my life."

"And, now, man, where is she?"

"With those Indians who attacked us, and burned the cabin — she may be a prisoner."

He laughed uneasily, shifting his position.

"No fear of that. She is a wonder worker with these savages; they are afraid of her; they think her cross will work miracles. Saint Denis! I would rather have her with me than all the chiefs."

"Could she save a man from the torture, the stake?"

"She has done it; ay! I saw it done, and it took some courage. But she might fail with these renegades. Who is the man?"

"Brady; the scout who accompanied me."

"I know of the fellow; she would have small chance of saving him." He paused, then asked suddenly:

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“What about me? Am I a prisoner, or free to go? Do you absolve me of murder?”

“Of killing D’Auvray — yes. But your hands are bloody enough without that crime.”

“Then I may go my way?”

“To more treachery? to those Indians to report my presence here?”

“No, I swear —”

“I accept no pledge from you. You say ’t is already war on the border; then I will act accordingly. We will wait here until she comes.”

“She! not Mademoiselle D’Auvray.”

“Yes,” I answered tersely. “Mademoiselle D’Auvray.”



CHAPTER XXVIII

AN EFFORT TO SAVE BRADY

THE night had closed down without, but the remnants of fire still eating away the dry logs of the cabin, yielded a red tinge to the interior of the cellar. It was a spectral, eery light, brightening as some breeze fanned the flames, and then as suddenly lapsing into dimness. Yet sufficient glow found way down the entrance to enable me to see my prisoner, and observe his movements. He received my words quietly, breathing heavily, and then laughed.

“You must possess an odd sense of humor,” he said finally. “Do you realize where you are, man? ’T is a long way to the Ohio, and the woods between by now swarm with savages. You will do better far to make a friend of me than an enemy.”

“I see no reason for choosing either,” I answered, pleasantly enough. “We chance to be on opposite sides, and I deem it safer to hold you here until the lady determines what to do. She knows you better than I.”

“She comes here then?”

“Those were her last words to me.”

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"But it may be I have no wish to remain; no desire to meet this woman."

I smiled at him.

"Your wish in the matter has small weight with me. You remain where you are, and my authority is this rifle."

"You'll regret that," angrily. "Mark my words now, and show some sense. I can help you escape; I can point you a way through the Indian lines to your own people. I have authority here, and power. Treat me right, and I will do this. If you refuse I'll turn you over to the first band of stragglers to do with as they please. Lay down your rifle! You do n't dare fire at me."

"And why not?"

"Because of the alarm. I am not a fool; the Indians have not deserted this neighborhood."

"I will take the risk," I asserted gravely, "rather than have you get past. Do n't rely on my fear — you will find that dangerous. What is the harm of remaining? Are you afraid to meet the girl?"

"Afraid! Why should I —"

A descending figure blotted out the red glare of the entrance. We both stared upward unable to decide who the visitor might be; I could perceive merely a dim, indistinct outline. The smudge of a figure descended

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quietly, yet with evident confidence that the dark cellar was deserted. I attempted to step back, so as not to be between the two, but something rattled under my foot, sounding loud in the silence. The intruder stopped instantly, drawing a quick breath of surprise.

"Who is here? answer!" There was the sharp click of a gun lock; the words were French, the voice unmistakable.

"Hayward, Mademoiselle."

She laughed in sudden relief.

"*Peste!* you startled me! How came you out here, Monsieur?"

"The smoke of the burning cabin drove me out; else I should have suffocated. I burst open the door."

"Burst it open!" incredulously. "Then it was not barred? Someone had entered from this end."

"So I discovered, Mademoiselle; one of them is here with me — an old acquaintance of yours."

"Of mine!"

"Ay! step out into the cave so the light can find entrance; now, do you know the man?"

Her eyes wandered from me, whom she located by voice, toward the Englishman, who remained silent, his scarlet coat conspicuous in the glare. A moment their glances met, his face showing white and drawn, hers I could not see.

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"Oh, so it is you, is it!" a metallic ring to the low voice. "I thought you were safely away before this. And you have been hiding here. I ought to have suspected that. Now I remember, you knew of the tunnel."

He did not answer, although I saw his lips move. What was the man afraid of? He had been sharp and snappy enough with me.

"I think you mistake, Mademoiselle," I interposed, shocked at the expression of the man's face. "He has told me how it occurred; it was another who killed your father."

"What other?"

"A negro half-breed; I encountered him in the passage; we fought it out there in the dark."

"Alone? Where was this — this man?"

"He was lying unconscious beyond, next to the entrance."

"And — and," the words trembled on her lips, "you — killed the negro?"

"No, Mademoiselle, I did not. We struggled together; then he fired at me, and in the flash saw my face. The sight seemed to frighten the man, for he broke away, and endeavored to run. In his haste he forgot the lowness of the tunnel, struck his head against a sharp projection, and died."

She stood motionless, her hands pressed to her fore-

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head. Suddenly she turned from me, and faced him. I thought he shrank back against the wall; but, for a long moment, she stood there in silence, staring at him.

"Who was it?" she asked, at last, her voice like ice. "Tell me the truth — was it Picaud?"

He dropped his eyes, with an odd gesture of the shoulders. The girl's rifle flashed to a level, so quickly I could not even throw out my arm.

"Say yes, or no! Please stand back, Monsieur: this is my affair."

"Yes," the word seemed dragged from him.

"And you told Monsieur here the negro killed my father? You said that?"

His lips moved, but no sound came forth from them. She waited a breathless moment.

"That was a lie! You would not dare repeat that to me," she burst forth passionately, her whole body trembling. "You thought you could tell him, and he would believe you; would pity you, and let you go. You did not dream that I was here — I, René D'Auvray, Monsieur — to face you. You are afraid of me; yes you are — it is in your eyes. You think me an Indian? that I will avenge myself? Is that what you fear?"

He could not look her in the face, his glance wandering to me almost in appeal.

"I am an Indian," she went on more calmly, "but I

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am also French, and a Christian. I leave God to punish you, Monsieur. No; do not interrupt me now; I care nothing for what you say. I know what you have done, the lying trick which led me to desert my tribe; the subsequent treachery which brought my father here to his death, the falsehoods with which you induced my people to declare war. There is but one punishment for you; it will not come from my hands, but never again will you dare put foot in a village of the Wyandots. Somewhere the blow of vengeance will strike you down."

He muttered something in Indian dialect I could not understand.

"You say that to me! You dare say that! You are a bold man to try and threaten me now. Ay, do it then — Monsieur," and she stepped aside facing me, "this brute of an Englishman claims to be my husband."

"What," I exclaimed in shocked surprise. "He told me he attempted to make love to you, but failed, yet hinted that marriage might have been possible."

"He did venture that far. Then, Monsieur, I will tell you the truth. He won my father to him — God alone knows how — and persuaded me to go through the tribal ceremony. To me, a Christian and a French woman, that mockery of form means no more than to him. It was the price I paid for peace."

"But the Wyandots?"

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"In their eyes I am this man's squaw," her voice trembling with scorn, her hand pointing at him. "But in the eyes of God, I am not. His hand has never touched me — never will. Monsieur, I had to tell you."

"And I am glad you did. It is better for me to know."

"Oh, I begin to see," broke in the prisoner, finding his voice. "It is not my appearance that you object to, Mademoiselle, only you prefer the Yankee edition."

I strode forward threateningly.

"You low-lived coward —"

"No, Monsieur, let him talk," and she caught my arm. "We have no time now for a personal quarrel. We must save a man's life."

"His?"

"Monsieur Brady. There is but one way. 'T was for his sake, the endeavor to save him from torture, that I was so long in coming here. I did all that was in my power, but those Indians are not of my tribe. They might listen to me, but for the Englishman who leads them. He is heartless, more cruel than any savage; moreover Brady struck him, and he suspects me of aiding you to escape. There is no mercy in him, and I have failed. They mean to burn him at the stake, and I could do no more."

"Where are they now?" I asked in horror.

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“Yonder on the mainland. I could not remain to witness the scene — I could not, Monsieur. I was under guard, but stole away in the darkness, and came here, praying I might find you yet waiting. Now I know God has answered my prayers. He has shown me the way.”

She turned from me, her eyes on his face.

“Are you any relative to Monsieur whom you resemble so much?”

He laughed unpleasantly.

“Lord, I hope not — if so the connection is too remote to be considered. I have no desire to claim any Yankee cousins. Why?”

“The reason is not material. I want you to hear me. I do not know you killed my father, but I suspect it, and am certain you lured him to his death. If it was Picaud’s hand that did the deed, it was done at your desire. I would be justified as a Wyandot in killing you — even this American would grant me the right — but I am going to spare you, Monsieur — on one condition.”

“What?” the very sound of his voice proved his realization of her seriousness.

“That you accompany me to the Indian camp yonder, and help me save that white man’s life.”

“What do I care — ”

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"You care for your own, no doubt. Well, Monsieur, it hangs by a hair. Only on such a pledge will you go forth from here alive."

"You threaten to kill me?"

"It is hardly a threat — it is a certainty, Monsieur."

He looked from her face to mine, and there was small sign of mercy in either. The memory of Brady and his peril; the knowledge of what this man had done, his cold-blooded treachery, his lies, caused the hot blood to surge through my veins. He was to me a cowardly cur, and the very thought fanned my anger.

"Mademoiselle will not be the executioner," I said slowly. "I will take that duty on myself."

"You! I thought you a soldier; would you kill me in cold blood?"

"You have done the work of a spy, sir, creeping in the dark like a snake. The blood of this Indian war rests on you — the innocent blood of women and children."

"The savages would tear you limb from limb, you Yankee fool," he snarled.

"Possibly, but it would be after you were dead, sir."

I thought he would spring at me, and I half hoped he would. Yes, it would have been pleasant to have got hand on his throat, but fear conquered anger, his hands clinched, his teeth biting his lips until the blood came.

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"Tell me the plan then," he said roughly.

"I can control the Indians," she went on, as if there had been no interruption, "if the Englishman does not interfere. It will be your part to command him."

"Who is the fellow?"

"The fur trader — Lappin."

He stared into her face; then laughed insolently.

"Then the game is up. By the gods, it would be more likely he burned me. You make sport to suggest I could influence that monster."

"I do not," her face changeless in its expression. "There is nothing for you to laugh at. I know you two are enemies, but he dare not ignore your uniform. He has no authority and you have. You can accomplish the rescue of this prisoner if you have the courage, and will. There is only one thing for you to say — yes, or no."

There was absolute silence. I did not look toward her, but kept my eyes on him, reading the struggle in his face. I saw his eyes wander this way and that, as if seeking some possible escape. He had the appearance of a wild animal trapped, helpless. I could hear his quick breath. I waited until I could stand the strain no longer; then took a step backward, determined to force a reply. The lock of my rifle snapped to full cock, as I flung forward the barrel.

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"Answer the lady," I commanded sternly.

His eyes settled on my face; they were furtive, cowardly.

"Oh — well — I 'll go," he said slowly and sullenly.
"But it 's little enough good you 'll get out of it, I promise you."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE FIRE IN THE CLEARING

I LOWERED the rifle, but with mind fully made up as to my own part in the play. That the man contemplated treachery was sufficiently clear. How it might be prevented occurred to me in a flash.

“I understand your intention,” I said sharply. “Now I am going to give you warning that your life hangs in the balance. If I comprehend the desire of this lady it is that you accompany her alone to where these Indians hold their prisoner for torture — is that true, Mademoiselle?”

I was not looking at her, yet I knew her eyes were upon my face in wonderment.

“Yes, Monsieur; together we will seek to save your friend.”

“So I thought. But this man has no such intention. He has promised merely to free himself. Once within that Indian camp he will be out of danger, safe by the magic of his uniform, and his office. He will denounce us both, and lift no hand in defense of Brady.”

“You lie, you Yankee coward!”

“It was in your eyes, sir, as you gave pledge. Ever

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since Mademoiselle came you have been seeking opportunity for escape. She may trust you, but I do not, and you are not going there with Mademoiselle alone."

"What is that you say?" she questioned, her hand on my arm. "It must be so, Monsieur; there is no other way. The man dare not fail; he would thus atone —"

"No, he will not fail, because if he does he dies right there," I interrupted quietly. "Listen now; it is night, and I go along with you on this errand of mercy. It is my comrade condemned to the stake, and I will have my share in his rescue. You will go, the two of you, directly into the Indian camp; you may win, or you may fail in your pleas for mercy — but there will be no treachery. Do you know why, sir?" and I stared him in the face, angered by the sneer on his lip. "You'd better pay heed! Because I shall lie hidden in the dark, outside the radius of the firelight, with rifle trained on your heart. Not for an instant will you be beyond my power to kill. They count me a good shot along this border, and if you say a word, or raise a hand in treachery to this girl, I shall kill you."

"It will cost you your life, you devil."

"That does n't frighten me in the least. We may look alike; we may even have some of the same blood in our veins — God knows I hope not — but there all

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resemblance ends. I will do what I say; do you believe that?"

He did not move nor answer, but he believed. Conviction was written plainly on his face. Mademoiselle's hand was still on my arm, and I felt her grasp tighten. I ventured to turn my eyes aside to glance at her.

"Have I spoken rightly?"

"*Oui, Monsieur,*" softly. "I like you."

My pulses leaped in response to the unexpected words. Impulsive, unreserved, the swift outpouring of her heart, they were sufficient reward; I read in them meanings far deeper than she intended. No doubt she saw this in my face, for her cheeks flamed, and she drew back, turning swiftly toward him.

"It shall be as the American says," her voice trembling slightly. "I believe in him — he is a man."

There was a bitter retort on his lips, but he caught my eyes in time, and smothered it with a curse. God knows I needed but an excuse to throttle him, which he was swift to see.

"Go on now," I commanded grimly, "and do not forget. Mademoiselle, do you go first, and show the way. I will keep good guard of the rear."

She gave me her hand in a long, lingering clasp, and then her slender figure blotted out the red glare as she mounted the steps.

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“You next, sir,” the words sufficiently polite, but my rifle flung forward, in readiness to enforce the brief order.

“Curse you! I’ll make you pay for this!”

“Hold yourself to words, and threats,” I returned coolly, “but do as I say — move on!”

He climbed the stairs, muttering savagely, with me following so close behind the muzzle of my gun touched his back. There had come into my heart a deep hatred of the fellow that left me almost vengeful; he had acted like a cur already; had lied to her; had deceived her into what was practically a mock marriage; had been responsible for her father’s murder, and even now planned treachery. No sympathy, no mercy, appealed to me.

At the top the light from the blazing logs gave us full view of each other, but there was danger in remaining there thus exposed. The girl turned sharply to the left, leading the way into the woods, and then circling toward the ford. There was no word spoken, save as I gave a brief order or two. As we came into the black shadows of the overhanging trees, I walked close enough behind to touch him ever with my rifle barrel.

“I am playing safe,” I muttered grimly, “so do n’t try any tricks in the dark.”

We came out on the shore, pausing a moment to gaze

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out across the water to the gloom of the mainland. There was shouting in the distance, faintly echoed along the smooth surface of the lake, and to the right a slight reddening of the sky above the trees.

“The camp is yonder?” I asked, feeling my flesh creep in horror. “It is there they torture the prisoner?”

“Yes, Monsieur; the savages are all there now. They do not fear interruption.”

“Yet they know of my escape?”

“Yes; Lappin and the Ojibwa chief believe I helped you. ’Tis that which made them angry. When I interposed for Monsieur Brady — urging that he was on a mission of peace, and should be taken as a prisoner to the Wyandots — they drove me from the camp. It was best I go, for I could do nothing — they were not my people.”

“But why did they not search for me?”

“Because they were baffled, Monsieur; they found no trail. I sank the broken boat in the lake, and when they found where it had been dragged along the shore, they believed you had crossed the water, and got safely away. Against me they were mad with hate. They would have laid hands on me, only Lappin knew the Wyandots were coming.”

“Here? this way?”

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“That is the story whispered me by a friendly Shawnee. Already there is war, and the tribes gather to attack the Americans. The Wyandots follow this trail. ’T is because Lappin knows this he urges the torture. If we can delay until my people come these outlaws will be like sheep. Come, Monsieur, we must go.”

Her swiftly spoken words had rendered the dreadful situation clear. The fur-trader, by nature a brutal renegade, angered by resistance, by my attack on him in the forest, by René’s successful effort at my escape, had determined in his vengeful heart that Stephen Brady should pay the full price of it all. Possibly he had some personal reason also for desiring to see the old scout suffer. And he possessed the power; he commanded the band of Shawnees, and the others were outcasts easily inflamed to any deviltry. But the deed must be done quickly, without delay, before the Wyandots came.

We went down into the water together, the girl leading the way in confidence, holding her rifle high above her head. Trusting to her to find safe footing I kept my eyes on the prisoner. There was no word spoken, no noise except the soft ripple of the water against our bodies. Wet and dripping we climbed the bank of the main shore. It was dark under the trees, so we could scarcely distinguish each other. She paused, listening

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to the yells of the savages, now sounding much nearer, and in greater volume. Then she peered about into our faces.

"I cannot tell the one from the other," in a whisper, "only as I know the American bears the gun. Now hear me, both of you. There are no guards set, for those Indians believe there is no enemy near, yet we cannot be too cautious. There is a trail here leading to the opening in the forest where they are. I know it well, and can follow it in the dark." She touched the Englishman's sleeve. "You will take hold of the barrel of my gun — so! and advance as I do; and you, Monsieur —"

"Do not fear my being lost," I interrupted confidently. "Our friend will feel me at his back every step of the way."

It was a crooked path, winding around trees, and through thickets of dense undergrowth. To my eyes there was little of guidance, but my thought was concentrated on the man I guarded. Once he swore, but ceased instantly as I punched him with the rifle muzzle. I rubbed against trees, my feet tangled in roots, straggling undergrowth slapped me in the face. The advance was slow, cautious, the Indian in Mademoiselle showing in every stealthy movement. I could not see her at all, nor distinguish a motion; not a twig snapped

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under her moccasined feet; not a leaf rustled against her body. It was still as death where we were; only those fiendish yells piercing the blackness ahead yielded me any sense of reality. They sounded like the cries of devils, and brought with them the thought that we were approaching the mouth of hell. Then, through the screen of tree trunks there came to my straining eyes the red, sinister glare of fire.

I do not know how close we ventured before Mademoiselle stopped, and crouched down in the narrow path. Seldom before had I realized what real shuddering fear was, but I shook then like an aspen, gritting my teeth in an effort at self-control. Against the glimmer of light ahead I could perceive the outlines of the two — the man half sheltered behind a tree; the girl kneeling, with one hand parting the bushes before her. He glanced about furtively, catching my eyes, a ghastly, scared look on his face. In fear lest his panic might drive him to some mad act, I laid a hand heavily on his shoulder. He swallowed in his throat, giving utterance to a smothered groan; then stared the other way. She turned her head slightly at the faint sound, and the red light was on her face. Just that swift glimpse made me ashamed of my weakness, my cowardice. I stood straight, my fingers gripping him in a vise, my glance on the hideous scene revealed. I could see little, mere

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glimpses through the intervening branches, yet enough to show that we were close to the edge of a small clearing in which a considerable fire burned. The red and yellow flames lit up the open space fairly well, but all around the black forest wall closed in tightly. It was like a grotesque picture in a frame. Before the fire, mostly with their backs toward us, I counted twenty savages on the grass, their red skins and matted hair showing clearly. They were silent, motionless, apparently staring into the flames. The fiendish yelling came from beyond, from the other side of the fire, where I caught fitful glimpse of wildly dancing figures, of arms flung in air, of brandished guns, and streaming hair. I knew not which was the more terrifying spectacle — that mad dance, or those silent, brooding figures — the unrestrained savagery of youth, or the grim barbarism of age. I read the meaning of it all in a glance — the council determining the prisoner's fate — the warriors assured already of his condemnation. Yet where was Brady? Where was the fur-trader? Although I leaned forward, searching widely on either side, I could discover neither man. Then, suddenly, the two came forward out of the darkness directly to where the chiefs sat.

I saw Mademoiselle rise silently to her feet, but my hand only gripped harder on the Englishman's shoul-

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der as I watched. Brady advanced between two Indians, his arms bound behind him, a bloody cloth concealing his jaw. He was bare-headed, his clothing rags, and he staggered slightly as he walked. An Indian struck him with a stick, a vicious blow, and Lappin jerked him forward between the chiefs and the fire. The warriors sat there impassive, emotionless, their eyes cold and merciless. Brady looked into that ring of savage faces without a quiver, throwing back his shoulders, blood trickling down one cheek. It even seemed to me his eyes smiled. Then one of the chiefs spoke without rising, in deep guttural voice. I heard the words, but they were meaningless, a jumble of sound, yet somehow menacing, gruff with threat. The discordant yelling ceased, and a dark mass of forms clustered beyond the blaze, drawing together in a half circle behind the prisoner. The light played over dark, sinister faces and sparkled in the wild savage eyes. It was a horrid scene — that small open space lit up by the fire glare, and banked about by the black wall of trees, filled with those demons, half naked, repulsive, weapons gleaming in their hands, their glittering eyes on the helpless Brady waiting the torture. As I looked forth upon it I grew sick, my limbs trembling.

The girl stepped backward, voicelessly, until she stood beside me, her hand touching my arm.

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"We are here in time," she whispered, "but can delay no longer."

"He is condemned then? They will not spare him?"

"The chief speaks in Shawnee, and I know little of the tongue, but there is no mercy in his words."

"And you mean to go out there, to face those fiends? Are you not afraid?"

She smiled, a sad, brave smile up into my eyes.

"Monsieur, I must," she said pleadingly. "It is not only his life, but my duty. I leave my rifle here, and bear this; with Christ I am not afraid."

And in her clasped hands, reddened by the flames, I saw a crucifix.



CHAPTER XXX

THE RECOGNITION

SHE bowed her head, her lips pressed to the cross, and, when she looked up again into my face, I had no words to say; I could but choke, and brush tears from my eyes.

“It is right, Monsieur,” she murmured softly. “You would not have me fail. I — I am glad you care — so much.” She lifted her head and faced him. “You are ready, Lieutenant Hayward?”

The question came to him with a shock, his eyes wandering from her face to mine, and then beyond to the red fire. There was a ghastliness to his face horrible to look upon.

“If I must — yes,” he managed to articulate in a voice that shook. “Yet I — I dread the task; some instinct tells me we will fail. I would it were any white man in these woods out there rather than Lappin.” He glared at me, angry at himself for exhibiting such weakness. “I am no coward, sir — she knows that to be true. I have done England’s work on this frontier for five long years, and faced death more than once — but this, this,” a sudden shudder shook him, “is like

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walking open-eyed into hell. Mademoiselle, we cannot save the man. We but throw our own lives away. 'T is not the Indians I fear, but that fur-trader; he is the devil's own imp."

"It may be so, yet I try," her voice firm with purpose. "Under Christ I can do no less. Lappin dare not lay hand on you, Monsieur — you, an officer in uniform. However he may hate he would never venture that. I fail to perceive what you have to fear. But I am going — going now, whether you come with me, or stay here."

"Lieutenant Hayward is going with you, Mademoiselle," I said sternly. "He is man enough for that, I hope." I drew him about so I could look squarely into his eyes. "This is no boy's play, but a man's work. We are of the same race, perchance, however long ago the family line divided. I care nothing for that now. The man bound out yonder, condemned to the stake, is my comrade. Your word of authority can save him from torture and death. Go, and speak it. No matter what your excuse, you are a treacherous coward; you are afraid. Now listen, man! You have far more reason to fear me than all that savage crew; for I swear to you that if you fail this woman I will kill you where you stand. This is no threat; these are no idle words. Now go!"

The Recognition

“Monsieur —”

I put her hand aside, thoroughly aroused by the man's reluctance.

“Not now, René; this has become my task. He will do well to understand all I mean. Is this man Lappin an Englishman? Come, find your voice, sir!”

“Yes.”

“Then talk to him in English; I wish to hear all you have to say. No, I shall not remain here; I will find a place where I can see everything; where you cannot hide. There will not be an instant when my rifle does not point at your heart.— Mademoiselle?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“If this man speaks a word of treachery; if by look or gesture he attempts to play us false, will you give me a sign?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“Clasp your hands like this about your head; it will be his death warrant. Now, sir, are you ready?”

There was hate in his eyes, but I was glad of it. The very intensity with which he hated me at that moment, had brought back his courage. He had forgotten all else in a mad desire to get revenge on me. I let him read defiance, scorn in my own face, and the look stung him like the lash of a whip.

“Oh! but I'll get you for this. Yes, I'm ready,

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you clod of a Yankee peasant! but you 'll pay before ever you get out of these woods — oh, Lord! you 'll pay.”

I half thought he would spring at me, and drew back, my rifle lifted. But he only laughed, his lips snarling, and strode past crunching his way through the thicket. I caught the swift upward glance of the girl's eyes — a message of thanks, ay! more — and she had followed him. I sprang aside amid the trunks of trees, confident I could not be seen, that every savage eye would be riveted upon those two advancing figures. The light afforded me sufficient guidance, and I possessed some idea of where I wished to go. I found it with a dozen quick steps, and, even as the first wild scream of discovery burst from the red throats, I crept in behind a decaying log, at the very edge of the opening, and thrust my rifle barrel across the rotten bark. Deliberately, coolly, with full determination to act, I drew bead on the red jacket.

They were not five yards away, advancing straight toward the startled group of chiefs, the girl slightly in advance, the firelight on her uplifted face, the white crucifix gleaming in her hands. The Englishman, a step behind, his first mad anger already dying, walked like a criminal, with lowered head, and eyes glancing furtively aside. Even by then the treacherous coward-

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ice of him had returned. At sight of his face I cocked my weapon, every nerve taut as a bow-string, breathing through clinched teeth. I cannot say that I saw much of what occurred in that first moment — I had no eyes but for the red jacket — and yet I must have perceived it all. I remember now the whole scene, as if it hung painted before me, in all its vivid coloring and rapid movement. I saw the chiefs start up, grasping their weapons, at the first screech of alarm, a fierce intensity in their eyes. A glance at those two unarmed figures, and they stood still, gazing at them, yet with a shadow upon the dark, scowling faces that chilled my blood. The yelling ceased; there was no sound, but the pressing forward of bodies, and the crackle of flames. The Shawnee chief, a dark, saturnine face showing under his war-bonnet, stood erect with folded arms. Down the lane of warriors, apparently oblivious to their presence, Mademoiselle came, the Englishman slouching behind. The crowd of figures hid for a moment Brady and his guard, and surged in between me and Lappin.

There was silence; I could hear the wind in the tree tops, the restless movements, the heavy breathing of the excited savages; somewhere a dog barked. René stopped, her hand now touching the soldier's sleeve, her eyes on the dark, savage face confronting her. A mo-

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ment he stared at her, then at the Englishman, while I held my breath.

“Why you — here — ’gain?” he asked in halting English, the face like bronze. “I — send you — to forest — why come — back?”

“Because I am a Wyandot, and a Christian,” she answered, the words slow and distinct. “We kill warriors in battle, not by torture, Sis-e-te-wah. I come with this that I may beg your prisoner’s life. See; it is the cross of the Great God.”

“Huh!” he grunted. “Why should we listen — to a — squaw? the warriors of — the Shawnees — are men.”

“So are the Wyandots, Sis-e-te-wah; they are as the birds of the air. Once they came to the villages of the Shawnees. You know it well — they were warriors, under great chiefs. Yet they listen to words of wisdom from a squaw. I am Running Water; I have sat in the councils of my people; I am the daughter of the White Chief.” She glanced about her proudly, looking into the ring of dark faces. “I am a squaw, but I am a Wyandot — no Shawnee dare place a hand on me.”

“T is so,” he answered gravely. “I know — but not my — young men. It best you go — I speak true — the white man will die — it has been decided — the

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Shawnees know not — your God — the God of the Long Robes — the white man dies.”

“ But he came in peace, not war ; he was a messenger to the Wyandots.”

The chief had stepped back, and lifted his hand, but now he stood statue-like before her.

“ He great hunter — he warrior — we have — met in — battle. He kill warriors — my tribe — now he die — it is spoken. Sis-e-te-wah listen — no more.”

“ But you must ! you shall ! ” she insisted. “ ’T is not the Wyandots alone who say this. You may refuse me ; you may disregard the cross I bear, but you dare not disobey the word of the English — of the great chief across the water. If you will not heed the word of a squaw, listen to this man — a warrior of the Red Coats.”

“ I know him not,” coldly, “ nor care what he — says. He nothing — to Sis-e-te-wah — why he — come here ? ”

“ To stop this deed, this dastardly outrage ; he speaks for the Great Chief. ’T is best the Shawnees listen. Now, Monsieur.”

She stepped aside, and the Englishman stood alone, facing the grim-faced Shawnee. The very desperation of his position had brought to him courage ; he knew enough of Indian nature to be aware that any cringing

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now would add to his peril. Ay, he knew more, that the shadow of death hung over him. I saw him glance aside, sweeping the black edge of the forest, as though he sought to locate me; then he straightened up, every nerve taut, a soldier of England. For a moment I felt a thrill, almost of pride, as unshrinking before the scowl of the chief, the man stared back into the unwinking eyes. Yet this suddenly assumed boldness of front was no mystery; these savages were England's allies; only by her aid was war possible — however they might bluster and threaten, no hostile hand dare touch him. This he knew, realized to the full. Let the dark faces scowl, the young warriors shake their tomahawks, and scream insult; back of him stood power and authority. I could read this conviction in the man's face, as the firelight played upon it. In calm assurance he folded his arms.

“You say you know not who I am, Sis-e-te-wah,” he said sharply. “Then I will tell you; you and your warriors. I am an officer of England, an aide to Hamilton. Will you hear me now?”

There was silence, profound, breathless; the bold defiance had fallen upon them like a blow. Then, before even the chief could answer, the crowding ring of Indians was broken, and into the circle of firelit space strode the fur-trader, his mottled face purple, his mustache

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bristling. One moment he glowered into the soldier's face, and the latter stepped back recoiling against *Mademoiselle*, all his audacity gone. Lappin laughed, the cruel echo of it breaking the silence.

"A soldier of England! an aide to Hamilton! You lie. When Hamilton knows what I know he will tear you limb from limb. You come here to frighten us with your threats — you! I spit upon you! *Sis-e-te-wah*, warriors, hear me; you know who I am; I travel with you on the war-trail; I go with you into battle. Now I speak with the straight tongue. You do not know this man, but I do. See; he dare not face me; watch him shrink back afraid. Well! there is reason."

"I fear you, Jules Lappin?"

"Ay! and with cause. Knew you ever the time I failed to pay my debts? or wreak my vengeance? I have you now, and will crush the white-livered heart out of you with these hands. Listen, *Shawnee*. *Miamis*, *Ojibwas*, while I tell you who this fellow is. Then give him to me — I ask no more."

He stopped, bent forward, his fingers clinched. The ring of Indians pressed closer, but the old chief waved them back, standing motionless.

"Speak, Englishman," he said with dignity "we will hear."

Lappin half turned to face them, one hand gripping

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the knife at his belt. Like a white ghost Mademoiselle slipped silently in between the two men. I saw it all over the brown barrel of my rifle, my heart throbbing fiercely.

“He is a renegade, a traitor,” and Lappin’s hand pointed at the man he accused, “the uniform he wears a lie. How do I know? Because he fought me yonder in the woods on the island; because he was in the cabin with the others. This is the man who was left for dead, who escaped. Do you recognize him now?”

I saw the red faces, and heard the scream of voices.

“Ay! you do; and the woman, the Wyandot squaw, helped him. I said so before; now we have the proof. You drove her out, afraid to treat her as an enemy, and she goes to him, thinking his uniform will frighten you into sparing the hunter from torture. She brings him here to threaten you with what England will do. What say you, Shawnees, to the dog!”

The voices burst into a wild yell that seemed to split the night, but the fur trader flung up his hand.

“Back all of yer!” he roared savagely. “I claim this man as mine! Who has better right? I’ll throttle the life out of him with my bare hands before yer all. Have your warriors give us space, Sis-e-te-wah.”

The chief of the Shawnees, his eyes blazing under tangled hair, uplifted his arms.

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“T is the white man’s right,” he ordered grimly.
“I have spoken.”

I drew in my breath sharply, yet what could I do? The rifle trembled in my grasp, but I dare not use it. The unfortunate Englishman stood in my place, was mistaken for me, but if I revealed myself it could serve no end — would only leave me helpless to aid the girl. I could not think of him at that moment, but only of her. What would be her fate when this struggle was over? Maddened by the fight could those savages be controlled? Would she be spared? I had no time to think; my blood was like ice — I could only look, look at that hideous spectacle, reddened by flame, as my lips muttered a prayer, “God help me to do the best thing!”

It was all the work of an instant. Lappin whirled on his victim, flinging his gun to the ground.

“Face me, you cur, you spy!” he shouted. “Come out from behind that squaw. You got me once when my foot slipped. Let’s see what you can do now. What! you won’t! Well, you will!”

He thrust René back, hurling her with one sweep of his arm into the crowding ranks of warriors, one of whom clutched her as she fell. Then he struck the shrinking, startled Englishman a vicious blow in the face.

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CHAPTER XXXI

IN THE HANDS OF SAVAGES

I SAW the red welt on the white cheek left by the fur-trader's rough hand. Hayward staggered back from the force of the blow, his arms flung up, a sudden passing of anger darkening his eyes. This was more than flesh and blood could stand, and not retaliate. Wild rage usurped the place of courage; his lips snarled like a cornered wolf; he had forgotten all but hate. It was not a man, but a maddened animal who crouched for a spring.

"Fight you! I will! Yes, to the death," he snapped out hotly. "But you lie when you say I fought you before; when you say I was in the cabin — you lie, you dog of a white savage — you lie!"

"Messieurs, it is a mistake," I caught the girl's protesting voice in the hush. "It was not —"

"A lie, hey!" Lappin broke in crazed with rage. "What am I — blind! I saw you, you hound, with my own eyes. Shut the squaw up. Oh! you will; then have it now!"

They met like two enraged bucks in a forest, clutching at each other in blind, deadly battle. They were big

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men, evenly matched, fired with hatred. Perhaps there was an old score to be wiped out in blood; now and then some word sobbed out in the din of that struggle made me think so. Be that as it may, from the first grip, the first blow, they were beasts not men, striking, gouging, tearing at throat and face; using feet, or hands, or knees, in sheer savagery. Never did I witness such fighting, such mad barbarism, the ferocity of which stopped at nothing. The soldier I knew was unarmed, but a knife dangled at Lappin's belt. Either he forgot it, or in his rage disdained to use the steel. I saw the glitter of the naked blade in the firelight, as the two surged back and forth, gripped in each other's arms, their muscles strained with mighty effort. Oh! how they fought — like two cats, snarling and snapping, throttling each other, occasionally an arm breaking free to send a clinched fist crashing into an exposed face. Once the soldier went down to his knees, and Lappin kicked him, only to be gripped himself and flung headlong. But they were up together, bleeding both, panting for breath, clothes half ripped off their bodies, cursing fiercely, as they rushed at each other once more. They were silent now from sheer lack of wind, desperate, realizing each that he must kill or be killed. There was no mercy asked, or given. Straining, stumbling, exerting every ounce of strength, using every trick, they swung

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back and forth across the open firelit space. It was brutal, devilish. Ay! and so were those who watched.

Merciful Mother! What a sight that was! I, a soldier, and border-bred, hid my face in my arms — and yet I looked and saw. The very ferocity of it was a fascinating horror — the black, black night above, around; the forests shutting them in; the howling dogs snapping at their heels; the red glare of fire, and that ring of yelping savages, dancing back and forth to give the combatants room. René had disappeared — forced back into the half crazed mass, as the savages surged forward; of Brady I caught no glimpse. That was no scene to ever forget, to blot out with passing years. The wild savagery of it burned in on the brain; those dark faces, with wild eyes and dangling hair; the waving arms, and leaping bodies, the gleam of weapons tossed aloft, the jangle and din of excited voices in jargon of unknown tongues. How the red flames danced over them all, now in shadow, now in glare of light, making them appear fiends incarnate. And those two battling in the midst, huge men in death grapple, fighting as tigers fight — remorseless, merciless; tearing each other's flesh, battering each other's faces, gripping, clutching, straining in effort at mastery. Again and again they crunched into the crowd, reeling from blows, or hurled back by sheer strength of muscle; they sobbed

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forth curses, staggering with weakness. I saw Lappin drive his head into his opponent's stomach as though it were a battering-ram; I saw the soldier sink his teeth into the fur-trader's hand, as if he were a mad dog. 'T was then the brute reached down and fumbled for his knife — found it, and, with one hoarse cry of triumph, sent the bright blade home. Twice he struck, and they went staggering down together, locked in each other's arms, the soldier dead ere he struck the ground.

It was bed'lam then, followed by a breathless hush as Sis-e-te-wah pressed forward with uplifted arms. Two warriors lifted Lappin to his feet, and, as his gripping hand plucked out the knife from the wound, I saw the gush of blood crimsoning the dead man's side. An instant the victor stood staring down, reeling in weakness, upheld by others. Then he laughed, waving the dripping blade.

"Ah! good!" he cried. "There is one more recruit for hell. Bring me the girl here. 'T is time she had her lesson also."

They brought her forward, a red brave grasping either arm. I caught sight of her face, white, drawn, but not with fear, and sighted my rifle across the log at the white ruffian's breast. With clinched lips I lay, finger to trigger. Yet I waited — thank God, I waited. I know not what restrained me, only it was no fear of

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consequences to myself. It must have been the expression of the woman's uplifted face, the quick glance she cast about, as though in silent warning to me. I took it as a signal, a message of restraint. The fur trader, burly and brutal, still panting for breath, yet able to stand alone now, and conscious of his victory, thrust his reeking knife back into his belt with a coarse laugh.

"How do you like that, you Wyandot squaw?" he asked, leering down into her face.

"When you have these men release my arms I will answer you," she returned quietly.

"Oh, you will, hey! You'll be glad enough to talk before I am through. Let go of her there — yes; that's what I mean. Now look here — there lies your English officer. He's paid the price of being a fool. Look at him; are you ready to speak now?"

She glanced down at the motionless figure, the upturned face, white even with the red flames playing over it; she even took a step nearer that she might see more distinctly, one hand shadowing her eyes. Then she straightened up, and looked into Lappin's blood-stained face.

"He was nothing to me," she said slowly, "nothing. But he fought a man's fight, and was killed by cowardly treachery."

"What! You squaw, you dare —"

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"Of course I dare. Do you suppose I fear you, Jules Lappin, or your gang of outlaws?" her voice scornful. "Why, I challenge you to lay hand on me. You know who I am; you have eaten in the tepee of my father. I know who you are, and I despise you. You call me a Wyandot squaw; threaten what you will do; point me to this dead man whom you have murdered. Why? to frighten me — me? Very well, I'll answer you. I am a Wyandot; I am Running Water; but in my veins flows also the best blood of France. Mine is not a race of cowards and murderers, thieves and traders; my ancestors were soldiers and men. And you think I am afraid of you — you cur of the woods; afraid of you! Touch me, Jules Lappin, if you dare; I challenge you. Come, I wait for you to lay hand on me."

He stared at her sullenly, angry enough, yet with the bullying look ₂ ne from his mottled face. Something about the girl — her sharp words, her cool defiance — had left him uncertain.

"More than that, Jules Lappin," she went on passionately, "you are going to pay for all this," and she pointed down at the dead body, "pay for it, do you understand! That man was what he claimed to be — an aide to Hamilton. England pays her debts, Monsieur Lappin. Ay, and so do the Wyandots; have you

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forgotten that so soon? Have you forgotten what befell the Frenchman, Phillipe Bridau? Have you blotted from memory already the fate of Michael Cozad? You were in our village when the chiefs of the Wyandots dealt out justice to these renegades. Answer me!"

He did not, yet he drew a step back, and swept his hand over his eyes.

"Oh, you do remember, and it is not so pleasant to recall. Well, you have threatened me; you have had these Indians hold me prisoner; you have killed my companion, with whom I came to you on a mission of peace. Do you expect the Wyandots to forgive, or to forget? They are on this trail tonight, marching to join the tribes in war—you told me that but a few hours ago. They are out yonder in the dark; they will pass by here. Do you think, Monsieur Lappin, there is a covert of the forest that will hide you? Do you imagine this rabble of savage outcasts can protect you from the vengeance of the Wyandots? It is not for me to beg for mercy; you had better ask it at my hands."

The cool boldness of her words stunned the fellow. I could see him glance about into the dark woods, and then at the faces of the savages pressing about them. Few among them understood what was said, and their gestures, the fierce expression of their eyes, gave the renegade courage. He had already gone too far for

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retreat; his only chance now was to proceed — to brow-beat this girl, frighten her, and trust to the wilderness for a hiding place. The Wyandots were not coming this way; he knew that much, and he felt his nerve come back at the remembrance — they were bound south to the Maumee; their route would lie miles to the westward, beyond the lake. Ay, he was safe enough. And this chit of a girl had tried to bluff him, to make him cringe before these Indians. Hot anger flamed up in his heart. He had the power, and he would use it. As to the future, the world was wide!

I imagined I saw all this written on his face, in the stiffening of his body, in the look he cast at Sis-e-te-wah, and those warriors hemming him about. He was now armed with anger, his back to the wall; he would fight, not run! Bah! what was there to run from — the raving of a squaw! Yet, even then his hand shook, as he waved it before him.

“Stand aside, all of yer; get back and give us room, yer red scum!” he roared, his rage increasing as he gave it vent in words. “Well, I’ve heard yer talk, all of it, you breed, an’ that’s what I care for your threats,” and he snapped his fingers in her face. As she stood silent, motionless, looking straight at him with scorn unutterable in her eyes, the brute clinched his red fist, stepping forward as if he would strike.

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“Curse yer! I’m a mind to let yer have some of the same medicine I gave him. You ’ll laugh at Jules Lappin, will yer? Oh, ho! but I know a better way than that to make yer cry. By all the gods, we ’ll roast that Yarkee friend of yours to a turn, and you ’ll stand by and watch. That ’ll fetch the two of yer to yer senses. Here, Shawnees, two of yer come here. Pick up this carrion, and throw it out of the way, over there in the edge of the wood. We ’ll want this space presently. Sis-e-te-wah?”

“The chief is here,” with dignity.

“’T was your vote that the hunter die by torture?”

“It was so spoken.”

“Then he shall — to spite this squaw of a Wyandot, if for no better reason. Bid your warriors tie the dog up.”

For the moment, in the confusion, the noise and rushing back and forth of figures dimly seen in the red light, I lost sense of what was being done. There was a babel of yells, a wild mingling of half-naked forms dancing about through the shadows. Those whose identity I could comprehend had been swallowed up by the rush of bodies. Occasionally Lappin’s voice sounded above the din, as he cursed out some order. Then, forth from the surging, excited mass of savages, two braves came directly toward where I lay concealed, staggering under

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the weight of Hayward's dead body. I drew back my rifle, sinking lower behind the rotten log. The weight of the dead man caused them to shuffle forward, grunting to each other, glad enough to be rid of the burden. In the first dark shadow they let go, flinging him down against the very log behind which I lay, holding my breath in fear. The one turned back, uttering a guttural exclamation of relief, but the other paused, gripping the soldier's hair. Then he also straightened up, and ran back into the open, giving sudden utterance to a wild yell. I peered across the log to see him dancing in the firelight, waving a bleeding scalp in the air.

Even as I gazed with eyes of horror, my mind a chaos, every nerve throbbing in physical pain, there came to me the one hope, the one chance for me to meet alone the situation.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE GHOST OF THE LIEUTENANT

THE thought startled, actually frightened me. I had no conception as to where it originated, what strange conjunction of ideas, but it came into mind full born, every detail clear, as if sent direct from God. I felt that I must try it, that it was a command. Impossible, impractical as it seemed at first — a wild, crazy dream — yet, as I thought upon it swiftly, realizing the impotency of delay, it assumed new power. Ay! its very audacity made it possible of success. And what else could I hope to do? To attack that band of red demons alone would be suicide; would only condemn me to the same fate which Brady faced. It would neither serve the hunter nor the girl; it would indeed be the last resort of a madman. Nor could I flee, a self-confessed coward, to seek my own safety in the woods, leaving them to their fate. Yet here was a chance to aid them, an opportunity to overcome numbers through superstitious fear, to smite those savages with terror. It seemed the emanation of a crazed brain — but it was not. There was reason back of it, and a knowledge of Indian nature. They would never stop to think, to reason, to consider;

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they would be struck by terror, by the ghosts of their own consciences — even the white leader — left with no thought but for escape from the awful thing. I knew all this instantly — it leaped into my brain, with sudden remembrance of my strange resemblance to that dead man, lying almost within reach of my arm. If he only could be made to appear again, stalking forth, from those shadows where he had been thrown into the glare of fire, a ghastly semblance plucked from the grave, it would be a sight to chill the blood, to send those murderers shrieking in flight into the black forest. And it could be done, it could be done!

I laughed at the simplicity of the scheme, yet it was a grim, quiet laugh, tinged with bitterness. It seemed to come from other lips than mine; to be a faint echo. If it failed — what then? Well, it was only death, and that would be sweeter than living, if I fled, a coward in the night. In Heaven's name I would try the trick; I felt in my heart I had the courage. With eyes on those figures blotting out the fire, their discordant yelling deadening all other sound, their whole attention centered now on savage vengeance, I crept over the log, and crouched low beside the motionless body. Ugh! but I dreaded to touch it, to feel the awfulness of clammy flesh. As the upturned face, with staring dead eyes, revealed indistinctly by the red glimmer, met my gaze,

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it was like looking into my own. For an instant it seemed as if I stared down at myself, bent above my own insensate body. A shudder ran through me, my hands shaking as with palsy. Yet I rallied, crushing back the numbing horror of that vision, as the hateful voice of Lappin rose above the din:

“Ay! hold her there! Afraid of the cross? Well, I am not. Here, I’ll show you how to deal with squaws. Now get the dry wood — there’ll be some sweet singing presently. Oh, you’d like to get your hands on me, would n’t you, Brady? Not this time, my boy. Hurry up, there! let’s see the Yankee dance!”

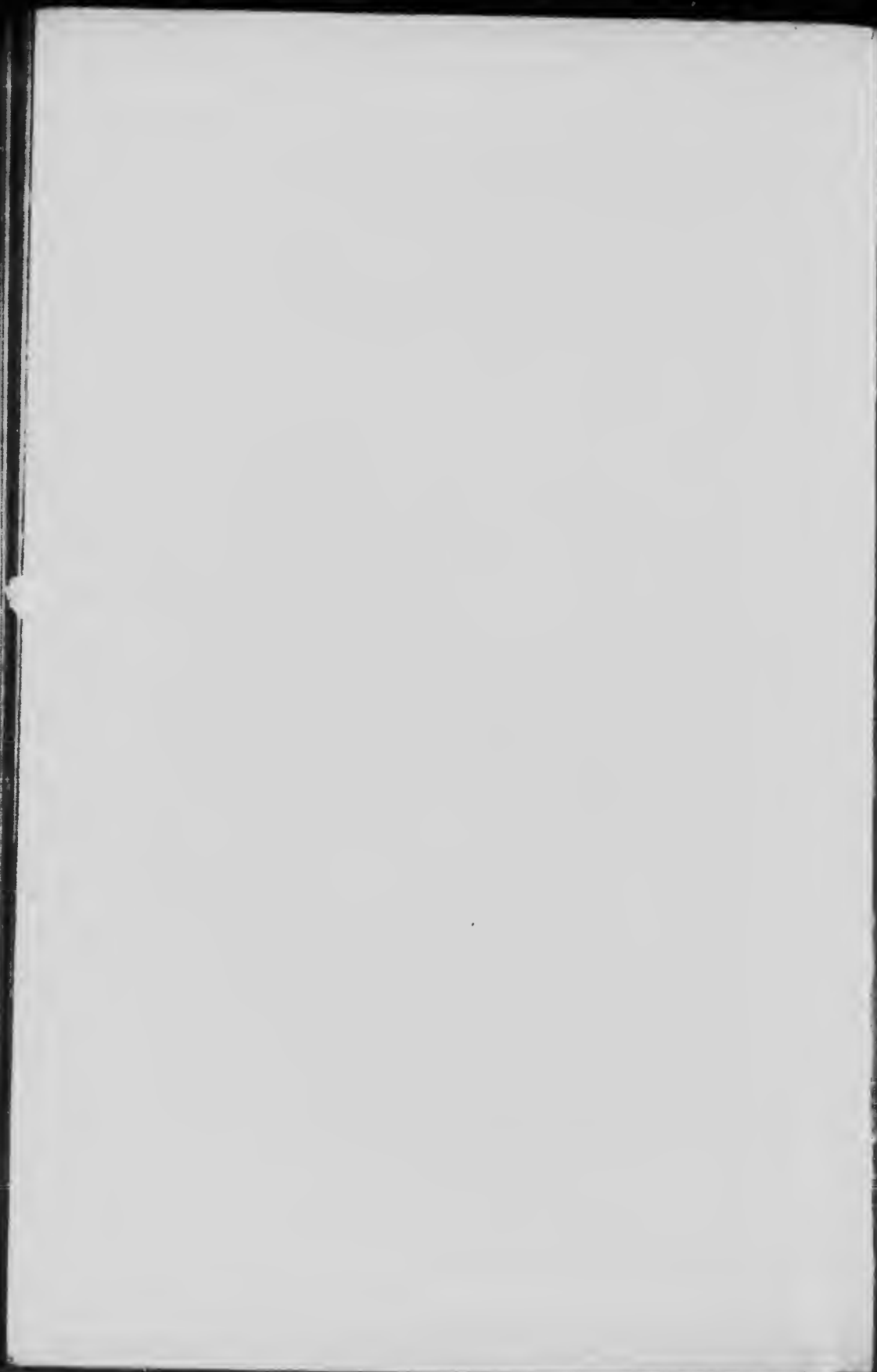
My hand no longer trembled; the grip of my fingers was like steel. The dead man no longer appalled; he was but a corpse of whom I had use to save the living. Recklessly I stripped the red jacket from the body, ripped in the struggle with Lappin, and showing clearly the rent made by the knife, and crawled back over the log, to put it on. Beyond my cover, not a dozen feet away, was a shallow ravine, and the light streaming through tree branches, fell upon a clay bank, gleaming a yellowish white. I reached it on hands and knees, streaking my face with moist clay, until it must have been ghastly, and plastering even more on my hair in horrible representation of the scalped victim.

Still unsatisfied, yet knowing of nothing else I could

add, and warned by the shouts that I must act without delay, I stole forward to the edge of the wood, pausing there a moment to muster my courage, and take one last glance at the scene revealed by the firelight. All the center of the opening seemed alive with Indians crowding forward about the prisoner, who stood bound to a stump, facing me. Other savages were running swiftly back and forth bearing armsful of dried wood, which were cast down at Brady's feet, the mass already rising above his knees. Excitement was evidenced in shouts, and wild cries, in frenzied leaping, dancing, and mad gesticulation. The Shawnee chief stood silent, with folded arms, but burning eyes, while Lappin grasped Mademoiselle's shoulder, holding her to place in the front rank of those red demons, his voice shouting forth orders, or taunting the motionless hunter, who made no reply. René was upon her knees, her face hidden, but I could see the white gleam of the crucifix as she held it forth in the glow of light. Brady's face was not toward me, nor revealed clearly by the fire, yet he held his head erect, his eyes roving over the devilish faces. The wounded jaw was bound about with a strip of bloody rag. Without speaking, it yet seemed to me he mocked them. Once he twisted in his bonds, and gazed at her as if he would utter some word, but changed his mind, and, for the first time, a look of pain swept into his face.



Brady held his head erect, his eyes roving over the devilish faces



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Lappin saw the effort, called out some foul insult, and a warrior sprang forward, striking the defenseless man across the lips, and driving his head back against the stump.

The vicious act drove me mad, and I stepped forth into the open, flinging my gun down in the underbrush. No eye in all that swarm was turned my way. In silence I moved forward until I was within a few yards of the struggling mass. Then I stopped, full in the red glare of fire, my arms uplifted, and gave utterance to a deep, sepulchral groan. God alone knows how awful was the apparition. To them, in startled horror, I was the dead man, standing there with ghastly face, and arms outstretched, my appearance rendered more terrible by the fitful gleam of fire, revealing features and form, glowing on torn red jacket, and head slashed by scalping knife, behind me the night and the black woods. No doubt it was a sight to bring fear to any heart, but to those murderers, their minds poisoned by superstition, it brought panic — a terror too terrible to resist. They knew me in the instant; I was the spirit of the dead; I had come back for vengeance; with clammy hands I was clutching for them; with sightless eyes I was seeking them out. There was one yell, breathing forth the terror of their souls; I saw eyes, wild with horror, staring at me; I saw men run and fall, scramble to their

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feet, and run again; I saw leaping bodies fight like fiends in an effort to get free. Sis-e-te-wah, struck by the rush, shrieked like a woman, stared toward me from where he lay on the ground, found his feet and ran. I caught glimpse of René's face uplifted, the cross still before her eyes; of Lappin, hurled over by the rush, trampled into the earth by flying feet, finally regain his knees, his face white as death, as he stared back toward me with protruding eyes.

Again I groaned, the unearthly sound rising even above the din, seemingly echoed by the great forest and flung back to earth again by the black curtain overhead. Ay! it was an eery sound! It even made my own flesh creep. Crazed by the terror of it, panic-stricken by the fears of others, the fur trader leaped to his feet, flung forward his rifle and fired. The ball sang past my ear, and I walked straight toward him, my ghastly face exposed to the fire, my hands reaching out in blind clutching. With one yell, piercing, the yelp of a frightened wolf, he turned and dashed for the woods, staring back over his shoulder even as he crashed headlong into the underbrush. For fear they might pause when once under cover — the first spasm of terror gone — I ran forward to the forest edge, giving utterance to another groan to spur them on. But this was not needed — terror, awful terror had struck into their very souls.

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Not one doubted the evidence of his own eyes; they had seen the dead walk; their murdered and scalped victim rise again in ghost-like semblance, and they thought of nothing but escape — to get beyond the reach of those hands, the gaze of those accusing eyes. They were mad with the ghastly horror. I could hear the fleeing bodies crash blindly into the underbrush, the discordant cries dying in the distance, the occasional thud as some frightened savage struck against a tree in the dark, or fell sprawling to the ground.

It was all over with so quickly I could scarcely realize what had actually occurred. I stood there myself stunned, and witless, gazing into the black woods, as if I had lost my mind. I knew I had won; that my plan had worked even better than my dream; that we were alone, unguarded, the savages gone. I knew this, and yet my mind, dazed, excited, failed to grasp the significance of the fact. I stood grasping a tree, listening to the sounds that came fainter and fainter from the forest, gasping for breath. A tear stole down my cheek, and I swept it away, angry at this evidence of weakness. Then I laughed and swore, my nerves dancing like so many demons. They were gone — gone! those merciless red devils, those accursed murderers, those fiends in human guise. Nor was it likely they would stop in their mad flight until they dropped from sheer exhaustion, or

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the dawn of another day brought with it fresh courage. In the dark woods every gloomy tree would be a new apparition, every gleam of star-light through the branches a menacing ghost. The wind in the leaves, the skurrying of wild animals in the thicket, would send them on, shrieking and panic-stricken, pursued by that ghastly thing with whitened face and clammy, outstretched hands.

And those others, who were yet there — Brady, tied still to the stake, the flames already licking the fagots at his feet, and Mademoiselle praying to the Virgin — what would they think? Would they know, understand, what had really occurred? or had the terrible spectacle left them also in benumbed terror? The thought awoke me as from a stupor, and I turned about. The opening in the forest was bright as day, for while the first red fire was dying down from lack of fuel, the dry wood encircling the old hunter was leaping into flame. In the glare I saw his face clear-cut as a cameo, and the girl now on her feet, yet with eyes turned on me. Two Indian bodies lay outstretched on the ground between us, killed and trampled under foot by the frenzied warriors in their first terror; everywhere was a litter of discarded weapons, flung aside in flight, and many a war-bonnet kicked into shapelessness under the feet of the fleeing. The ground was a jumble of things, as if I

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looked upon a battle field, yet this was not what I really saw in that first swift glance. A man — a white man — ran leaping across the flame-lit opening, kicking aside the blazing fagots of wood already scorching Brady, hurling them to right and left in frantic haste, until he made passage through. I caught the glimmer of a knife in his hand; and then, by main strength, he dragged the weakened prisoner clear of the burning wood, and dropped him exhausted on the ground. As the fellow stood erect, staring about him, at the helpless huddle at his feet, at the white face of the girl, at the debris on every side, I recognized Simon Girty.

“Saints alive! What does all this mean?” he cried, grabbing up the gun dropped in his first swift effort at rescue. “You ‘Running Water’; ay! and this is the Kentuckian who would have killed me. What’s happened here? It looks like a shambles. Never before did I see a man burning himself. Who killed these — merciful God! what is that?”

His voice rose into a shriek as he stared at me, while I advanced toward him. With one terrorized leap he sprang back, throwing up his rifle, but with hands shaking so, that I laughed outright. The sound coming unexpectedly from such ghastly lips must have been more horrible than a groan, for the frightened man dashed his weapon to the ground, and turned to run.

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His foot struck Brady's body and he went down, scrambling to his knees. I saw the old scout's head uplifted, the trembling girl bury her face in her hands, as if to shut out the sight.

"Do n't run; there is nothing to be afraid of!" I cried hastily, stopping still in my tracks to better reassure them. "I am no ghost, but a friend. Hear me, Mademoiselle!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

THROUGH THE BLACK NIGHT

SHE dropped her hands from before her eyes, and, holding out the white cross gleaming in the fire-light, came slowly forward. There was doubt and terror in the fair, uplifted face, but likewise a glow of hope and confidence. I waited silent as she came, noting every swift change of expression. A yard from me she stopped, hesitating, not even yet thoroughly convinced of my identity.

“Is — is it really you, Joseph Hayward?” her lips faltered. “Tell me, I beg you, for — for I was never so frightened in my life.”

“There is nothing for you to fear, Mademoiselle,” I said quickly, regretful enough to have startled her so. “I am Joseph Hayward, the American. ’T was but to save you I played this part.”

She buried her face in her hands, sobbing hysterically, her slender form trembling.

“Oh, I am glad — glad!” she managed to whisper. “I — I am not superstitious, not weak; but this was so real, so dreadful, that all thought left me. Oh, how could you, how could you do that?”

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“It was all that was left for me to do,” I explained, my heart throbbing, as I drew her hands from before her face, and looked into her eyes. “You must not blame me, Mademoiselle. I could not fight alone against them all. I was crazed with despair when I first thought of this. It was as though God inspired me to the attempt. Mad as it was, I had to try it; something seemed to impel me. But I thought you would know, would understand —”

“I did not; it never once occurred to me — the — wonderful resemblance. Oh! you cannot comprehend how terrible you appeared when I first saw you, Monsieur — there, with the horrid red glare on your face; you had the look of death, of a corpse walking. I — I will never blot it out of memory; it will haunt me while I live. I tremble still like a leaf, even though I feel your hands upon me.”

My eyes looking beyond her saw Girty on his knees, reaching for his rifle in the dirt. Then he arose to his feet, his face showing hard and ugly in the firelight.

“What’s all this mad play about!” he ejaculated roughly. “Come now, speak up thar, or I’ll try what lead kin do. Are ye ghost, er man? Burn me if I’m afraid o’ either!”

“Your courage has been tested,” I returned in humor. “But you might as well lower the gun, Girty. There is

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no occasion to shoot at me." I stepped out into fuller view. "Do you know me now?"

He stared, uncertain, into my clay-streaked face, his eyes narrowed into mere slits.

"Maybe I do, an' maybe I do n't," he admitted at last obstinately. "Yer 're like the lad who guided me into Harmar, but yer a sight for all that. If yez had yer face washed, an' more hair showin' I could judge better. What's all this play-actin' about anyhow? though 't was n't much play in it for him, I reckon," pointing to Brady, "when I got here. A minute more, an' the man would have been sheeted in flame."

I glanced at the old hunter, now raised upon his elbow. He seemed to be endeavoring to speak, but the wounded jaw, tightly bound by a cloth, prevented. The rough treatment he had received was plainly in evidence, his face bruised and blackened from blows, a great welt across one cheek from which blood oozed, his right ear slit, his leather jerkin slashed almost into ribbons, the moccasins charred on his feet, his small clothes smouldering yet, where Girty had beaten out the flames with his bare hands. Yet bad as he looked, the old, indomitable spirit shone in the blue, steadfast eyes. With an effort he sat up, supporting himself painfully with hands blackened by fire, yet before I could speak, Mademoiselle came between us and knelt beside him, her gentle

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fingers smoothing his gray hair, her voice speaking words I could not catch. Indeed, Girty, in his impatience, gave no opportunity.

"Well, yer ghost," he blustered. "Give me the straight of this."

I stepped toward him, amused to see the man shrink back, half startled still at my weird decoration, and dropped a hand heavily on his shoulder.

"Does that feel like the grip of a phantom, you fool?" I asked sharply. "If it does I'll shut down tighter still for your benefit. My tale can wait its telling until we be well out of here. There will be time enough then to satisfy your curiosity. Those fellows may get over their fright and come back."

"What fellows?"

"A mixed band of Miamis, Ojibwas, and Shawnees — mostly Shawnees with a chief named Sis-e-te-wah!"

"Huh! so it was those c'evils? The same gang I left at the foot of the island. But there were no Shawnees with them then. Sis-e-te-wah, did you say? I know the rascal, but never before did I hear of him being bold enough for such a deed. What stirred him to it?"

"There was a white man with them."

"Ah! now we have the truth — a red-coat?" and his eyes were on my jacket.

"He wore one — stolen no doubt — but was no sol-

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dier. Mademoiselle knew the man, a ruffian called Jules Lappin."

He gazed into my face a minute and laughed, slapping his knee in sudden merriment.

"Lord! but that 's a good one, boy! By all the gods I must tell it to Hamilton. He 'll split his sides. And yer actually played ghost for Jules Lappin, and sent that hell hound running! By my faith, I hope he never comes back. Do I know him? It was my knife that put the red slash in his cheek. There is no deviltry but he might be up to. An', Lord, love me, yer played ghost fer him!"

He laughed again, the odd sound echoing through the night, and causing Mademoiselle to turn and look at us.

"Is he one to get over his scare, and come back?" I asked, scanning the forest apprehensively. Girty's face sobered, the loud laugh dying into a cackle.

"I judge 't is like enough; the dog is no coward, but he 'll have a job gatherin' up the red-skins. By the Lord Harry! 't was a fine joke. But maybe we better move, friend, for he would not be in good humor if he did come, and I am scarcely in better grace with him than you."

"Go where?"

"To join my party. Did yer think it likely I was

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here alone? I'll tell yer the whole of it in a word. I found the warriors of the Wyandots marching south, an' joined them. Have you heard it was war? Ay! there's no stopping now; the tribes have taken the trail, the Cornhawk are bloody. 'T is said St. Clair has left Harmer alone, and there will be fighting on the Wabash. Dism! it is easy to guess how it will end."

"St. Clair is a good soldier," I contended stoutly.

"I grant that, but 't is not a soldier that is needed now. Pipe clay and drill are not for the wilderness. So is Harmer for the matter of that — did n't I see him bring his raw recruits into line — but one Kentucky backwoodsman — like our scorched friend here — would be worth the two of 'em in a fight with savages. He 'd meet them on their own ground. I tell ye, lad, the redskins will send yer St. Clair back as they did Braddock — if he lives to go. But why discuss that now? Saint Anne! we 've got enough to think about to save our own scalps. What was I saying? Oh, yes — the Wyandots were on the trail south, and I left them, taking a dozen braves along with me that I might learn what had happened on the island. 'Running Water' had disappeared; I thought at the time maybe she did n't care to travel with me any longer, or else desired to get away from those Indian outlaws we were camping with. Most of them were drunk, and no pleasant company. So it

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was my notion she left by herself to join her own people. But when I reached the Mandots she was not there, nor had anyone heard from her. Then your party failed to show up, and, putting the two together, I got it in my head that something must be going on down here. I came across to see."

"Where are your Indians?"

"At the foot of the lake. I scouted up the shore as far as the ford; saw the blaze of fire over here and crept up through the woods to investigate. Then somebody fired a gun, and I ran forward. This is what I found." He waved his hand about the open space. "Now you understand. I reckon the best thing for us to do is to get out."

I looked down at Brady doubtfully; then stepped over beside him.

"How is he, Mademoiselle?" I asked, "can he talk at all?"

"If you bend close to his lips you can hear his words," she answered glancing up at my face. The hunter's eyes were bright; he seemed to be trying to speak, and I dropped on my knees beside her.

"What is it, Brady?"

There was a faint muttering, but I distinguished the words.

"Was — was that — Simon Girty?"

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"Yes."

"The — the man — who, who — cut me down?"

"Yes."

"Whar — whar is he now?"

"Right here; you want to speak to him — oh, Girty?"

The renegade came toward us, and the eyes of the two borderers met. For a long moment they looked at each other, many a memory, no doubt, floating between. Then Brady held out a blackened hand.

"Yer saved my life, Simon Girty," he said with an effort. "I — I never thought to — shake hands with you — but — but I'm a goin' to."

Girty's ugly face broke into a smile.

"No more did I," he admitted grimly. "We ain't ginerally been in no shakin' hands mood when we've met heretofore. Still, I reckon, we're about even up an' kin afford ter shake if we want. Think yer kin travel a bit, Brady?"

"How far?"

"To the foot of the lake; to a Wyandot camp."

The hunter's eyes wandered from his face to mine.

"I — I reckon I can," he mumbled at last. "I — ain't hurt so much, only bruised up." His glance fell upon his feet. "Maybe if — I had some whole moc-casins I'd get along better."

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"We 'll fix that," and Girty laughed. "I reckon that 's what them dead Injuns is lying there for."

He stepped across to the nearest body, fumbled a moment, and came back, dropping on his knees. Deftly and quickly he cut the burned leather from the wounded man's feet, touching the blackened flesh gingerly with his fingers, and slipped on the new moccasins.

"You 're not scorched much, friend. Hurts some, I reckon, but a couple o' days will put you all right agin." He saw me, and grinned. "Go wash that face of yours, lad. Lord! but I want to laugh every time I look at it, an' the girl here has n't got over bein' scared at you yet. Go on now; we 'll get Brady started, and if you ever come into camp lookin' like that, my Wyandots would run all night."

I left them willingly enough, and found water in the ravine between the clay banks with which to scrub myself, lying down at full length, and managing thus to remove most of the decorations. I dried myself on the red jacket, and then flung it aside into the thicket, resuming my own, and picking up the discarded rifle. The application of water made me feel like a new man, although I realized now how tired I was in brain and body. The scattered embers of fire were by this time only a dull red, emitting little flashes of light, and the opening in the forest was but dimly revealed, the figures in the center

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almost undiscernible. I found the hunter on his feet, however, leaning heavily on Girty's shoulder, but insisting he could walk alone. Mademoiselle bore two guns, and was first to greet me.

"I cannot see how you look," she said, the tremor gone from her voice, and striving to speak gaily. "But I am sure it is an improvement, Monsieur."

"I trust you may think so still by daylight," I answered. "At least I have done my best to cease being a ghost. I mean you shall discover I am very much alive."

"I have small reason to doubt that. You must help him."

"Yes, I know; but you, Mademoiselle; did you escape uninjured?"

"But for some small bruises, and a terrible fright; only I—I wish so much to get away from here, Monsieur."

"Is that you, Hayward?" broke in Girty's harsh voice. "Take hold here with me, until this man gets the use of his legs. You know the way, girl; down the line of the shore. Keep a bit ahead of us, but do n't move too fast; 't will be dark in the woods."

Brady groaned with pain, but was not without strength. When we reached the forest the trail was so narrow, that Girty fell behind, leaving me alone to guide him. We advanced slowly, having to almost feel our

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way through the dense gloom, until we emerged on the shore of the lake. Here the dim light of the stars shimmering on the water yielded a faint guidance, but Brady hobbled along so painfully I had no heart to urge him faster. Ahead, a dim shadow, was Mademoiselle. My mind was filled with thought of her, but Girty began asking questions, and I told him briefly all that had occurred since we left Harmar. It was so we came, at last, into the Wyandot camp.



CHAPTER LXXIV

A PRISONER AND THE ALLIES

AS I pen these adventures of youth I seem to retain but dim recollection of what occurred following our arrival at the camp at the foot of the lake. I recall the struggle we had with Brady, which taxed Girty's strength as well as my own. The man suffered greatly, and for much of the distance we bore him in our arms in spite of his protests. Yet we reached the spot at last, and stumbled into the circle of light cast by a small fire, the Indians aroused from sleep by Girty's shout, and clustering about us in eager curiosity. At first view I deemed them hostile, but a word from the girl made them friendly enough.

Indeed she assumed command at once, ignoring Girty utterly, and keeping the Wyandots busy with an effort to give Brady relief from pain. Boughs were spread for him before the fire, the wounded man placed upon these, and his wounds carefully washed. I saw the old hunter's eyes following her movements as she flitted about in the firelight, or bent above him in gentle ministrations. If she was weary she gave no sign, her whole thought concentrated on her work of mercy. She never looked at

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or spoke to me, and I felt my heart sink as I watched her, the dancing red light on her face, grave and earnest. With the help of one of the warriors — an older man of stern look — she made some native poultice, which was bound to the burned feet as well as the wounded jaw. This must have brought relief, for Brady finally closed his eyes, and fell asleep with her brown hand stroking his forehead. Yet she remained in her position, motionless, her eyes upon his face. I moved uneasily, and changed my position, but she did not look up. From where I lay I could see the clear outline of her face silhouetted against the fire. I yearned to go to her, yet somehow I dared not. At last I lay my head down on my arm, still watching her, and, before I knew it, was asleep.

It was gray dawn when Girty called me, a bright, fair dawn, and everything was ready for the march. I ate the food an Indian brought me, but looked about in vain for Mademoiselle. The hunter was sitting up, propped against the base of a tree, and his eyes smiled a welcome when I called to him. He had slept well, he said, and was better. Then Girty ordered the breaking of camp, and she stood beside me, as I gained my feet. I know not where she came from, but she looked as fresh as the morning, her dark eyes meeting mine in all frankness.

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"You are a good sleeper, Monsieur," she said lightly.

"And you must be a witch to get along with none, and yet appear so rested."

"Oh, but I slept; did you think not?"

"I only know you were awake when I succumbed. Your face was the last thing I saw, but I could keep my eyes open no longer."

She laughed.

"Perhaps had you waited a moment longer I might have said good night," archly. "But when I turned you were sleeping soundly. I remained with Monsieur Brady until I knew he was relieved of pain. He looks quite himself this morning."

She left me with a nod of good fellowship, and knelt down to speak with him, just as Girty came up with two of his Wyandots. Nor did we converse alone again that day. When the night came I had the feeling she avoided me.

They made a litter for the hunter from two poles, with a blanket strung between, the Indians taking turn as bearers. Mademoiselle went ahead with some of her own people, while Girty and I brought up the rear. We talked but little, although I caught a wide grin on the fellow's face every time he looked at me and recalled the memory of my ghost play. Once he chuckled in merriment, swearing again he would tell the tale to the Eng-

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lish commandant, but I saw no fun in it, and told him so in a way that kept his tongue silent. I was in no good humor at best, and, in spite of his service to us, no friend to the black renegade. Faith, I knew his foul story too well, and thought only of how soon we might be rid of his company. 'T was with this in mind that I ventured on questioning the fellow as to his purpose, and where he proposed taking us. His answers were not to my liking, although he was soft-spoken enough.

“Where could I take you, friend, but to the Wyandots? It was to them you were sent.”

“Ay! but the mission has failed, and there is already war.”

“The more reason you should go. These woods are full of savages to whom you would be easy prey. What could you do with the wounded man alone? 'T is a long trail from here to the Ohio, and a hard one.”

“And the Wyandots?”

“Will hold you prisoner, no doubt. 'T is not like they will free you to fight against them. Yet that is better fate than death and torture. 'T is my belief that Hamilton is with the tribes. If so, he may hold you to ransom.”

I said no more, watching Mademoiselle's slender form ahead, and buried in my own thoughts. Yet before sundown we had proof that the man was right, for we

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suddenly came up with a considerable band, armed and painted for war — Miamis, and Pottawattomies, Girty said — the warriors crushing about us with sullen faces and fierce yellings. Some among them recognized Brady, and one brute struck him with a gun stock, before the chiefs came and drove them back. That night we were under Indian guard and the next day marched with grim, silent warriors on either side of us. Made-moiselle remained by Brady much of the time, seeing to the bandaging of his wounds, but I trudged on despondent and alone, for Girty had disappeared.

It was the fourth day, on the banks of the Maumee, that we came straggling into the Indian encampment, and passed through howling hordes, who struck at us in spite of the guards. The word passed that one of the white prisoners was Stephen Brady caused them to press about us so close that we were fairly hemmed into the mass, infuriated faces on every side, the wild shrieking making an indescribable din. The situation was becoming serious, for the guards cared little what befell us, when Girty, accompanied by three Wyandot chiefs and a white man in British uniform, fought passage through the crowd, and, by threats and blows, won way for us through the village. The extent of this surprised me, and gave me a new conception of the power of those northwest Indian tribes. There were hundreds,

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perhaps thousands, gathered there, for we only traversed one end of the encampment, the warriors of tribes whose homes were as far away as the Great Lakes and the Big River. Nor were all yet gathered at the rendezvous. Our ears, as we pressed on, heard a jargon of strange tongues, and our eyes saw a variety of Indian dress, such as few have looked upon; everywhere the war bonnets waved resplendent, and hideous faces, streaked with war paint, glared at us in hostile menace. It was a desperate passage, yet those who protected us from violence pressed steadily on, thrusting aside obstructing forms in grim determination. Twice they came to blows, and once the Englishman threatened to use his rifle, but, at last, we reached the camp of the Wyandots, and left the howling mass behind. There were savages in plenty here, but the sight of Mademoiselle beside us still, and the presence of their own chiefs, held them to peace. They crowded about, pointing at us, even touching us with curious hands, questioning eagerly, but with no threat of violence.

One chief called to them, and many responded, driving back those of other tribes who still yelled threateningly in our rear. There were shouts, blows, the sound of struggle, but we were not halted. There were few wigwams erected, not more than two or three standing in the shadow of trees close beside the river. Big as

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the encampment was, it was no permanent village, but a mere rendezvous for the various tribes allied for war. To one of these, covered with deerskin and rendered hideous by tribal totems, we were taken, and thrust within. At last we were alone, Brady and I, although we could still hear the yelling without. He lay extended on his litter, and I dropped to the ground, thoroughly exhausted from the rough buffeting through which I had passed. We were safe for the time being; I knew that, but what the future had in store could not be guessed at. It would depend upon the decision of the Wyandots, and the authority exercised over the wild hordes by the few white men present. That some of these wore the uniform of the British service signified little, for they would be there without the open connivance of their government — more adventurers than soldiers. What real influence they wielded I had no means of knowing, nor could I deem them of high character or merciful hearts.

Brady sat up, and then, with some effort, and no special exhibit of pain, succeeded in standing erect. I joined him, and our hands met in firm grip; his eyes were cool, the expression of his strong face composed.

“You are better, Brady?”

“The pain is less,” he said with difficulty. “The girl is a witch doctor. Ay! the touch of her hands —



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cures. Yet I thought — it best — not to appear — strong. Faith! 't is a big Indian camp — Hayward. Did you mark the different tribes, boy? The whole — northwest is here — and with white leaders.”

“They will give St. Clair a fight.”

“My God! — they will — an' he 'll come up to it — like a blind fool. He 'll march into — an ambuscade — mark my words — unless he 's warned. Oh how I wish I had — my old feet back.”

“For what, Brady? You would run for it? Would seek escape?”

“Ay, I would,” earnestly. “'T is worth more than my life to tell him what is coming. But, faith, 't is all I can do to hobble. Lad, you must go.”

“I? How? There is no way.”

“We 'll find one; the girl — hush! someone is coming now!”

There were three of them — Wyandot chiefs — and a white man. I stepped back as they filed in through the narrow opening, the Indians grave and stolid of mien, wrapped in blankets, not even glancing toward us as they passed; the white man, who came last, dark-skinned, erect, his eyes a sharp, scintillating blue, his moustache gray and luxuriant. He wore a green hunting shirt that hung in fringe to the knees, a pistol and knife at his belt, and on his head a hat of broad brim that left

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his face in shadow. I saw Brady stare at him, giving utterance to a sudden, half suppressed exclamation, but I remained motionless and observant, while the three chiefs solemnly seated themselves on the ground, and the fellow in the green shirt wheeled about, as if on parade, and scanned us for a long moment in silence.

"Which is Stephen Brady?" he questioned at last in high-strung voice.

The scout sought to answer, but the words were but a mumble. I stepped forward into the stronger light.

"This man is Brady," I said shortly. "He has been shot in the jaw, and cannot speak."

The eyes of the four were on me in startled amazement. The white even took a quick step forward to better peer into my face.

"And who are you?"

"Ensign Hayward, of the garrison of Fort Harmar."

An oath leaped from his lips, his sharp eyes snapping.

"Rot, man! What mummery is this? Do you dare think I do not know you?"

"I am very sure you do not," I answered coldly, little liking his manner. "Never before have I seen you. Yet I know whom you mistake me for — a British Lieutenant of my name."

"And you are not he? you insist on that? You have his name, his look, and still claim to be another? I can

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scarce believe that. What know you then of Lieutenant Hayward?"

"That his body lies yonder, beyond a lake in the woods."

"Killed! by whom?"

"By a white renegade — Jules Lappin. I saw him die, and if you care to listen will tell the story."

He stood in silence, gazing at me, unbelief plainly depicted on his face, one hand clasping a pistol butt. Then he nodded his head.

"Go on!" he said harshly.

I told the tale briefly enough, from the time when Girty first appeared to me in the woods, until we entered the Indian encampment. The dark, expressionless eyes of the chiefs were upon me, and I spoke slowly, not knowing whether they understood or not. I saw bewilderment and interest in the face of the white man as I proceeded, his hand leaving the pistol to tug at his moustache. Once or twice he interrupted me with a question, but the sharp tone of his voice was modified. When I related my career as a ghost, something not unlike a smile curved his thin lips, and softened the steel glitter of his eyes.

"And you expect me to believe that?"

"I do."

"And why — pray?"

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"Because I am an officer, and a gentleman," I answered stiffly. He laughed, unpleasantly.

"Permit me to say a rather unusual combination so far as I am acquainted with the service you claim to represent. However, I will question Girty. Who is this Mademoiselle D'Auvray?"

"You may know her as 'Running Water'."

"Oh, the Wyandot missionary. Ay! I remember now old D'Auvray was her father. We clashed often enough to recall each other — a quarrelsome Frenchman, and, from all I hear, the girl possesses the same spirit." He stopped speaking, with a glance at the silent chiefs.

"You would question the man?"

There was no response, save that of the central figure who shook his head gravely.

"Then I hold the two of you prisoners. After the campaign you may be taken to Detroit. At present you must go with the tribes, as there are no men to spare to guard you north. Do you know, sir, who I am?"

"I do not."

"Well, your companion does; that is why I hold you in close confinement — to keep your mouths shut. We will go, Wyandots."

They filed out slowly in the same order they had

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entered. At the entrance the man in the green shirt paused, and glanced back.

“You understand that the slightest attempt at escape will mean death,” he said sternly. “The savages are hard to control.”

Neither of us answered, and, after waiting a moment, he dropped the flap of skin and disappeared. I turned toward Brady.

“He said you knew him; who is he?”

There was a stern glow in the old scout's eyes.

“Hamilton, the British commander at Detroit — the biggest devil on this frontier. 'T is a bold thing — his being here in person. There is big game on foot.”

CHAPTER XXXV

RENÉ COMES

THE afternoon passed slowly. We discussed the chances of escape, yet knew so little of our surroundings as to gain slight satisfaction. If we could be certain that there were no Indians on the opposite bank of the river we might venture an attempt. But we were far from sure. Desperate as we were, desirous above all things to get our scanty information to St. Clair, we could not court certain death. Even Brady advised postponing the effort until we learned more of the situation. It was his belief that the Indians would remain where they were for several days, waiting the arrival of other tribes from a distance. Scouting parties might be sent out, but the main body would stay in camp, preparing and awaiting new recruits. Hamilton, he was sure, would never dare lead the redskins into battle, and his presence in the village was proof that the real campaign had not commenced. It was merely planned and engineered.

He fell asleep at last, but I kept wide awake, listening to the various noises without, and watching the lengthening shadows indicate the passage of the sun. I

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could see the silhouette of an Indian guard, standing like a statue, and once ventured to peer out through the slit in the skins, but only stared into a savage face, and dodged back, barely escaping the vicious sweep of a tomahawk. At another time loud yelling led me to believe new arrivals had come trooping in, and just before dark an English voice spoke sharply to the guard without, and I realized there were others besides the one I had seen, stationed about the lodge. We had been fed soon after our arrival in camp, and nothing more in the nature of food was forthcoming. Night settled down but with no diminution of noise without. Fires were kindled both in front and behind the wigwam in which we were confined, and the red glare found entrance through slits in the skins, making the interior visible. Some robes and a blanket or two were thrust through the opening by a red arm. I spread one of the latter over Brady without disturbing him, and sat down on the rest, occupied with gloomy thoughts.

Thus far all had been failure, our mission useless, our sufferings vain; Schultz had given up his life, Brady was wounded and suffering, and I, as well as he, a helpless prisoner. Yet even this could be borne with patience if only I could perceive some way to become of service, some means by which I could warn St. Clair of this tornado of savagery about to sweep down upon

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him. I wrestled with the problem, searching vainly for some avenue of escape, some unguarded opening by which I might hope to penetrate through the watchful red lines. God knows I had no fear for myself, no shrinking from danger. I would have risked the rifles in a moment could I only discover a chance to carry a warning of treachery. My whole thought was with my comrades, marching the forest trails, unaware of the hordes of warriors who watched their every movement with furtive savagery — tramping sturdily forward to ambuscade and death. The dread picture left me sick and trembling, the awful helplessness taking the very heart out of me.

Slowly, insensibly, the vision of Mademoiselle came. What a life had been hers from childhood, and yet how the true, sweet womanhood had conquered all savage environment. It was to me a miracle. Indian she claimed herself, and yet it was her French forebears who had marked her face and character. The very glory of the French court found fresh portrayal in this homeless girl of the wilderness — in the proud setting of her head, in the merry laugh of her eyes, the naive daring of her actions. She was like no other I had ever known — she was just herself. And yet the sweet, wholesome charm of her! It was not to be told in words, nor pictured in thought; there was about her

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the breath of the wild, made more fragrant by the subtle perfume of civilization. She could do strange things, cast convention aside, and still remain womanly, sweet and strong. What a bright, happy sprite she was, yet what tongue would be reckless enough to attempt insult? I pitied the man who did, who presumed on her drop of Indian blood, or the happiness of her disposition. For those dark eyes could flash, ay! and if need be, the strong brown hand could strike. Someway this girl had learned life, had found its shadow and its sunshine, and glorified it with a deep, abiding faith which set her apart and stamped her different. She was René D'Auvray — lovable, brave, faithful, her very presence a benediction, her smile a blessing worth sacrifice to win. I wondered where she was in that ribald camp. Had she also been held prisoner — which was not likely — or been sent back to the North — far more probable — as a squaw out of place amid this concourse of warriors preparing for battle. Surely some restraint kept her from coming, some authority other than the command of Wyandot chiefs. These held her in awe, almost in reverence — she could have won her way with them, and, somehow, I had no doubt what that way would be. My heartbeats quickened with the faith that was in me.

She was in my mind still, a soft, tender memory, when the skin concealing the entrance was lifted and she

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stood in the narrow opening looking in. I could see her slender, lightly poised form outlined against the fire, but seemingly her eyes could not penetrate the darkness within. An instant she hesitated, leaning slightly forward.

"Monsieur."

"Yes," I said eagerly, already on my feet. "I was longing for you to come."

She came forward cautiously, guided by the sound of my voice, leaving the entrance open, permitting me to glimpse the guard without, facing the opening.

"And I thought I might never have the privilege, Monsieur," she said softly. "Hamilton refused to listen to my request, even to see me. I had to wait until he left the camp, and make appeal to my own people."

"He has departed then?"

"Not for long; merely to hasten forward laggard tribes. He is a hard man, Monsieur, ambitious and cruel. It is he, not the Indians, you must fear."

"But he is of white blood; of a nation at peace with us. It seems strange, his enmity."

"Yet that is the very cause. He is here in secret performing an act of treachery. I know not what the government bids him to do, but it is his influence which has precipitated war. He and his emissaries have preached it from tribe to tribe. Yet he dare not have it

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known. That is where danger threatens you, Monsieur — you recognize him, you have seen him here in this hostile camp; you are an officer of the American army, your word of testimony would bear weight."

"You mean," I asked, horrified at the thought, "that his promise of protection is a false one?"

"I do not know," hesitating. "I only know the man, and dare not trust him. He is ambitious, unscrupulous, and possesses power. 'T will be as he decides. A life will weigh nothing if it interferes with his plans." Her hands clasped mine suddenly, her eyes upturned to my face. "I could not be untrue to my people," she whispered swiftly, "but they have been made this Englishman's victims. Him I despise, abominate; he has led my people astray; there will be weeping and sorrow in the villages of the Wyandots."

A quick hope came to me, and I held tightly to the hand in my clasp.

"You have come to help us, Mademoiselle?" I whispered, bending so close her hair brushed my lips. "You feel that our need is that desperate?"

"I must do right," she answered, yet without lifting her eyes to mine, "as God tells me. I pray to him for guidance. You are white men and Christians; you came to the Wyandots on a mission of peace. What is my duty, Monsieur? I also am Christian, and only a

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drop of Indian blood flows in my veins. Yet all my life have I been Indian. How can I turn against my own people?"

"I cannot think that you do," I urged as she paused, breathing heavily. "The Wyandots have been falsely led, deceived. They have been driven into this war by the lies of white men. Would we be in danger now if our fate was left to a council of Wyandot chiefs?"

"No; they would listen to me, and believe. It is Hamilton and his white aides who refuse to hear the story. I went to his tepee twice, and was turned away—the last time with insults, as though I were an unknown squaw."

"How, then, did you gain permission to come here?"

"I waited until he left the camp. There are but two white men here tonight, and one of them is Girty. I like not the man, but he seems friendly to you, and so I trust him. He suggested that I come, and told me something which gave me courage. He had heard a word dropped by Hamilton which made him suspect your lives were at stake. He dare not act openly, but he sent me to tell you this, and to whisper to you his plan. It was easy for me to come here with Hamilton away. The guards are Wyandots, and I had only to ask the chief to let me dress again Monsieur Brady's wounds. He had not been warned against me, and suspected

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nothing. The Englishman who was left in command was led by Girty to the other end of the village. When the chief sought him, he was not to be found, and so I was given permission."

She stepped silently back to the entrance, and glanced out into the firelight, returning as swiftly to clasp my sleeve.

"Listen, Monsieur; I must speak fast, for I know not who may suspicion us. Is he better?"

"Yes, except for the wound in his face; his feet will bear him, although he would suffer pain."

"He could travel but slowly, and it is a long forest road, nor could you conceal your trail. Ay! Girty's plan is the better — by means of the river. Now mark every word, for 't is a desperate chance. Two hours from now be ready. We must work tonight, while Hamilton is away. I will somehow draw the guard away from this side — here, next to river, Monsieur. When you hear an owl hoot three times creep beneath the skins and down the bank to the water's edge. You must move like foxes, for there will be sleeping warriors to pass. Go down stream."

"And then?" I asked breathlessly, as she stopped to glance behind.

"A quarter of a mile below, at the end of the village, around a sharp bend, Girty will have a canoe tied to a

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tree that overhangs the water. It will be in shadow, and concealed by brush. He has promised to put into it food, paddles and one gun."

"Are there Indians on the opposite bank?"

"A few, yes, and there is much scouting. You cannot be too cautious. Float with the stream at first; do not risk the paddles until you round the big bend, and then be silent. You must hide during daylight — are you sure you understand all?"

"Yes; that is clear, but I must ask a question — where is St. Clair?"

"I do not know exactly, but he is marching toward the little Wabash; he seeks to destroy the Miami towns."

"With what force?"

"Less than two thousand, the scouts say. He only expects to meet the Indians of the Wabash."

She must have answered me without pausing to think, for as the words left her lips, she drew a quick, startled breath.

"Why should I have told you that!" she exclaimed.

"I have forgotten I am a Wyandot; that — that I only seek to save your life."

"I have long ago forgotten," I returned earnestly.

"And it is well you told me, for nothing less than duty to my country would ever compel me to leave you here. Even at risk of life I would remain to be near you, re-

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main to urge you to desert this life and return to your own people."

"The Wyandots are my people."

"No; you are not of them, save by accident. In heart, in nature, in face even, you are of the white race. Will you not come with us now?"

She could not doubt the earnestness of my appeal, and I could feel her tremble, as her eyes scanned my face in the dim light.

"No, Monsieur."

"You prefer savagery, the squalor of Wyandot villages, the horrors of Indian war, to — to me?" I faltered. "Am I nothing to you, René?"

"You are much, Monsieur," she said frankly. "So much, I am afraid. I do not know why, but it — it was hard for me to come with the message. But I had to, for there was no one else."

"But why should you be afraid? Have I ever been discourteous? Ever lacking in respect?"

"Oh, no! no! It was that, Monsieur, which made you different. I was not to you an Indian squaw, but a woman. It was in your words, your eyes. I had grown to distrust white men, but you won my faith. It is because I had learned to trust you I was afraid to come. I — I feared you would say this, and — and I knew it would be hard to say no."

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"Then do not say it," I urged. "It is love that calls."

"Please, Monsieur; I cannot hear that. I am your friend, but I am not of your race, not of your people. It is not blood, but everything; you do not understand. I was born in the wilderness. God placed me here for purposes of His own. I—I am pledged to His service, by a vow as sacred to me as if it had been taken before men. I am His messenger to the Wyandots. They need me—more than ever they need me, now that my father is dead."

"And do you dream I will give you up for that plea?"

"You must, Monsieur; you are of my church."

"Ay! and always will be. Yet love will conquer, René. It is you who do not understand. God may have called you to the work of the wilderness. He has also guided us through the forest to each other. In this He tells you that the earlier work is done; that now He has for you a new duty. You will hear the call. I will go believing, but I shall come back. Yes, I will, dear girl; there are no leagues of forest now that can keep me from you. Nowhere can you hide in the villages of the Wyandots, but I will find you. You will not forbid me coming?"

"Are there no women of your people?"

"There is no other René D'Auvray in all the world,"

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I urged warmly, and clasped her hands. "You cannot tell me not to come."

She smiled, but it was wearily, and with a little pucker of pain about the lips.

"No, Monsieur; I will not tell you not to come. I — I shall wish so much to know of you, of — of how you fare on this long journey. It — it will be lonely here for me — lonelier than ever. It — it is not I who will forget, nor will I be the first woman of my race to wait — to wait the return of a white man."

A head was thrust through the flap, and a gruff voice spoke in a strange language. The girl's fingers pressed mine firmly, and then she turned and went out in silence. As she passed out of the opening her hand dropped the skin, leaving the interior in darkness.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE ESCAPE

I STOOD motionless, listening to the many sounds without, hardly conscious yet that she had gone. The hot blood was throbbing in my veins, but it was caused by no thought of the dangers confronting me. At that moment she alone occupied my mind. Then slowly her message recurred, forcing its way in upon my consciousness with insistence. Tonight — our escape must be made within two short hours. I stepped forward to awaken Brady, but now, with my brain cleared, a sudden suspicion came. Was this honest planning? Was the desire back of it actually our escape? Or was it born of treachery? Not for an instant did I question her — the purity and truth of her purpose — but Simon Girty. Why should he scheme to help us? Never before had I heard his name spoken as any harbinger of mercy to the frontier. I recalled his ugly face, his narrow, tortive eyes, and my doubt of him increased. The plan was too easy, too well oiled, to be altogether natural. And Girty himself had proposed it, had outlined all its details to her, and found a way whereby she might come to us safely. And Ham-

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ilton had left the camp; ay! no doubt he had, but not without leaving his orders behind him.

I shook Brady awake, told him all that had occurred, so far as related to our effort, but without voicing my suspicion. I would have his judgment first. He sat a long time in silence.

"You trust the girl, no doubt?"

"Always! she cannot lie."

"I thought as much," a faint smile in his eyes. "So do I, Hayward; but not Girty. I'll be plain with you, but I like not the plan; 't is too easily arranged."

"So I thought; yet what would be the motive?"

"To put us safely out of the way; killed while trying to escape would be a simple manner of ending the whole case. Hamilton has the brains to plan, and the adroitness to keep out of it, and he had an able assistant to aid. 'T is work Simon Girty would enjoy. You promised her we would go?"

"What else could I do? Besides it never occurred to me until she had gone that there might be a lie in it."

"No, I suppose not," dryly, and he got to his feet, both hands on my shoulders. "Then we must go, lad," he said with conviction. "We cannot fail her, and it may be the plan was conceived in honor. The man saved my life, and may not be altogether a fiend, yet I have small faith as to that."

The Escape

“ You will risk the venture? ”

“ Ay! the chance is better than none, and other lives than ours hang in the balance. Even if it be treachery, we may outwit them. We will take a different road from the one ordained. It pains me to talk, lad, but listen, and then get ready. I may not have blood enough left in me for this job, but you have youth and strength. The news we have must reach St. Clair. We ’ll go together when the signal comes. If there be an ambuscade it will not be here, but lower down. The way leading from the lodge will be left open — they would trap us farther away, so as to give better point to their story.”

He paused a moment, holding a hand against his shattered jaw.

“ We ’ll use this to make sure how the land lays. We ’ll not go down the stream under the bank shadow — we ’ll cross over. You swim? ”

“ You need not doubt that.”

“ Good! Once across unobserved we have the advantage. The woods, if I remember right, come down to the shore line, and over here there are fires burning, all up and down the river. We can skulk in the dark, and use our eyes. If it be still, with no movement, we will trust the word sent, and seek the boat. If we discover treachery we must try passage overland through

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the woods. With God's help we might throw those red devils off our trail. Are you of a mind to try it?"

Our hands gripped, and we looked into each other's faces.

"I would be a dastard else," I said shortly. "You can count on me, Stephen Brady."

There was little we could do, nor much use of further planning. Except silently to loosen the skins to enable us to creep through, and make sure of our moccasins, no preparation was required. We could only sit there grimly in the dark, striving to distinguish the noises outside, and listening for the signal. 'T was a long two hours, and my thought centered about René. What would happen to her if this was treachery? Hamilton might use her as an innocent tool, but would he pardon her purpose? I put the question to my companion.

"'T is been also in my mind, Hayward," he confessed slowly. "I fear it may be bad for the girl."

"She would not go with us."

"You asked her?"

"Yes; I urged it."

"Then there is nothing more to be done." He reached over, and touched me. "The work before us is too serious, lad, to let that interfere. Do not imagine she will suffer greatly. Hamilton would not dare — it would cost him the alliance of the Wyandots."

The Escape

Twice we started at the distant hoot of an owl, but it was not repeated. Then, at last, the signal came, sounding near at hand, from somewhere down the stream. Brady went first, worming his way silently beneath the flap, and, the instant he disappeared, I followed. There was a slight gully to our left, and we crept into it, keeping down out of the gleam of fire. We neither saw nor heard any guard, except the fellow in front, who stood with back turned toward us, silhouetted between us and the blaze. On the other side of the fire was a group of savages, two of them beating drums discordantly. A white man, in fringed coat of brown leather, came out of the shadows beyond, spoke to one of the Indians, and passed on. Brady, his head uplifted watchfully, waited until the fellow disappeared, and then began to creep down toward the river. Lying side by side at the edge of the water he put his lips close to my ear.

"On your back, lad, with only the nose out; stroke easy, and let the current carry you down."

He lowered himself into the stream, which was deep to the shore, as silently as a ghost. A dozen feet away I lost sight of him entirely amid the dim, dancing shadows. Then I followed with equal caution, my face turned up to the sky. It was a dark night, but with a few stars visible peeping down through rifts of cloud. The small river was not wide, nor the current particu-

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larly swift, and I had not been carried far down stream when the overhanging branches of the opposite bank gave shelter. I drew myself ashore, and sat there, shivering in my wet clothes, the night air chill, and stared anxiously about, and across to the shore we had just left. The heavy, dark woods were silent; I could hear a scurrying in the bushes at the top of the bank, but it was only the frightened flight of some startled wild animal. Across the river I could perceive the red glow of a dozen fires, the most of them mere twinkling lights well back in the wood shadows. Those nearer the stream reflected across the running water in varied tints of coloring. There was much noise echoing through the night, all blending into discord, shouts, a medley of voices, the beating of tom-toms, the clink of steel on steel. Here and there, outlined in some circle of light, dark, indistinct figures appeared and vanished. But there was no sign of alarm, or excitement.

I moved down the shore cautiously, keeping well below the concealing bank until I found Brady. He was crouched in the shadow of a great tree root, his whole attention riveted on the opposite side.

"There are no signs of pursuit?"

"Not that I can see. I have watched here some minutes, but there has been no movement along the bank. We will move on down stream."

The Escape

It was hard walking amid the tangled roots, and we made slow work of it. Brady, in advance, stumbled once or twice, and, I noticed, held one hand pressed against his side as though from pain, breathing heavily. To our left, but some distance away, a voice called, and was answered by another. So, toiling on, we came to a sharp bend in the stream.

"It must be about opposite here, Hayward," he said stopping, "the girl told you the boat would be. What is that lumping shadow yonder? Your eyes are younger than mine."

I looked where he pointed, shading my eyes, and gradually focusing the outlines until they assumed definite shape.

"It is a big tree bent down over the river; not the one she meant."

"You see no movement?"

I strained my eyes, searching the dark shore inch by inch, but could perceive nothing; the lights of the fires were far away.

"It is still as death over there."

He shot a swift glance at me, as if the words pleased him little. In the dim starshine his face appeared ghastly white.

"Perhaps the days of miracles are not gone," he said doubtfully, "and Girty may have played fair."

The Maid of the Forest

Anyhow there is nothing to be done now but test it. Come on, lad; we 'll take to water again."

The cheerful note in his voice bolstered my own courage. We swam straight this time, with steady stroke, our eyes scanning the bank we were approaching. The forest shadows overhung the water almost from shore to shore, and even if there were watchers there, we were not likely to be seen. And the canoe was there, smuggled under the leaning tree, bow to bank, rendered shapeless by a covering of broken branches. We lay hold of the sides, standing waist deep in water, our eyes searching the high bank towering dark above us. There was no movement, no sound, and I lowered the branches one by one into the water, and permitted them to float silently down stream. As the last one was released, Brady seemed to lose his hold on the canoe, his lips uttering a low moan, and he staggered toward me. I caught, and held him up above the water till he recovered from his faintness.

"What is it? Are you ill?"

"I — I hardly know," he managed to answer, the words barely audible. "There is such pain in my side; I must have been more badly hurt than I thought, and — and I shake with chill."

"You must n't give up now, Brady; here, let me get you into the canoe."

The Escape

"No," he protested. "Leave me alone on the bank, and go on. It is your only hope."

"I will not," I said indignantly. "You 'll be all right tomorrow. Put your hands on my shoulders — so!"

He was a heavy man, but I lifted him by sheer bodily strength, forcing him over the side until he rested at full length in the bottom of the canoe. His eyes followed my movements appealingly.

"Is that easy?"

"Ay! but you 'll be sorry for it. Faith, yer a strong lad."

I stood up in the water, wondering if the slight noise we had made had created alarm. Nothing reached my ears but the murmur of the stream and the rustle of leaves. Then surely there were no Indians near by — another moment's delay could not increase our danger. I searched with my eyes the dark gloom of the shore, memory reverting to Mademoiselle. Where would she be? Had she fled as soon as she had given the signal? Would it be in her heart to let me go without another word? That would not be like the girl. More probable far that she was somewhere at hand watching, waiting for us to appear along that black shore. I could almost feel her presence.

"Brady," I whispered. "I am going to scout this bank a minute. You lie still."

The Maid of the Forest

He did not answer, and I bent lower. His eyes were closed. Concealed by the shade of the great tree I waded cautiously ashore and crept out into a maze of roots. The higher bank rose sheer before me. To the right there was an opening, as if a trail led down to the river, and revealed there against the upper sky, something moved. For an instant I could tell no more; then I recognized a human figure stealing cautiously toward me through the gloom. It moved silently as a spirit, and my heart beat fiercely as I rose up and stared. She was close upon me before I was sure.

“René.”

“Oh,” a little catch in the quick whisper; “then — then it is you; how — how did you come here?”

I drew her back into the deeper shadow, and told her the brief story in swift words, clinging to her hands, as I held her close. I could not distinguish her face, but she listened, her soft breath on my cheek.

“Oh, I am so glad — so glad, Monsieur. I did not know until after I gave the signal. I — I came down here to be sure — to, to say good-by,” she faltered, “and — and saw them waiting.”

“Then it was treachery? The purpose was to kill us? Girty lied?”

“Yes, Monsieur. You — you will not believe I knew? That I suspected such a thing?”

The Escape

My handclasp tightened.

"No, dear, no; go on. Where are the men?"

"Most of them, ten or twelve as near as I could make out, are in a ravine at the edge of the camp, yonder close to the shore. There are three others up above here, hiding behind the bank."

"I see; the attack was to be made by those above as we crept along, and if either of us got away those three devils were to complete the job."

The cold-bloodiness of the arrangement, the cowardly treachery, the making of her a tool in the foul plan, swept over me with sudden force. For the moment I was conscious only of fierce anger, a desire for revenge.

"Where are they now, the three?"

"To the left, Monsieur, near where that lonely tree stands. I had to creep down the trail so as not to be seen."

"They can be seen from there?"

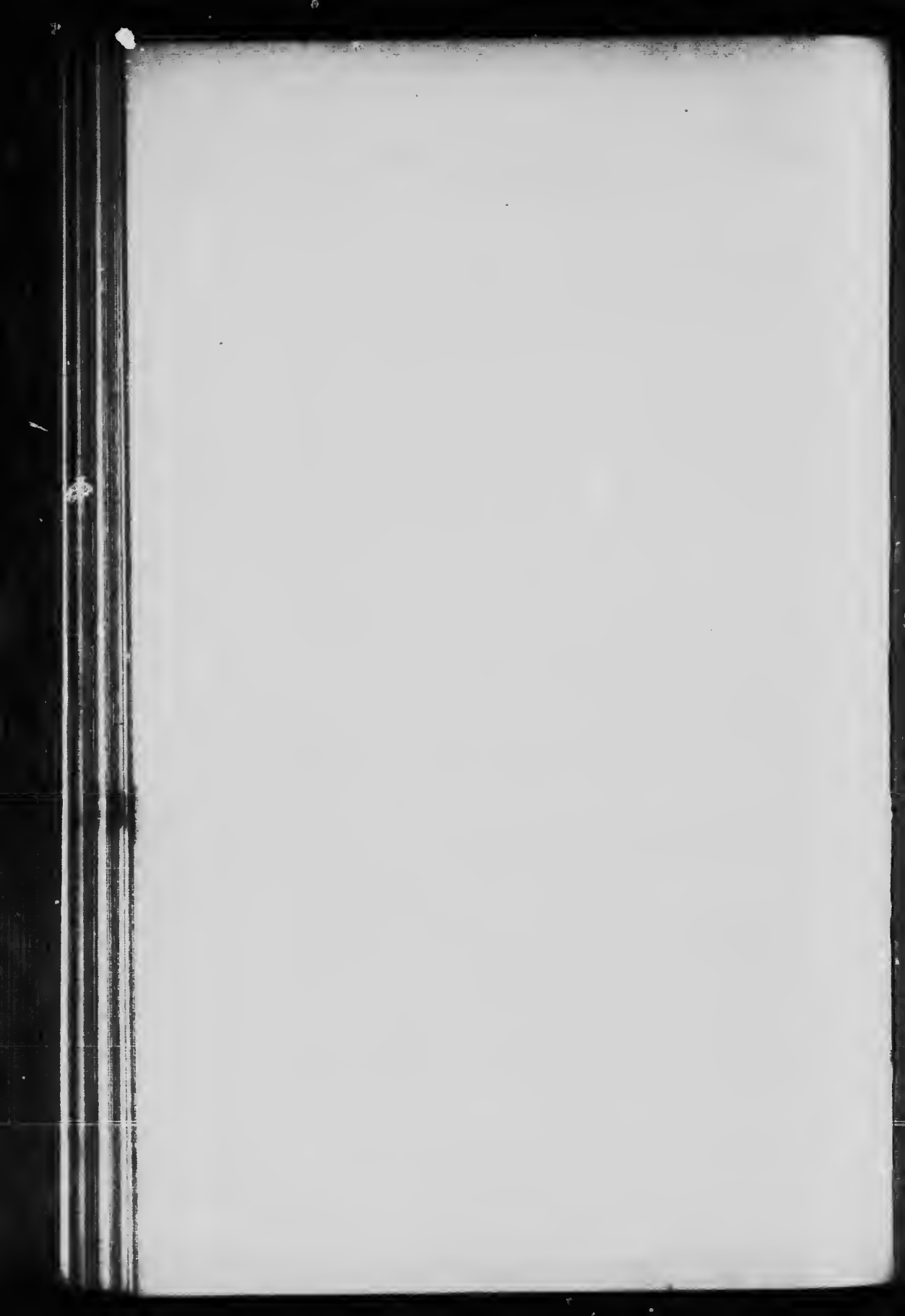
"If you know where to look; they appear just black blotches on the ground."

I made quick resolve, casting caution to the winds.

"Stay here in the shadow, René," I said, thrusting her back. "I will see for myself."

"Monsieur —"

"I will do nothing rash, never fear. Wait here for me until I come."



CHAPTER XXXVII

IN THE WOODS

WITH my body still below in the narrow trail I could distinguish the three dim forms at the summit of the bank. They might have been several rods distant, but were discernible. I had performed some swift thinking in the last five minutes, and had decided what should be done — René should not be left behind to meet Hamilton's vengeance, nor were these fellows going to *cape scot free*. How I was going to accomplish all this I did not in the least know, but, God guiding, there would be found a way. I stood there, striving to determine how best to attain to the rear of the three, when some voice spoke in the Indian tongue, and the fellow nearest me, as if in response to an order, rose to his feet and advanced in my direction. I crouched down, my heart throbbing joyously, watching him approach. He had covered half the distance, when the voice spoke again, and the second man also stood up. I dropped silently back into the darker shadow, planted my feet firmly in the soft earth, my body poised and ready.

The fellow came noiselessly along the bank in his

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moccasins, but evidently without fear or caution. Suddenly his form blotted out the strip of sky as he stepped carelessly into the trail and began the descent. He looked a big savage, his war-bonnet giving him the appearance of a giant. There was a blanket about his shoulders, and he held a gun clasped close to his body. I do not think he even saw me, but my blow landed squarely on his chin, and he went over as if struck by a pole axe, his arms flung out, the gun splashing the edge of the water. And there he lay without so much as a quiver.

I stepped back hastily into cover, rubbing my knuckles, and bracing for the next. No doubt the nearest savage had heard the sound of the blow or the falling body. He came forward cautiously, peering down into the dense darkness below before venturing the descent. Yet he neither saw nor heard anything to alarm, and finally started downward, one hand steadying himself against the bank, as his feet felt for lodgment. He also was an Indian, a young, slender warrior from what little I could see, with only a feather in his hair, naked to the waist. He was opposite me, his head turned aside, as he gazed up stream, when my arm shot straight out, the clinched fist taking him behind the ear. He gave vent to one stifled moan, his body shutting up like a jack knife.

In the Woods

“What’s all that noise?” asked a voice sharply in English. “Come, what’s goin’ on down there?”

I held my breath; heaven be praised, it was Girty. I thought he would never come. I stood expectant, not daring to move a muscle, while he peered down the dark slope, and cursed the Indians for their failure to answer. The silence seemed to anger him, for he jumped from the bank, landing in the path directly in front of where I stood. He saw me, and flung up one hand, but my blow crashed through his guard and landed. Never did I strike harder, and had it hit squarely Simon Girty would have known no more. But his upraised arm saved him. With a grunt of fear and pain he went staggering back, tripped over the big savage, and fell headlong. I saw him struggle to rise, leaped forward and gripped him. With one swing about my head I sent him flinging out into the water.

God knows what became of him. I do not. Whether he sank, or whether he made shore, I did not wait to see. There was enough else for me to do, and, without so much as glancing toward where he went splashing down, emitting a yell of terror, I seized the gun lying beside the water, stripped the big warrior of his store of powder and ball, and sprang hastily to where I had left Mademoiselle. She was crouched behind the great tree, and I caught her by the arm.

The Maid of the Forest

“ You must get into the canoe, René,” I said shortly.
“ Come, we have no time to lose.”

“ I, Monsieur? ”

“ Yes, you; I am not going to leave you here for Hamilton to wreak his rage on. There is no time to argue now.”

“ But, Monsieur — ”

“ Never mind that; will you go as I say? ”

There was a silvery gleam of star on her upturned face, and I could see her eyes, startled, puzzled, half frightened, gazing up into mine. Then the long lashes drooped over them.

“ Yes, Monsieur,” she said, her lips trembling. “ I will go with you.”

I am not going to set down here the story of that journey. In all the years since my lips have never told it in all its details, nor have I permitted my mind to dwell upon those days and nights, save in moments of loneliness and drifting memory. All I shall attempt now is to sketch swiftly those incidents which affect this tale. We were off on the black water, the fragile canoe leaping to the sweep of my paddle and the pressure of the current. The great trees cast shadows from bank to bank, and we must have vanished like an arrow. René sat facing me, her head bent low, her hands grasping either side. Only once did I note her glance up,



We were off on the black water, the fragile canoe leaping to the
sweep of my paddle

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timidly, as if the fright of my arbitrary words still lingered, and then her eyes fell again. I sent the leaping craft a half mile, a mile, reckless of the pain with which I gripped the paddle, then left it to the current while I held my bleeding, swollen hand in the cool water alongside. Mademoiselle again looked up.

“May I not bind it up, Monsieur?”

I nodded, wondering at her words and manner, the strange shrinking from me so different from her wont. She dipped a cloth in the river, and bound it about the bruise, wet and dripping, fastening it in some way with gentle fingers.

“Shall I not take the paddle, Monsieur?” she asked, but still with bowed head. “I understand its use.”

“No, not now; there will be plenty of work of that sort later. Look rather to Brady there, if you will; the man appears in bad case.”

I did not notice much of what she did, for I was too busy at my own task, baffled often by the sweep of the current and the trees leaning out over the water. Yet she turned at once, as if my words were an order, balancing herself skilfully in the frail craft. When I glanced that way again she had him sitting up, with head pillowed on her shoulder, and a blanket at his back.

“How are you feeling, now, friend?” I questioned cheerfully. “In less pain?”

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"A bit, yes," the voice strained and unnatural. "This good angel here has done her work well. What has occurred since I slept, Master Hayward?"

I told him as well as I could but doubt if he understood much of it, for more than once his head nodded, and René held him from falling. When I ended the tale he said nothing, and a silence fell upon us. There was no stopping that night, the girl and I taking turns at the paddle, although I did the most of it. I knew not what pursuit there might be, but feared the worst. Once I asked her if the savages had other canoes at the village, but she did not know, and I scarcely think there was another word exchanged between us, save as we shifted places in the boat. Brady slept uneasily much of the time, moaning, and occasionally speaking aloud. When I touched him I found his flesh hot and feverish.

The dawn found me with the paddle, but René still wide awake. There was a thin, gray fog over the river, which turned to purple as the light strengthened, and we were at the apex of a great bend, the course of the stream ahead leading into the northwest. That was not our direction, and besides I felt that if there was pursuit it would be safer far ashore. Just as the sun broke through the mist we came unexpectedly to the mouth of a small stream leading into the main river from

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the south. So thoroughly was it concealed by a thick growth of bushes, that we would have slipped by, had I not been skirting the shore closely, seeking some such opening. I headed the canoe straight in, pressing aside the branches to gain passage, and found beyond a narrow creek, up which we managed to paddle for several hundred yards. Then I stepped overboard, and dragged the light craft still higher, until I discovered a place of concealment behind a huge rotting log.

Here we left it, René and I bearing with us the guns and our small store of provisions. I had cut a cane for Brady, and, with its help, he managed to get along slowly, although sight of his face made my heart ache. Thus in single file we waded up the tiny stream, until we attained a ledge of rocks where our feet would leave no trail. Over these we toiled, helping each other, until we came to the upland, into an open forest, carpeted with autumn leaves. By this time Brady was too exhausted to go further, sinking helplessly on the ground. René also looked worn and heavy-eyed, and I had no heart to urge them on. We ate sparsely of what food we had, but Brady barely touched his portion. I wrapped him in our only blanket, and the three of us slept.

The sun was past the meridian when I awoke and called the others. It would be safer farther away from

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the Maumee, and every mile gained was to our advantage. The traveling was easy, through an open forest, with firm turf underfoot, yet our progress was pitifully slow. I loaded myself with all our equipment, leaving René free to aid Brady, but it was plain to be seen his every step was painful. Long before dark we were compelled to cease the effort and make camp. I offered to make a small fire so that he could have warm food, but the man refused, striving to smile cheerfully, as he crunched what we had in his mouth. His cheeks burned with fever, and his eyes appeared unnatural. I gathered dry leaves to protect us from the chill of the night, and wrapped him securely in the blanket. Just before dark René came timidly to where I sat alone, thinking of some way of escape.

“Monsieur.”

“Yes,” I looked up, but her eyes failed to meet mine.

“Monsieur Brady would speak with you.”

I got up, yet paused a moment hesitating.

“What is it, René? Are you afraid of me?”

“No, Monsieur; you are very good. Why you ask that?”

I laughed, but still unsatisfied.

“I hardly know myself. Probably I imagine things, but it seems to me you act different of late. Are you sure you are the same?”

In the Woods

The lowered lashes lifted just a little, so I had glimpse of the eyes below.

"Yes, Monsieur, I am the same."

I went across to where Brady lay and sat down beside him. How tired his eyes looked, and his face was drawn and white, no flush now in his cheeks.

"You sent for me?"

"Yes, Hayward," slowly, with difficulty making his words clear. "Lift me a little against this tree; I can speak easier. Yes, that will do, lad. I called you so I could say that I realize the awful position my illness places you in. I ought not to have come, nor would I had I known I was so badly hurt. I thought the pain would wear away once I was in the open, but — but it gets worse."

"It is in your side?"

"Yes; there is no mark of a wound, and I cannot understand the trouble. I ran the gauntlet on the island, and was often struck, but did not realize the blows had greatly injured me. One must have been serious. Now hear me, lad — it is not right that you should remain here longer with me. I cannot go on, and you must think of those others whose lives depend on your warning. I am nothing; I am an old man, 't is not likely I will live through this. You must leave me here and go."

The Maid of the Forest

“ You think I will? ”

“ There is nothing else to do; it is duty.”

“ Brady,” I said gravely, “ you have been a good comrade to me, and I’ll not leave you to perish in this wilderness. You waste your breath asking such a thing. You would never desert me; no! we face it out together.”

“ But the girl? ”

“ She would answer as I do. There is no need that I ask her. Come, man, get a good night’s rest, and we will try it again. The morning may find you strong and ready.”

He shook his head, his eyes on my face, as if he would read there some hesitancy. Then he extended his hand, and gripped mine.

“ You are a brave lad, and a good stout heart,” he whispered brokenly. “ Help me to lie down again, and we’ll try another day.”

It was a bright, crisp morning, but it brought little of encouragement with it. We traveled but two hours in the morning, and even less in the afternoon. It made my heart bleed to see him try, and René begged that we go no further. Leaving her to gather together leaves for the night, and build a windbreak with interlaced branches, I set off alone up the bank of a considerable stream beside which we had made camp. Some miles

In the Woods

away I ventured to use my gun, and came back before dark with a wild turkey. In the depths of a ravine, I built a small fire, using the driest wood I could find, cooked the bird, and brought to Brady some hot broth. He ate it with relish, smoked a pipe, and lay down. We both sat beside him for some time, encouraged by the belief that the man was really better. He appeared to be out of pain, and talked much, dwelling upon the days of his boyhood, and describing his earlier exploits in the woods. At the end he shook hands with us both, and spoke cheerfully of the morrow. I wrapped him in the blanket, and covered him with leaves. It was with almost a light heart that I fell asleep.



CHAPTER XXXVIII

BEFORE ST. CLAIR

IT was the gray dawn when Mademoiselle awoke me, shaking me soundly ere I could be aroused. That something was wrong I perceived instantly from the expression of her face, and sat up, glancing hastily about, expecting the approach of savages.

“What is it?”

“He is gone, Monsieur! Monsieur Brady is gone.”

“Gone! you mean left camp. Why that is impossible; he could barely walk.”

“But he is not here, Monsieur,” she insisted. “See: it was there he lay. I will tell you all I know. I woke up in the night and thought of him, of how hard it was for so strong a man to be so weak and ill. Then I got up and went over quietly to be sure he was all right. But he was awake, Monsieur, staring up at the sky with eyes wide open. He saw me, and said he was nervous and could not sleep. No, he told me he was not in pain, but complained of being cold. I spread more leaves over him, and he said that was better. Then — then he took my hand and kissed it, and begged me to go back and — and lie down. He was very nice and gentle, and

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smiled at me. So I went back, and crept into my leaves, and tried to sleep. He did not move, yet I lay there a long while thinking. I — think I cried a little, Monsieur, for I felt so sorry. At last I slept again. It was just a little light when I awoke once more, and my first memory was of him. I went over there and — and he was gone. I could see where he had rested in the leaves, and the blanket on the ground, but — but he was not there. I sought for him, but there was no trace — nothing. So I came and woke you.”

I was on my feet, a feeling of dread tugging at my heart. I felt that I already knew what had happened, yet I could not tell her — not now, not until I was sure.

“He could not have gone far, René,” I said hastily. “Perhaps to the river for a drink. Come, we will see.”

The ground about the camp had been so trampled by our feet that, at first, I could not pick up the trail. Finally, taking a wider circle, I came upon softer soil and the imprint of his moccasins. I knew they were his because of one foot dragging, and the impression of his cane. They led down toward the river, and I followed swiftly, the girl close behind, until we stood at the edge of the stream. The man’s trail ended there. I explored the bank for some distance up and down, but without result. There were tears glimmering in René’s eyes, as I came back — she also was beginning to under-

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stand. Without a word I waded out into the water, and swam across to the other shore. There was nothing there — no sign, no mark of any description — and I came back to where she waited, wading out with dripping garments to the bank.

“There — there was nothing, Monsieur?”

“Nothing,” I answered gravely. “He has not crossed over,” I hesitated an instant, but could not resist the questioning horror in her eyes. “You understand, do you not?”

“You — you think,” she faltered, “that Monsieur Brady has — has killed himself?”

“He has given his life for others, my girl — for you and me, and those soldiers of St. Clair’s. Do you remember when he sent for me? He begged me then to leave him and go on; he asked it for your sake, as well as theirs. He told me it was my duty; that he was old, helpless, and his wound would not let him travel.”

“And you refused?”

“Ay! I would not think of it, and at last, he promised to try again. It — it never occurred to me that he would do this.”

She stood a moment, silent, tears on her cheeks, looking blindly out at the water. Then she sank upon her knees, holding the crucifix against her face. I could see the movement of her lips, but heard nothing; only I

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knew she prayed for his soul, and my own eyes were moist as I knelt beside her. Then I lifted her up by the hand, and we went back up the hill to the camp.

There was nothing to hope for in waiting, and all our duty lay beyond. Without the exchange of a word we packed what few things we had, and started, following the bank of the stream. It was the first of many days, all alike full of hardship and peril. Now and then we came to open land, but more often our course lay through tangled woods, or morasses choked with underbrush. At night we slept beneath leaves, seldom venturing upon a fire. The girl bore it all without complaint, seldom speaking except to ask some question, and ever holding me aloof in some strange, silent manner I could not comprehend. If I addressed her the answers were as if she responded to an order; nor could I read aught in her eyes but passive obedience. It was not often I caught their expression at all, for she stood before me with lowered lids and lips that faltered. At night I lay awake, listening to the wild life of the great woods, and thought of why she had so changed. The vivacious, saucy French girl had vanished; here with me was the silent, obedient Indian. Ay, perhaps that was it! I had taken her by force, by strength, and arbitrary command. She had witnessed my fight on the banks of the Maumee, she had seen me strike down the

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big warrior, and fling Girty — as if he had been a child — far out into the river. Then I had come direct to her, ordering her into the boat. I was no longer the lover, the asker of a favor. I was the conqueror, commanding obedience. I had borne her away with me as a chief might the maid of his fancy. I had taken the spoils of battle. The very act had reawakened all that was Indian within her — the old environment, the old life, the old subjugation of childhood days in the villages of the Wyandots, revived instantly. She was an Indian, I a white man who had conquered — who demanded her life. She had come because she must, because the fates had so ordained. I was to her a master, a tyrant; my word was law, her part obedience. It was not love, but fear, which gave me such control. The thought shocked me, yet I knew it must be true. Nor could I speak the suspicion; I know not why, or how, yet she held me from her as if there were an invisible barrier between. I tried to speak, to explain, yet failed, fearful of what she might answer, dreading the result. If love had fled — and I was not even sure there ever had been love — I shrank from hearing it from her lips. So we went on in silence and heartache, along the dim forest aisles — she the slave, I the master. Oh, those were dreary days, long, lonely nights, as I watched her, anticipating my slightest wish, her eyes averted, her lips trembling as she

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answered me. Yet I dare not speak, dare not hope even — to her my protestations might be mockery, an insult worse by far than mere command. She could not understand honor between a white man and an Indian maid.

It was a miracle that we passed those leagues in safety, encountering none of those numerous bands of savages which, I learned later, were flocking southward in ever-increasing force. They must have been all about us, yet in some way we passed between. No doubt this was because we kept from off the trails, traveling straight through the woods by sun, halting, or turning aside at the slightest sign. We saw and heard Indians, but kept concealed ourselves. Once we heard their yelling in our rear, and once several shots rang out at some distance. Hiding on the banks of a silvery stream we watched a band of Miamis cross a mile below, and one night some noise aroused me, and I stared out through a coverlet of dried leaves at a spectral body of savages filing past in the gloom, as silent as phantoms. There must have been fifty of them, but they disappeared in the dim woods ignorant of our presence. I saw René sit up after they had gone, and then steal cautiously over and look at me. I lay quiet with closed eyes, the horrid suspicion in my mind that she contemplated flight; that she meant to join them. Very well, let her

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go, if that was all she cared; and my teeth clinched, as I watched her under lowered lashes; I would not lift a hand to prevent. But the girl went back to her bed of leaves and laid down.

It was a raw November morning that we came unexpectedly upon St. Clair's outposts. The ground was covered with snow, and the little pools were skimmed over with thin ice. It had been too cold to rest, and we had walked much of the night, afraid to build a fire. Chilled to the marrow by the icy wind that swept through the trees and buffeted us, I had wrapped the girl in our only blanket, fastening it about her head and face, hurt as I did so by the dumb, patient, bewildered look in her eyes. She tried to protest, yet at my first stern word ceased and wrapped herself closely in the folds. We had crossed a slight depression, skirting an opening in the woods, advancing with some caution because of trampled places observed in the snow. I was in front breaking the trail that she might have easier marching, when suddenly a man stepped out of a thicket, and with gun at my breast roughly commanded a halt. I paused instantly, uncertain as to which side the challenger was on, yet a glance at his face and dress reassured me.

"Who are yer? an' what do yer want?" he asked suspiciously.

"I am an officer of the Fort Harmar garrison," I

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answered, "with news from the North. To what command do you belong?"

"The Kentucky militia," he acknowledged sullenly. "Colonel Oldham."

"Where is your colonel?"

"Back yonder on that rise o' ground; you kin go on, but I'll keep an eye on yer."

We left him, following the direction pointed out, hearing him call to some one in our rear, yet paying no heed. The very ease with which he had passed us on was evidence enough of lax discipline, and small conception of the danger of the command. There was a plain track through the snow, which led to a camp fire blazing cheerily in a grove of trees, with maybe a dozen men clustered about it. No one appeared to notice us as we drew near.

"Which is Colonel Oldham?" I asked, glancing about the group. One stood up, a smooth-faced, ruddy-cheeked man of fifty, with iron-gray hair, and eyes that looked as if they laughed easily. I liked him at first glance.

"That is my name," he said shortly. "What is it? St. Denis, man!" as his glance swept over me, "you look as if you had been far from the settlements and had a hard trip."

"I have, sir; I come from the Maumee. I am an

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officer of regulars with news of importance for St. Clair."

Every eye was on me now and Oldham took a step nearer.

"The Maumee!" he exclaimed. "Ay, that is a journey. News for St. Clair, you say — what news? There was a rumor down below that the Indians of the northwest were mustering. Know you anything of that?"

"They have already mustered, sir. I was at their rendezvous. Even now they are at my heels — the whole of them, Shawnees, Miamis, Delawares, Wyandots and, for all I know, as many more. There are white renegades with them, and English officers I suspect — I saw Hamilton myself on the Maumee, and he evidently was managing affairs."

There was a muttering of voices, and Oldham let out an oath.

"Well, sir, I believe it, but I'll be hanged if you can make St. Clair. The arrogant old fool may listen to you, but I doubt even that. He thinks this is a pleasure party we are on. What do you think he did a week ago?"

I looked at him uncomprehending, stunned by such mutinous words openly spoken.

"Sent back a whole regiment of regulars on a wild

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goose chase after deserters, and we within fifty miles of the Miami towns."

"What force have you here?"

"Less than fourteen hundred — all militia but one regiment. From the Maumee, Ensign? and did you come through alone with that squaw?"

I glanced back at her, standing silently behind me, the blanket drawn over her head and face.

"Take it off, René," I said quietly.

"Yes, Monsieur."

Her hands obediently threw the wrapping aside, permitting it to drape over her shoulders. She lifted her head, and stood facing them, with eyes centering upon Oldhani. He gasped, and jerked the hat from off his head.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. "A white woman?"

"A French girl, sir, whom I found with the Wyandots. Can you send us back to St. Clair?"

He stared at her so long, hat still in hand, that I thought he did not hear. An officer touched him on the shoulder and spoke a word.

"Ah, yes, certainly — St. Clair. At once, sir, but I do n't envy you your reception. By Jove, I lost my wits seeing such a woman as that here in this hole. Someone send Masters here."

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He came quickly, a youngish lad, with white hair and eyebrows, but intelligent face, who never took his eyes off René. Oldham spoke brusquely.

"Take this officer and the — the lady to General St. Clair at once. Tell Butler I say it is important, that he be given immediate interview. Here, wait! get the lady a horse somewhere. Captain, can he take yours?"

"With pleasure, sir; I will fetch the animal."

They watched us depart until we had crossed the ridge, Masters and I trudging through the snow at the horse's head. René had drawn up her blanket, but I could see her eyes watching me, when I glanced around at her. It was not long, however, until we came out of the forest, into a bit of lowland near the river, where a dozen tents, grimy and dirty looking, stood on the bank. There were soldiers everywhere, gathered about camp fires, with a few guards patrolling beats along the forest edge. Masters led the way through the motley crowd up to the central tent. There was delay there, René sitting motionless in the saddle, and I waiting impatiently beside her. At last Masters came back.

"He will see you, sir."

"Very well; are there any women in camp?"

"A few, sir; 'non-com' wives mostly, washerwomen and cooks; they are in those two tents there — the officers' kitchens."

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“Take the lady over there, and leave her in good hands. René.”

She looked down at me.

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“This soldier will take you to some women who will take care of you until I come. You will wait for me.”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

I waited until they started, and then advanced to the tent. A tall, slender man, in a colonel's uniform, pointed the way within, and I stepped through the narrow opening. The interior was plain — a bearskin stretched on the ground; two officers on camp-stools against the canvas; a sentry beside the open flap standing motionless; a rude table of one unplanned board, and behind it, seated, St. Clair. He was a spare man, with broad shoulders and prominent nose, wearing a long queue of thick, gray hair, which was plainly visible below his three-cornered hat. He was attired in blanket coat, with hood dangling down his back. I had met him once, but it was clear he retained no recollection of me, as he surveyed me coldly across the table.

“Well, sir,” he snapped, “Colonel Oldham says you bring news. Who are you?”

“Ensign Hayward, of Fort Harmar,” I answered, bringing my hand up in salute. “I was sent with a message to the Wyandots.”

Before St. Clair

The stern lines of his face broke into a grim smile.

"Ah, yes, I recall that. One of Harmar's fool notions. Told him as much when I got back. Well, your peace offering didn't do much good, did it? I hear there is hell brewing in those north woods."

"It is already brewed, sir. The tribes have got together to crush you. They rendezvoused on the Maumee."

"Huh! that is a ways away. No great danger from that source till we're ready. What tribes were there, do you know?"

"I saw them, sir; Wyandots, Pottawattomies, Shawnees, Delawares and Miamis. There were also some Ojibwas, and a sprinkling of others, mostly young warriors."

"Who heads the conspiracy?"

"Little Turtle, of the Miamis, but there are Englishmen with them also; Hamilton himself was there."

"The cursed hound; so you were there, with them, hey? a prisoner?"

"Yes, General; a scout named Stephen Brady and I. We got away by means of a canoe on the river."

"Where is Brady? I know the old coon."

"He died, sir, and I came on alone."

No one spoke, and I went on.

"It was a hard journey, and there were many delays

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on the way. I came as quickly as I could, sir, but I do n't think the savages are far behind."

"Oh, do n't you, indeed," sarcastically. "It was not advice I was asking, and as to what is in front of us my own scouts keep me posted. You're young, and easily frightened. I happen to know there is n't a hostile Indian within fifty miles of us — not a bloody one. I do n't care what they do up on the Maumee. We'll go on to the Miami towns tomorrow, raze them, and be back to the Ohio before that bunch gets started. I doubt if there is a shot fired. It's all a big bluff, sir; we've got them frightened half to death. I wrote Washington so a month ago."

I stood before him, stunned and bewildered by his obstinacy.

"Am I to understand, General St. Clair, that you question the accuracy of my report?"

"No, sir!" his cheeks flushed. "Only, my young friend, there is nothing to it. This expedition is not interested in what Hamilton is doing on the Maumee. He does n't dare attack us with his mongrel savages. If he did we'd give him a belly full, and a fine story to send back to England. Come, gentlemen, let's get to more serious affairs. You may go, sir."

I passed out, dazed, unseeing. So this was the man in whose hands rested the fate of the northwest. This

Before St. Clair

was the end of my toil and suffering; this the reward for Brady's death. He had sneered at me, turned me away with a laugh. For a moment I stood shaking from head to foot; then hot anger seized me, and brought me back to life. By heaven! he would learn yet which of us was the fool.



CHAPTER XXXIX

THE BATTLE ON THE WABASH

HE had not even assigned me to service; simply turned me adrift to go where I pleased. The implied insult cut me to the quick, yet, now that I had taken the measure of the man, I cared little enough for his good opinion. Very well, I would choose my own service then — I would go back to Oldham and his Kentucky militia. He was of fighting blood, if his face spoke truth, and his command was stationed where they would feel the first shock of attack whenever it came.

With mind made up, I strode down the line, past where the artillery was parked, to the tent Masters had pointed out as the officers' kitchen. It was looped up at the sides, and a glance within revealed Mademoiselle perched on a low bench, her eyes following the movements of a woman of ample proportions who was bustling about a camp stove. The girl had her chin in her hand, her face hidden, the blanket still wrapped about her shoulders, but the woman looked up from her work and saw me. To my surprise I recognized her.

"Is it you, Mistress McCarthy!" I exclaimed, glad enough that it was. "How happens it you are here?"

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“Be ther wurst o’ luck, Mister Hayward. It’s no Injun foighter Oi am, but shure Major Butler would n’t consint ter lave me behind when he had to go. He sed I was as fit ter die as iver he wus, an’ he did n’t propose ter be starved fer the sake ov me.”

“Butler?”

“Ther same, sorr; Major Thomas Butler it wos. It is ther lost year Ci’ve bin cookin’ fer him, iver since his woife hed ther baby, sorr, an’ he is a wee bit particular whut he eats.”

“Oh, I see; you are here as cook. Where’s Dan?”

“Back wid th’ rigiment, sorr; ol’ St. Clair sent ’em ter ther rear maybe a wake ago. It’s him, sorr, that is n’t afeerd o’ Injuns.”

“So I have discovered.” I glanced at René, but she was not looking at me. “Well, I’m glad you are here, Mistress McCarthy. I can trust you to look after this girl.”

“Yer shure kin, sorr. It’s ther best o’ friends we are already. Belike she wus French?”

“Yes, but she speaks English well. René.” She turned her face toward me, and rose to her feet.

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“Mistress McCarthy here is an old acquaintance of mine; her husband was a sergeant in my company. She will look after you until I come back.”

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"Yes, Monsieur."

"You will stay here until I come?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

It was maddening, yet I knew not what to do or say. I stood a moment gazing into her face, but the long lashes would not lift, and I turned away, with teeth clinched to keep back the hot words, and left the tent, never glancing back as I crunched my way through the snow.

Oldham received me gladly, and about the fire that night I told of my reception by St. Clair.

"Well, I warned yer, Hayward," the Colonel commented, chuckling. "I know the bullet-headed old fool. I reckon he 'll know more about Injuns in a day or two. Told yer he had his scouts out, did he? Why, man, there is n't one of 'em been ten miles from the column since we began this march; is n't that so, Captain? The old cock does n't know tonight what's goin' on two hundred yards ahead of his outposts." He got up, and stretched out his arms. "And so, gentlemen, we march for the Miami towns in the morning. Old Cock-a-doodle-doo says so. I'll wager a year's pay we never get there. What! no takers? Well, I'm going to bed."

Why should I attempt to describe that drear battle on the east fork of the Wabash? Many another has

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done it already, yet few tell the story as I remember it. Still I saw but little — flashes here and there, dim pictures drawn in flame and obscured by smoke. Today, as I look back, half wondering if it could be really I who witnessed, there is little but confusion to recall — wild yells, the crack of rifles, the roar of the big guns, terrible figures, painted black and red, dancing before us, the gleam of tomahawks, the dead forms at our feet, the shrieks of the wounded, the faces ghastly with terror. These are the sights and sounds that remain in memory, haunting me even yet.

We were up at dawn, but for no purpose, so far as I could see, unless it was to idle through a leisurely breakfast. I had finished mine, and was smoking, cuddled close to the fire, when the storm broke. Our outposts could not have been a hundred yards in advance, or else they ran without firing a shot, for the red devils burst on us without slightest warning. I heard a hoarse shout of alarm, then whoops and yells, such as would strike terror to the bravest. I was on my feet, gripping my gun in an instant. I saw Oldham leap forward, roaring out an order — then they came, pouring out of the woods into the open, a mass of shrieking demons, half obscured in smoke, their rifles spitting fire. The man beside me went down in a heap; Oldham flung up his arms and toppled over; I saw men stare, then turn and

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run, peering back over their shoulders with eyes full of horror. I threw up my rifle and fired; sprang back, racing for a tree, loading as I ran. Men were everywhere, a frightened, screaming mob. I saw officers strike them with their swords, cursing them as cowards. But nothing could stop the panic; they fought to get away, they struck with clinched fists, they battered a path for themselves with clubbed muskets; they became fiends from terror, every semblance of men lost. God! may I never see such a sight again! My hand trembles as I write of it.

Into that terror-stricken, fleeing mob the naked warriors came, hacking with tomahawks, slashing with knives, battering with clubbed guns. The snow was red with blood, covered with dead bodies. It was massacre. I know not how I got out of it, but I fought back from tree to tree, firing as I halted, loading as I ran. There were others with me, cool-headed fellows, and we held the painted demons back until a hundred of us, or more, gained the opening by the river, where the regulars and artillery were. But the savage hordes, infuriated by victory, drunk with slaughter, were at our very heels. They lined the edge of the woods and poured in deadly volleys. There was no sound now, no yelling — only the incessant rattle of firearms, as they crept from log to log, and tree to tree, slowly drawing closer. They

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fled off to either side, and hemmed us in, the river alone protecting our rear. Through the clouds of smoke we caught glimpses of their flitting figures, distorted, horrible, of faces striped black and red, of waving feathers, and brandished arms. Never before, or since, have I seen Indians fight as they did that day — rushing to the charge, leaping straight at us through the smoke, and firing with deadly aim into our very faces. They shot us down as hunters slaughter a herd of buffalo. There was no rest, no cessation, no time in which to breathe. Hidden beneath the smoke cloud, they leaped upon us with the tomahawk. Only now and then did we get glimpse of them, we scarcely knew what we were firing at; we stood and shot, closing up the ranks as men fell, growing constantly less, pressed steadily back. Suddenly, in an instant, without warning, dark faces leaped into view through the haze, war-axes gleamed and struck, and men toppled over into the snow.

Twice they took the guns, swarming forward with a fierce rush that flung us back, and crushed the gunners under foot. But they were in the open now, and we could see; with bayonets and clubbed rifles we charged home, driving them back to the woods. There they held us, while from every hollow and grass patch, every tree and fallen log, their rifles spat fire. The bands of my gun flew off, and I picked up another; I was out of pow-

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der and ball and took them from a dead body. The dead lay everywhere, alone, in heaps; cries of the wounded rose above the din. We charged over the bodies, crunching them under foot, seeking to reach our invisible foes. They would not stand, would not meet us. Helpless, bleeding, dying, confused by many orders, we fell back, yet still retained line, and fronted that blazing wood. Frightened, panic-stricken men were everywhere, running and shrieking in terror, seeking vainly for some means of escape from the savage cordon. Indians crept forward under the smoke to see and mutilate the dead and dying. Horses from the artillery and staff, breaking loose, charged wildly about, trampling living and dead alike under their feet. Women, camp-followers, were wedged in the mob, their shrill screams piercing the mad uproar. Only the regulars stood intact, a thin blue line, with here and there among them a few militiamen who kept their heads. About the guns, not a dozen powder-grimed artillerymen remained. Not an officer of the battery was left; not one of the regulars unwounded.

I heard St. Clair storming up and down behind us, swearing and shouting orders in his high, cracked voice, yet took no time to glance toward him. The smoke settled down upon us in a cloud; we fought blindly, in the dark, hardly certain but we stood alone. I was

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beside Butler when he was struck, and helped drag him aside out of the rout. Then I saw St. Clair, and, as I stopped a second, staring into his face to be sure of his identity, an officer rushed up through the smoke cloud, knocking me aside, everything forgotten but his urgent message.

“General St. Clair,” he cried, “we must get out of here, sir. My men cannot stand five minutes longer. If that line breaks it will cost every life. For God’s sake, let us go.”

“Yes — yes, Colonel Darke, but how is it to be accomplished, sir? See those fool cowards.”

Darke swept his hand out to the south in sudden gesture.

“There is only one way, sir — there by the road. I can hold the regulars steady; they’ll cover the rear, and give the others a chance. One fierce charge forward with the bayonet will drive those devils back, and open the way. May I try it, sir?”

“Ay, try it. Hold! I’ll lead them myself. Here Simmons, Cauley, lash those skulkers into the road there, while we clear a path.”

I sprang forward with the others in response to swift orders. We made the woods and plunged into their shadows. There was a fierce, mad struggle face to face, bayonets and clubbed muskets, knives and tomahawks.

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St. Clair, on an artillery horse, led the way. We swept the front of the broad road clear, the impetuosity of our reckless charge forcing the startled savages into full retreat. Then we dropped to our knees, loading and firing to hold the advantage. Behind us, into the open road, surged the mob of panic-stricken men, fighting and crowding, beginning their long race back to the Ohio. It was a sickening sight, the white, ghastly faces, the wounded limping along, the brutal acts of fear, and over all the ceaseless cries and profanity. I caught glimpses of women among the seething mass, hustled and thrown under foot in the mad terror. The sight of them brought back to me the remembrance of René. Was she also crushed in that mob, fleeing for life? or was she still in the cook tent, trembling as she stared out helplessly on the stricken field? I turned and ran, heedless of all else, plunging through the stream of fugitives, plowing a passage with my bulk. I had done my duty — now I must save her!



CHAPTER XL

THE RETREAT

I HAD no faith I should find her there, but I fought my way through to the tent. It had been knocked half over, the camp stove overturned, the long bench smashed into kindling wood. With sinking heart I flung back the sagging canvas, and cast one glance within. As heaven witnesses, she stood there, the blanket still wrapped about her, her hands grasping a rifle, her face turned toward me. Unconsciously her lips gave utterance to a cry of relief, and her expression changed. I sprang forward, eager, glad.

“René, you are here!” I cried out. “Why did you not go with the others? Why did you stay?”

“It was the word of Monsieur,” she answered simply. “Monsieur said stay till he come.”

“Yes, yes, I know; but I never thought of this; never dreamed of such a defeat. But there is no time to waste in talk. There is nothing to do but run for it now. Come, lass!”

Before she realized what I was going to do, I had flung away my rifle and seized her in my arms. She was a light, slender thing, and I held her tight in the

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folks of the blanket, scarcely feeling her weight. She made no effort to resist, yet her eyes — bewildered, half-frightened — looked into my face. I gave them no heed, my whole purpose concentrated on the one effort to save her, to fight a passage through that mob of frightened men. The spirit of panic had gripped me also — not for myself, but for her! Here was my duty now; not back yonder where those regulars yet stood grimly in line, and died with their shoulders touching; not where I had fought all day in the powder-cloud facing those forest demons — but in the mob of fugitives, battling and cursing for their lives.

I ran out, clasping her to me, and sprang into it, battling my way through to the edge of the human stream, where there was more room. I cared not who I hit, or who I trampled under foot. I retained but one object, one purpose — to bear Mademoiselle safely out of danger. Once I tripped and fell, but arose instantly, shaking off those who stumbled over me. I put her down now, gripping her with my left hand and leaving my right free. I fought like a wild man, cool-headed enough, yet realizing I could only win by reckless ferocity. I was dealing with crazed men, and there was no virtue in mercy. Foot by foot, yard by yard, we pressed past; I cleared the way with heavy hand, with butting shoulder. They gripped me, and I shook them off;

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they grasped at her, and I struck; they surged in, blocking our passage, and I hurled them aside. At last we were out of the crush, ahead where the way was more open, the fugitives fewer. Again I seized her in my arms, and ran. Here and there rifle smoke belched from out the bushes. I saw men fall in their stride, and lie motionless in the road. I leaped across dead bodies, hearing the cries of terror behind and the ceaseless din of firing. They were at it yet, those regulars; these who shot at us as we raced by were scattered riflemen hid in the thicket. It was a broad road, the snow trampled flat by feet fleeing from death. Some instinct kept me to the right, next to the river, for the shots came from the other side. Others ran between us and those dark woods, and many a one stopped a speeding bullet. I heard their cries, their oaths, caught glimpses over my shoulder of racing figures, of frightened faces and streaming hair. The road was littered with guns thrown away, with discarded blankets and powder horns. I dared not look back, straining every muscle, staggering forward over the ruts. The roar of guns behind grew faint in the distance; the spit of rifles from the thickets ceased. Exhausted, breathless, reeling from fatigue, I put her down, and, with arm about her, stood an instant looking back.

They were coming, a dark mass bearing down upon

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us, but ahead of them, wild with terror, his harness flapping at his heels, his head flung from side to side, charged an artillery horse full tilt. In his mad terror he saw and knew nothing; he came straight at us, running as if crazed. I flung the girl into the side of the road and leaped recklessly for his head. My hand gripped the mane, then the leather rein; I was flung from my feet, jerked into the air, but hung; my moccasins touched ground again. I was dragged forward, rendered half unconscious by a blow, but weight told. I got fingers on his nostrils, and he stood still, panting and trembling. Clinging to him, warned by shouts to hurry, I stripped the harness and hoisted her onto the bare back. Even as this was accomplished the head of that shrieking mob was on us; one brute grabbed her by the arm seeking to pull her down, and I struck him with all the force I had. Then I ran forward, clasping the horse by the bit, crunching our way, heedless of who opposed or blocked our passage. And they made way for us; even in their blind terror, they swept aside to escape being trampled under the animal's hoofs, and left before us a clear path.

As I ran I thought, striving to clear my mind, to drive away the fog of panic, and overcome the fears which thus far had compelled action. What should we do now? What was best to do? I could still hear

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Instant firing, but no longer in volleys, and far off Indian whoops borne on the wind. How had the fight ended? were the regulars still holding the rear? still protecting the escape of the rabble? or had the savages rallied, and overwhelmed them? I had no means of knowing; all about us were fugitives, running blindly, many of them crying like children. I looked up at René. She was clinging to the horse's mane with one hand to keep her seat on the broad back, the other clasping the blanket, which streamed out behind. Her black hair, jarred loose from its fastening, hid her face, and hung below her waist. This would be the road they would all take, this broad path to the Ohio; it would be crowded with unarmed, desperate, terrorized fugitives. There would be no discipline, no semblance of order, no organized defense against attack. And the Indians would follow; they would elude that weak rear-guard, race through those woods, and fall on these helpless fugitives. Doubtless even already they were in pursuit. There would be greater safety traveling alone, the other way, following the course of the river straight through the forest.

I looked eagerly for some place in which to turn aside, saw the faint trace of an Indian trail, seemingly leading down the bank of the stream, and, with instant decision, turned into it. I walked the horse now, and René sat

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up straight, and fastened her disarranged hair. The narrow trail led through dense thickets and about a slight hill; in five minutes we were out of sight of the road, alone in the wilderness. To the right through trees was the glimmer of the river. The horse panted heavily, and the way was rough. There was blood I noticed now, on his flank, and he limped slightly as he walked. I staggered and reeled from weariness, feeling reaction from excitement, yet kept grimly on until we must have covered two miles, wandering in and out among the low hills. No sounds reached us, and as we came into a narrow ravine, promising concealment, I released my grasp on the bit, and staggered back against the bank. Mademoiselle slipped from her seat and hastened to me.

“You are worn out, Monsieur? wounded?”

“Worn out, yes, but nothing has touched me save a blow or two. I — I think we can rest now.”

Then it occurred to me, a thought that had swept into my mind once before — we had no provisions, no chance to get away and we dare not shoot, nor build a fire.

“What is it, Monsieur?”

“Why, we have nothing to eat, René,” I admitted reluctantly. “It is a long journey to the Ohio, and how are we going to keep from starving? Faith! but I am near that now.”

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She stood before me, slender, erect, the blanket draped about her, her eyes lowered.

“It was mine to remember, Monsieur,” she said simply, as if it was all the most ordinary thing in the world. “I knew not what would happen, and there was food there. When the women ran away, and I would not go, because you told me not, I knew it would be best that I take some. You do not blame, Monsieur?”

“Blame! you are a jewel; but I see nothing of it! Where —”

“It is here, Monsieur; I am glad if I please you.”

She flung aside the blanket, dropping it to the ground, revealing a black ammunition bag strapped across her shoulder. I remembered now feeling it when I held her in my arms, vaguely wondering what it was. She unclasped and opened it.

“Monsieur must eat,” she said gravely, “and sleep. Then he will be strong again.”

I tried to do as she said, munching a few mouthfuls. Her actions, her words, her manner toward me, both bewildered and angered. She had assumed the part of a servant — chosen it, as if she would thus teach me my own place. In every possible way she showed me she was not there from choice, but necessity. I lay back, toying with the food, my appetite gone. The wounded horse had been down to the river and drank; now he was

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paving the snow in an effort to discover feet. Over in the east, but some distance off, a rifle cracked ominously in the silence. My head fell back against the bank, and I was sound asleep.

It was two days later when we toiled up a long hill, and came out upon the summit. I no longer needed to lead the horse, and was plodding along wearily behind. Much of the snow had melted, leaving the soil soft, and the trees appeared bare, phantom-like, against the sky. René rode silently, wrapped in her blanket, for the air was chill and damp, her head bent, her eyes straight ahead. I have no remembrance that we had spoken for an hour. Beyond the hill summit there was an escarpment of rock, giving an open view ahead. As I gazed off, over the trees below, my heart gave a great bound — there, scarce a mile away, flowing between leagues of forest, was the broad Ohio, its waters silvery in the sun. I turned to her and pointed.

“At last, René,” I cried, forgetting. “We are safe now; see! There is the river.”

She lifted her eyes and looked.

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“Why do you ever speak to me in that tone? You answer me always as if you were my servant.”

“Your servant!” she was looking at me now. “Am I not, Monsieur?”

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"Of course you are not. You are free; whatever put that in your head? I have n't known what to think, what to do since we have been together. Back on the Maumee I — I thought you loved me."

"I do love you, Monsieur."

"You — you love me," I stammered. "And yet bear yourself as you do?"

"Yes, Monsieur; how else could I do? You are white; I am an Indian."

"Is that all! You think that makes it different? René, I love you; out yonder is my home; I would take you there; I would say to those who know me — here is my wife."

"Your — your wife!" There was doubt, questioning in her eyes.

"Yes, of course; how could you think otherwise?"

"Oh, Monsieur, how could I know? how could I believe? I was an Indian girl, a Wyandot. It is not so the white men come to our villages. I have seen them — the red-coats, the traders of France. They take with the strong hand, and then laugh, and go away. Monsieur, you did not tell me. You swung Girty about your head in rage and flung him from you into the river; you killed the big Shawnee chief with a blow. You — you were terrible, Monsieur; even I was afraid. Then you came and grasped me, and said get into the

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canoe. I tried to not go, but you said yes, I must. You did not ask me, Monsieur — you spoke stern, angry. I was frightened, I dare not say no, so I did as you said — I was your prisoner; you had taken me as the warriors of the Wyandots take the maidens of the Ojibwas.”

“Then if that was so, why did you not leave me — that night the Indians passed us in camp?”

Her cheeks flamed.

“I — I could not, Monsieur — I loved you.”

“And now? — now you will go with me down there — a prisoner no longer, but my own?”

“Always and forever?”

“Always and forever,” I answered gravely.

There was something new, wonderful in the depths of the dark eyes that looked into mine. I saw her hands clasp the white cross at her throat, then they were held out to me.

“I am so glad, Monsieur,” she said softly, “so glad!”

THE END



