CHAMBERS ROBERT WILLIAM

THE HIDDEN CHILDREN

Robert Chambers

The Hidden Children

Chambers R.

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Содержание

Robert W. Chambers
The Hidden Children

TO MY MOTHER

Whatever merit may lie in this book is due to her wisdom,

her sympathy and her teaching

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

No undue liberties with history have been attempted in this romance. Few characters in the story are purely imaginary. Doubtless the fastidious reader will distinguish these intruders at a glance, and very properly ignore them. For they, and what they never were, and what they never did, merely sugar-coat a dose disguised, and gild the solid pill of fact with tinselled fiction.

But from the flames of Poundridge town ablaze, to the rolling smoke of Catharines-town, Romance but limps along a trail hewed out for her more dainty feet by History, and measured inch by inch across the bloody archives of the nation.

The milestones that once marked that dark and dreadful trail were dead men, red and white. Today a spider-web of highways spreads over that Dark Empire of the League, enmeshing half a thousand towns now all a-buzz by day and all a-glow by night.

Empire, League, forest, are vanished; of the nations which formed the Confederacy only altered fragments now remain. But their memory and their great traditions have not perished; cities, mountains, valleys, rivers, lakes, and ponds are endowed with added beauty from the lovely names they wear—a tragic yet a charming legacy from Kanonsis and Kanonsionni, the brave and mighty people of the Long House, and those outside its walls who helped to prop or undermine it, Huron and Algonquin.

Perhaps of all national alliances ever formed, the Great Peace, which is called the League of the Iroquois, was as noble as any. For it was a league formed solely to impose peace. Those who took up arms against the Long House were received as allies when conquered—save only the treacherous Cat Nation, or Eries, who were utterly annihilated by the knife and hatchet or by adoption and ultimate absorption in the Seneca Nation.

As for the Lenni-Lenape, when they kept faith with the League they remained undisturbed as one of the "props" of the Long House, and their role in the Confederacy was embassadorial, diplomatic and advisory—in other words, the role of the Iroquois married women. And in the Confederacy the position of women was one of importance and dignity, and they exercised a franchise which no white nation has ever yet accorded to its women.

But when the Delawares broke faith, then the lash fell and the term "women" as applied to them carried a very different meaning when spat out by Canienga lips or snarled by Senecas.

Yet, of the Lenape, certain tribes, offshoots, and clans remained impassive either to Iroquois threats or proffered friendship. They, like certain lithe, proud forest animals to whom restriction means death, were untamable. Their necks could endure no yoke, political or purely ornamental. And

so they perished far from the Onondaga firelight, far from the open doors of the Long House, self-exiled, self-sufficient, irreconcilable, and foredoomed. And of these the Mohicans were the noblest.

In the four romances—of which, though written last of all, this is the third, chronologically speaking—the author is very conscious of error and shortcoming. But the theme was surely worth attempting; and if the failure to convince be only partial then is the writer grateful to the Fates, and well content to leave it to the next and better man.

BROADALBIN, Early Spring, 1913.

NOTE

During the serial publication of "The Hidden Children" the author received the following interesting letters relating to the authorship of the patriotic verses quoted in Chapter X., These letters are published herewith for the general reader as well as for students of American history.

R. W. C.

149 WEST EIGHTY-EIGHTH STREET,

NEW YORK CITY.

MRS. HELEN DODGE KNEELAND:

DEAR MADAM: Some time ago I accidentally came across the verses written by Samuel Dodge and used by R. W. Chambers in story "Hidden Children." I wrote to him, inviting him to come and look at the original manuscript, which has come down to me from my mother, whose maiden name was Helen Dodge Cocks, a great-granddaughter of Samuel Dodge, of Poughkeepsie, the author of them.

So far Mr. Chambers has not come, but he answered my note, inclosing your note to him. I have written to him, suggesting that he insert a footnote giving the authorship of the verses, that it would gratify the descendants of Samuel Dodge, as well as be a tribute to a patriotic citizen.

These verses have been published a number of times. About three years ago by chance I read them in the December National Magazine, p. 247 (Boston), entitled "A Revolutionary Puzzle," and stating that the author was unknown. Considering it my duty to place the honor where it belonged, I wrote to the editor, giving the facts, which he courteously published in the September number, 1911, p. 876.

Should you be in New York any time, I will take pleasure in showing you the original manuscripts.

Very truly yours,

ROBERT S. MORRIS, M.D.

MR. ROBERT CHAMBERS,

New York.

DEAR SIR: I have not replied to your gracious letter, as I relied upon Dr. Morris to prove to you the authorship of the verses you used in your story of "The Hidden Children." I now inclose a letter from him, hoping that you will carry out his suggestion. Is it asking too much for you to insert a footnote in the next magazine or in the story when it comes out in book form? I think with Dr. Morris that this should be done as a "tribute to a patriotic citizen."

Trusting that you will appreciate the interest we have shown in this matter, I am

Sincerely yours,

HELEN DODGE KNEELAND.

May 21st, 1914.

Ann Arbor, Michigan.

MRS. FRANK G. KNEELAND,

727 E. University Avenue.

THE LONG HOUSE

"Onenh jatthondek sewarih-wisa-anongh-kwe kaya-renh-kowah!
Onenh wa-karigh-wa-kayon-ne.
Onenh ne okne joska-wayendon.
Yetsi-siwan-enyadanion ne
Sewari-wisa-anonqueh."

"*Now listen, ye who established the Great League!
Now it has become old.
Now there is nothing but wilderness.
Ye are in your graves who established it.*"

"At the Wood's Edge."

NENE KARENNA

When the West kindles red and low,
Across the sunset's sombre glow,
The black crows fly—the black crows fly!
High pines are swaying to and fro
In evil winds that blow and blow.
The stealthy dusk draws nigh—draws nigh,
Till the sly sun at last goes down,
And shadows fall on Catharines-town.

Oswaya swaying to and fro.

By the Dark Empire's Western gate
Eight stately, painted Sachems wait
For Amochol—for Amochol!
Hazel and samphire consecrate
The magic blaze that burns like Hate,
While the deep witch-drums roll—and roll.
Sorceress, shake thy dark hair down!
The Red Priest comes from Catharines-town.

Ha-ai! Karenna! Fate is Fate.

Now let the Giants clothed in stone
Stalk from Biskoonah; while, new grown,
The Severed Heads fly high—fly high!
White-throat, White-throat, thy doom is known!
O Blazing Soul that soars alone
Like a Swift Arrow to the sky,

High winging—fling thy Wampum down,
Lest the sky fall on Catharines-town.

White-throat, White-throat, thy course is flown.

R. W. C.

CHAPTER I
THE BEDFORD ROAD

In the middle of the Bedford Road we three drew bridle. Boyd lounged in his reeking saddle, gazing at the tavern and at what remained of the tavern sign, which seemed to have been a new one, yet now dangled mournfully by one hinge, shot to splinters.

The freshly painted house itself, marred with buckshot, bore dignified witness to the violence done it. A few glazed windows still remained unbroken; the remainder had been filled with blue paper such as comes wrapped about a sugar cone, so that the misused house seemed to be watching us out of patched and battered eyes.

It was evident, too, that a fire had been wantonly set at the northeast angle of the house, where sill and siding were deeply charred from baseboard to eaves.

Nor had this same fire happened very long since, for under the eaves white-faced hornets were still hard at work repairing their partly scorched nest. And I silently pointed them out to Lieutenant Boyd.

"Also," he nodded, "I can still smell the smoky wood. The damage is fresh enough. Look at your map."

He pushed his horse straight up to the closed door, continuing to examine the dismantled sign which hung motionless, there being no wind stirring.

"This should be Hays's Tavern," he said, "unless they lied to us at Ossining. Can you make anything of the sign, Mr. Loskiel?"

"Nothing, sir. But we are on the highway to Poundridge, for behind us lies the North Castle Church road. All is drawn on my map as we see it here before us; and this should be the fine dwelling of that great villain Holmes, now used as a tavern by Benjamin Hays."

"Rap on the door," said Boyd; and our rifleman escort rode forward and drove his rifle-butt at the door, "There's a man hiding within and peering at us behind the third window," I whispered.

"I see him," said Boyd coolly.

Through the heated silence around us we could hear the hornets buzzing aloft under the smoke-stained eaves. There was no other sound in the July sunshine.

The solemn tavern stared at us out of its injured eyes, and we three men of the Northland gazed back as solemnly, sobered once more to encounter the trail of the Red Beast so freshly printed here among the pleasant Westchester hills.

And to us the silent house seemed to say: "Gentlemen, gentlemen! Look at the plight I'm in —you who come from the blackened North!" And with never a word of lip our heavy thoughts responded: "We know, old house! We know! But at least you still stand; and in the ashes of our Northland not a roof or a spire remains aloft between the dwelling of Deborah Glenn and the ford at the middle fort."

Boyd broke silence with an effort; and his voice was once more cool and careless, if a little forced:

"So it's this way hereabouts, too," he said with a shrug and a sign to me to dismount. Which I did stiffly; and our rifleman escort scrambled from his sweatty saddle and gathered all three bridles in his mighty, sunburnt fist.

"Either there is a man or a ghost within," I said again, "Whatever it is has moved."

"A man," said Boyd, "or what the inhumanity of man has left of him."

And it was true, for now there came to the door and opened it a thin fellow wearing horn spectacles, who stood silent and cringing before us. Slowly rubbing his workworn hands, he made us

a landlord's bow as listless and as perfunctory as ever I have seen in any ordinary. But his welcome was spoken in a whisper.

"God have mercy on this house," said Boyd loudly. "Now, what's amiss, friend? Is there death within these honest walls, that you move about on tiptoe?"

"There is death a-plenty in Westchester, sir," said the man, in a voice as colorless as his drab smalls and faded hair. Yet what he said showed us that he had noted our dress, too, and knew us for strangers.

"Cowboys and skinners, eh?" inquired Boyd, unbuckling his belt.

"And leather-cape, too, sir."

My lieutenant laughed, showing his white teeth; laid belt, hatchet, and heavy knife on a wine-stained table, and placed his rifle against it. Then, slipping cartridge sack, bullet pouch, and powder horn from his shoulders, stood eased, yawning and stretching his fine, powerful frame.

"I take it that you see few of our corps here below," he observed indulgently.

The landlord's lack-lustre eyes rested on me for an instant, then on Boyd:

"Few, sir."

"Do you know the uniform, landlord?"

"Rifles," he said indifferently.

"Yes, but whose, man? Whose?" insisted Boyd impatiently.

The other shook his head.

"Morgan's!" exclaimed Boyd loudly. "Damnation, sir! You should know Morgan's! Sixth Company, sir; Major Parr! And a likelier regiment and a better company never wore green thrums on frock or coon-tail on cap!"

"Yes, sir," said the man vacantly.

Boyd laughed a little:

"And look that you hint as much to the idle young bucks hereabouts—say it to some of your Westchester squirrel hunters–" He laid his hand on the landlord's shoulder. "There's a good fellow," he added, with that youthful and winning smile which so often carried home with it his reckless will—where women were concerned—"we're down from Albany and we wish the Bedford folk to know it. And if the gallant fellows hereabout desire a taste of true glory—the genuine article—why, send them to me, landlord—Thomas Boyd, of Derry, Pennsylvania, lieutenant, 6th company of Morgan's—or to my comrade here, Mr. Loskiel, ensign in the same corps."

He clapped the man heartily on the shoulder and stood looking around at the stripped and dishevelled room, his handsome head a little on one side, as though in frankest admiration. And the worn and pallid landlord gazed back at him with his faded, lack-lustre eyes—eyes that we both understood, alas—eyes made dull with years of fear, made old and hopeless with unshed tears, stupid from sleepless nights, haunted with memories of all they had looked upon since His Excellency marched out of the city to the south of us, where the red rag now fluttered on fort and shipping from King's Bridge to the Hook.

Nothing more was said. Our landlord went away very quietly. An hostler, presently appearing from somewhere, passed the broken windows, and we saw our rifleman go away with him, leading the three tired horses. We were still yawning and drowsing, stretched out in our hickory chairs, and only kept awake by the flies, when our landlord returned and set before us what food he had. The fare was scanty enough, but we ate hungrily, and drank deeply of the fresh small beer which he fetched in a Liverpool jug.

When we two were alone again, Boyd whispered:

"As well let them think we're here with no other object than recruiting. And so we are, after a fashion; but neither this state nor Pennsylvania is like to fill its quota here. Where is your map, once more?"

I drew the coiled linen roll from the breast of my rifle shirt and spread it out. We studied it, heads together.

"Here lies Poundridge," nodded Boyd, placing his finger on the spot so marked. "Roads a-plenty, too. Well, it's odd, Loskiel, but in this cursed, debatable land I feel more ill at ease than I have ever felt in the Iroquois country."

"You are still thinking of our landlord's deathly face," I said. "Lord! What a very shadow of true manhood crawls about this house!"

"Aye—and I am mindful of every other face and countenance I have so far seen in this strange, debatable land. All have in them something of the same expression. And therein lies the horror of it all, Mr. Loskiel God knows we expect to see deathly faces in the North, where little children lie scalped in the ashes of our frontier—where they even scalp the family hound that guards the cradle. But here in this sleepy, open countryside, with its gentle hills and fertile valleys, broad fields and neat stone walls, its winding roads and orchards, and every pretty farmhouse standing as though no war were in the land, all seems so peaceful, so secure, that the faces of the people sicken me. And ever I am asking myself, where lies this other hell on earth, which only faces such as these could have looked upon?"

"It is sad," I said, under my breath. "Even when a lass smiles on us it seems to start the tears in my throat."

"Sad! Yes, sir, it is. I supposed we had seen sufficient of human degradation in the North not to come here to find the same cringing expression stamped on every countenance. I'm sick of it, I tell you. Why, the British are doing worse than merely filling their prisons with us and scalping us with their savages! They are slowly but surely marking our people, body and face and mind, with the cursed imprint of slavery. They're stamping a nation's very features with the hopeless lineaments of serfdom. It is the ineradicable scars of former slavery that make the New Englander whine through his nose. We of the fighting line bear no such marks, but the peaceful people are beginning to—they who can do nothing except endure and suffer."

"It is not so everywhere," I said, "not yet, anyway."

"It is so in the North. And we have found it so since we entered the 'Neutral Ground.' Like our own people on the frontier, these Westchester folk fear everybody. You yourself know how we have found them. To every question they try to give an answer that may please; or if they despair of pleasing they answer cautiously, in order not to anger. The only sentiment left alive in them seems to be fear; all else of human passion appears to be dead. Why, Loskiel, the very power of will has deserted them; they are not civil to us, but obsequious; not obliging but subservient. They yield with apathy and very quietly what you ask, and what they apparently suppose is impossible for them to retain. If you treat them kindly they receive it coldly, not gratefully, but as though you were compensating them for evil done them by you. Their countenances and motions have lost every trace of animation. It is not serenity but apathy; every emotion, feeling, thought, passion, which is not merely instinctive has fled their minds forever. And this is the greatest crime that Britain has wrought upon us." He struck the table lightly with doubled fist, "Mr. Loskiel," he said, "I ask you—can we find recruits for our regiment in such a place as this? Damme, sir, but I think the entire land has lost its manhood."

We sat staring out into the sunshine through a bullet-shattered window.

"And all this country here seems so fair and peaceful," he murmured half to himself, "so sweet and still and kindly to me after the twilight of endless forests where men are done to death in the dusk. But hell in broad sunshine is the more horrible."

"Look closer at this country," I said. "The highways are deserted and silent, the very wagon ruts overgrown with grass. Not a scythe has swung in those hay fields; the gardens that lie in the sun are but tangles of weeds; no sheep stir on the hills, no cattle stand in these deep meadows, no wagons pass, no wayfarers. It may be that the wild birds are moulting, but save at dawn and for a few moments at sundown they seem deathly silent to me."

He had relapsed again into his moody, brooding attitude, elbows on the table, his handsome head supported by both hands. And it was not like him to be downcast. After a while he smiled.

"Egad," he said, "it is too melancholy for me here in the open; and I begin to long for the dusk of trees and for the honest scalp yell to cheer me up. One knows what to expect in county Tryon—but not here, Loskiel—not here."

"Our business here is like to be ended tomorrow," I remarked.

"Thank God for that," he said heartily, rising and buckling on his war belt. He added: "As for any recruits we have been ordered to pick up en passant, I see small chance of that accomplishment hereabout. Will you summon the landlord, Mr. Loskiel?"

I discovered the man standing at the open door, his warn hands clasped behind him, and staring stupidly at the cloudless sky. He followed me back to the taproom, and we reckoned with him. Somehow, I thought he had not expected to be paid a penny—yet he did not thank us.

"Are you not Benjamin Hays?" inquired Boyd, carelessly retying his purse.

The fellow seemed startled to hear his own name pronounced so loudly, but answered very quietly that he was.

"This house belongs to a great villain, one James Holmes, does it not?" demanded Boyd.

"Yes, sir," he whispered.

"How do you come to keep an ordinary here?"

"The town authorities required an ordinary. I took it in charge, as they desired."

"Oh! Where is this rascal, Holmes?"

"Gone below, sir, some time since."

"I have heard so. Was he not formerly Colonel of the 4th regiment?"

"Yes, sir."

"And deserted his men, eh? And they made him Lieutenant-Colonel below, did they not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Colonel—of what?" snarled Boyd in disgust.

"Of the Westchester Refugee Irregulars."

"Oh! Well, look out for him and his refugees. He'll be back here one of these days, I'm thinking."

"He has been back."

"What did he do?"

The man said listlessly: "It was like other visits. They robbed, tortured, and killed. Some they burnt with hot ashes, some they hung, cut down, and hung again when they revived. Most of the sheep, cattle, and horses were driven off. Last year thousands of bushels of fruit decayed in the orchards; the ripened grain lay rotting where wind and rain had laid it; no hay was cut, no grain milled."

"Was this done by the banditti from the lower party?"

"Yes, sir; and by the leather-caps, too. The leather-caps stood guard while the Tories plundered and killed. It is usually that way, sir. And our own renegades are as bad. We in Westchester have to entertain them all."

"But they burn no houses?"

"Not yet, sir. They have promised to do so next time."

"Are there no troops here?"

"Yes, sir."

"What troops?"

"Colonel Thomas's Regiment and Sheldon's Horse and the Minute Men."

"Well, what the devil are they about to permit this banditti to terrify and ravage a peaceful land?" demanded Boyd.

"The country is of great extent," said the man mildly. "It would require many troops to cover it. And His Excellency has very, very few."

"Yes," said Boyd, "that is true. We know how it is in the North—with hundreds of miles to guard and but a handful of men. And it must be that way." He made no effort to throw off his seriousness and nodded toward me with a forced smile. "I am twenty-two years of age," he said, "and Mr. Loskiel here is no older, and we fully expect that when we both are past forty we will still be fighting in this same old war. Meanwhile," he added laughing, "every patriot should find some lass to wed and breed the soldiers we shall require some sixteen years hence."

The man's smile was painful; he smiled because he thought we expected it; and I turned away disheartened, ashamed, burning with a fierce resentment against the fate that in three years had turned us into what we were—we Americans who had never known the lash—we who had never learned to fear a master.

Boyd said: "There is a gentleman, one Major Ebenezer Lockwood, hereabouts. Do you know him?"

"No, sir."

"What? Why, that seems strange!"

The man's face paled, and he remained silent for a few moments. Then, furtively, his eyes began for the hundredth time to note the details of our forest dress, stealing stealthily from the fringe on legging and hunting shirt to the Indian beadwork on moccasin and baldrick, devouring every detail as though to convince himself. I think our pewter buttons did it for him.

Boyd said gravely: "You seem to doubt us, Mr. Hays," and read in the man's unsteady eyes distrust of everything on earth—and little faith in God.

"I do not blame you," said I gently. "Three years of hell burn deep."

"Yes," he said, "three years. And, as you say, sir, there was fire."

He stood quietly silent for a space, then, looking timidly at me, he rolled back his sleeves, first one, then the other, to the shoulders. Then he undid the bandages.

"What is all that?" asked Boyd harshly.

"The seal of the marauders, sir."

"They burnt you? God, man, you are but one living sore! Did any white man do that to you?"

"With hot horse-shoes. It will never quite heal, they say."

I saw the lieutenant shudder. The only thing he ever feared was fire—if it could be said of him that he feared anything. And he had told me that, were he taken by the Iroquois, he had a pistol always ready to blow out his brains.

Boyd had begun to pace the room, doubling and undoubling his nervous fingers. The landlord replaced the oil-soaked rags, rolled down his sleeves again, and silently awaited our pleasure.

"Why do you hesitate to tell us where we may find Major Lockwood?" I asked gently.

For the first time the man looked me full in the face. And after a moment I saw his expression alter, as though some spark—something already half dead within him was faintly reviving.

"They have set a price on Major Lockwood's head," he said; and Boyd halted to listen—and the man looked him in the eyes for a moment.

My lieutenant carried his commission with him, though contrary to advice and practice among men engaged on such a mission as were we. It was folded in his beaded shot-pouch, and now he drew it out and displayed it.

After a silence, Hays said:

"The old Lockwood Manor House stands on the south side of the village of Poundridge. It is the headquarters and rendezvous of Sheldon's Horse. The Major is there."

"Poundridge lies to the east of Bedford?"

"Yes, sir, about five miles."

"Where is the map, Loskiel?"

Again I drew it from my hunting shirt; we examined it, and Hays pointed out the two routes.

Boyd looked up at Hays absently, and said: "Do you know Luther Kinnicut?"

This time all the colour fled the man's face, and it was some moments before the sudden, unreasoning rush of terror in that bruised mind had subsided sufficiently for him to compose his thoughts. Little by little, however, he came to himself again, dimly conscious that he trusted us—perhaps the first strangers or even neighbours whom he had trusted in years.

"Yes, sir, I know him," he said in a low voice.

"Where is he?"

"Below—on our service."

But it was Luther Kinnicut, the spy, whom we had come to interview, as well as to see Major Lockwood, and Boyd frowned thoughtfully.

I said: "The Indians hereabout are Mohican, are they not, Mr. Hays?"

"They were," he replied; and his very apathy gave the answer a sadder significance.

"Have they all gone off?" asked Boyd, misunderstanding.

"There were very few Mohicans to go. But they have gone."

"Below?"

"Oh, no, sir. They and the Stockbridge Indians, and the Siwanois are friendly to our party."

"There was a Sagamore," I said, "of the Siwanois, named Mayaro. We believe that Luther Kinnicut knows where this Sagamore is to be found. But how are we to first find Kinnicut?"

"Sir," he said, "you must ask Major Lockwood that. I know not one Indian from the next, only that the savages hereabout are said to be favourable to our party."

Clearly there was nothing more to learn from this man. So we thanked him and strapped on our accoutrements, while he went away to the barn to bring up our horses. And presently our giant rifleman appeared leading the horses, and still munching a bough-apple, scarce ripe, which he dropped into the bosom of his hunting shirt when he discovered us watching him.

Boyd laughed: "Munch away, Jack, and welcome," he said, "only mind thy manners when we sight regular troops. I'll have nobody reproaching Morgan's corps that the men lack proper respect—though many people seem to think us but a parcel of militia where officer and man herd cheek by jowl."

On mounting, he turned in his saddle and asked Hays what we had to fear on our road, if indeed we were to apprehend anything.

"There is some talk of the Legion Cavalry, sir—Major Tarleton's command."

"Anything definite?"

"No, sir—only the talk when men of our party meet. And Major Lockwood has a price on his head."

"Oh! Is that all?"

"That is all, sir."

Boyd nodded laughingly, wheeled his horse, and we rode slowly out into the Bedford Road, the mounted rifleman dogging our heels.

From every house in Bedford we knew that we were watched as we rode; and what they thought of us in our flaunting rifle dress, or what they took us to be—enemy or friend—I cannot imagine, the uniform of our corps being strange in these parts. However, they must have known us for foresters and riflemen of one party or t'other; and, as we advanced, and there being only three of us, and on a highway, too, very near to the rendezvous of an American dragoon regiment, the good folk not only peeped out at us from between partly closed shutters, but even ventured to open their doors and stand gazing after we had ridden by.

Every pretty maid he saw seemed to comfort Boyd prodigiously, which was always the case; and as here and there a woman smiled faintly at him the last vestige of sober humour left him and he was more like the reckless, handsome young man I had come to care for a great deal, if not wholly to esteem.

The difference in rank between us permitted him to relax if he chose; and though His Excellency and our good Baron were ever dinning discipline and careful respect for rank into the army's republican ears, there was among us nothing like the aristocratic and rigid sentiment which ruled the corps of officers in the British service.

Still, we were not as silly and ignorant as we were at Bunker Hill, having learned something of authority and respect in these three years, and how necessary to discipline was a proper maintenance of rank. For once—though it seems incredible—men and officers were practically on a footing of ignorant familiarity; and I have heard, and fully believe, that the majority of our reverses and misfortunes arose because no officer represented authority, nor knew how to enforce discipline because lacking that military respect upon which all real discipline must be founded.

Of all the officers in my corps and in my company, perhaps Lieutenant Boyd was slowest to learn the lesson and most prone to relax, not toward the rank and file—yet, he was often a shade too easy there, also—but with other officers. Those ranking him were not always pleased; those whom he ranked felt vaguely the mistake.

As for me, I liked him greatly; yet, somehow, never could bring myself to a careless comradeship, even in the woods or on lonely scouts where formality and circumstance seemed out of place, even absurd. He was so much of a boy, too—handsome, active, perfectly fearless, and almost always gay—that if at times he seemed a little selfish or ruthless in his pleasures, not sufficiently mindful of others or of consequences, I found it easy to forgive and overlook. Yet, fond as I was of him, I never had become familiar with him—why, I do not know. Perhaps because he ranked me; and perhaps there was no particular reason for that instinct of aloofness which I think was part of me at that age, and, except in a single instance, still remains as the slightest and almost impalpable barrier to a perfect familiarity with any person in the world.

"Loskiel," he said in my ear, "did you see that little maid in the orchard, how shyly she smiled on us?"

"On you," I nodded, laughing.

"Oh, you always say that," he retorted.

And I always did say that, and it always pleased him.

"On this accursed journey south," he complained, "the necessity for speed has spoiled our chances for any roadside sweethearts. Lord! But it's been a long, dull trail," he added frankly. "Why, look you, Loskiel, even in the wilderness somehow I always have contrived to discover a sweetheart of some sort or other—yes, even in the Iroquois country, cleared or bush, somehow or other, sooner or later, I stumble on some pretty maid who flutters up in the very wilderness like a partridge from under my feet!"

"That is your reputation," I remarked.

"Oh, damme, no!" he protested. "Don't say it is my reputation!"

But he had that reputation, whether he realised it or not; though as far as I had seen there was no real harm in the man—only a willingness to make love to any petticoat, if its wearer were pretty. But my own notions had ever inclined me toward quality. Which is not strange, I myself being of unknown parentage and birth, high or low, nobody knew; nor had anybody ever told me how I came by my strange name, Euan Loskiel, save that they found the same stitched in silk upon my shift.

For it is best, perhaps, that I say now how it was with me from the beginning, which, until this memoir is read, only one man knew—and one other. For I was discovered sleeping beside a stranded St. Regis canoe, where the Mohawk River washes Guy Park gardens. And my dead mother lay beside me.

He who cared for me, reared me and educated me, was no other than Guy Johnson of Guy Park. Why he did so I learned only after many days; and at the proper time and place I will tell you who I am and why he was kind to me. For his was not a warm and kindly character, nor a gentle nature, nor

was he an educated man himself, nor perhaps even a gentleman, though of that landed gentry which Tryon County knew so well, and also a nephew of the great Sir William, and became his son-in-law.

I say he was not liked in Tryon County, though many feared him more than they feared young Walter Butler later; yet he was always and invariably kind to me. And when with the Butlers, and Sir John, and Colonel Claus, and the other Tories he fled to Canada, there to hatch most hellish reprisals upon the people of Tryon who had driven him forth, he wrote to me where I was at Harvard College in Cambridge to bid me farewell.

He said to me in that letter that he did not ask me to declare for the King in the struggle already beginning; he merely requested, if I could not conscientiously so declare, at least that I remain passive, and attend quietly to my studies at Cambridge until the war blew over, as it quickly must, and these insolent people were taught their lesson.

The lesson, after three years and more, was still in progress; Guy Park had fallen into the hands of the Committee of Sequestration and was already sold; Guy Johnson roamed a refugee in Canada, and I, since the first crack of a British musket, had learned how matters stood between my heart and conscience, and had carried a rifle and at times my regiment's standard ever since.

I had no home except my regiment, no friends except Guy Johnson's, and those I had made at College and in the regiment; and the former would likely now have greeted me with rifle or hatchet, whichever came easier to hand.

So to me my rifle regiment and my company had become my only home; the officers my parents; my comrades the only friends I had.

I wrote to Guy Johnson, acquainting him of my intention before I enlisted, and the letter went to him with other correspondence under a flag.

In time I had a reply from him, and he wrote as though something stronger than hatred for the cause I had embraced was forcing him to speak to me gently.

God knows it was a strange, sad letter, full of bitterness under which smouldered something more terrible, which, as he wrote, he strangled. And so he ended, saying that, through him, no harm should ever menace me; and that in the fullness of time, when this vile rebellion had been ended, he would vouch for the mercy of His Most Christian Majesty as far as I was concerned, even though all others hung in chains.

Thus I had left it all—not then knowing who I was or why Guy Johnson had been kind to me; nor ever expecting to hear from him again.

Thinking of these things as I rode beside Lieutenant Boyd through the calm Westchester sunshine, all that part of my life—which indeed was all of my life except these last three battle years—seemed already so far sway, so dim and unreal, that I could scarce realise I had not been always in the army—had not always lived from day to day, from hour to hour, not knowing one night where I should pillow my head the next.

For at nineteen I shouldered my rifle; and now, at Boyd's age, two and twenty, my shoulder had become so accustomed to its not unpleasant weight that, at moments, thinking, I realised that I would not know what to do in the world had I not my officers, my company, and my rifle to companion me through life.

And herein lies the real danger of all armies and of all soldiering. Only the strong character and exceptional man is ever fitted for any other life after the army becomes a closed career to him.

I now remarked as much to Boyd, who frowned, seeming to consider the matter for the first time.

"Aye," he nodded, "it's true enough, Loskiel. And I for one don't know what use I could make of the blessings of peace for which we are so madly fighting, and which we all protest that we desire."

"The blessings of peace might permit you more leisure with the ladies," I suggested smilingly. And he threw back his handsome head and laughed.

"Lord!" he exclaimed. "What chance have I, a poor rifleman, who may not even wear his hair clubbed and powdered."

Only field and staff now powdered in our corps. I said: "Heaven hasten your advancement, sir."

"Not that I'd care a fig," he protested, "if I had your yellow, curly head, you rogue. But with my dark hair unpowdered and uncurled, and no side locks, I tell you, Loskiel, I earn every kiss that is given me—or forgiven. Heigho! Peace would truly be a blessing if she brought powder and pretty clothing to a crop-head, buck-skinned devil like me."

We were now riding through a country which had become uneven and somewhat higher. A vast wooded hill lay on our left; the Bedford highway skirted it. On our right ran a stream, and there was some swampy land which followed. Rock outcrops became more frequent, and the hard-wood growth of oak, hickory and chestnut seemed heavier and more extensive than in Bedford town. But there were orchards; the soil seemed to be fertile and the farms thrifty, and it was a pleasant land save for the ominous stillness over all and the grass-grown highway. Roads and lanes, paths and pastures remained utterly deserted of man and beast.

This, if our map misled us not, should be the edges of the town of Poundridge; and within a mile or so more we began to see a house here and there. These farms became more frequent as we advanced. After a few moments' riding we saw the first cattle that we had seen in many days. And now we began to find this part of the Westchester country very different, as we drew nearer to the village, for here and there we saw sheep feeding in the distance, and men mowing who leaned on their scythes to see us pass, and even saluted us from afar.

It seemed as though a sense of security reigned here, though nobody failed to mark our passing or even to anticipate it from far off. But nobody appeared to be afraid of us, and we concluded that the near vicinity of Colonel Sheldon's Horse accounted for what we saw.

It was pleasant to see women spinning beside windows in which flowers bloomed, and children gazing shyly at us from behind stone walls and palings. Also, in barnyards we saw fowls, which was more than we had seen West of us—and now and again a family cat dozing on some doorstep freshly swept.

"I had forgotten there was such calm and peace in the world," said Boyd. "And the women look not unkindly on us—do you think, Loskiel?"

But I was intent on watching a parcel of white ducks leaving a little pond, all walking a-row and quacking, and wriggling their fat tails. How absurd a thing to suddenly close my throat so that I could not find my voice to answer Boyd; for ever before me grew the almost forgotten vision of Guy Park, and of our white waterfowl on the river behind the house, where I had seen them so often from my chamber window leaving the water's edge at sundown.

A mile outside the town a leather-helmeted dragoon barred our way, but we soon satisfied him.

We passed by the Northwest road, crossed the Stamford highway, and, consulting our map, turned back and entered it, riding south through the village.

Here a few village folk were abroad; half a dozen of Sheldon's dragoons lounged outside the tavern, to the rail of which their horses were tied; and we saw other men with guns, doubtless militia, though few wore any fragment of uniform, save as their hats were cocked or sprigged with green.

Nobody hailed us, not even the soldiers; there was no levity, no jest directed toward our giant rifleman, only a courteous but sober salute as we rode through Poundridge town and out along the New Canaan highway where houses soon became fewer and soldiers both afoot and ahorse more frequent.

We crossed a stream and two roads, then came into a street with many houses which ran south, then, at four corners, turned sharp to the east. And there, across a little brook, we saw a handsome manor house around which some three score cavalry horses were picketed.

Yard, lawn, stables and barns were swarming with people—dragoons of Sheldon's Regiment, men of Colonel Thomas's foot regiment, militia officers, village gentlemen whose carriages stood

waiting; and some of these same carriages must have come from a distance, perhaps even from Ridgefield, to judge by the mud and dust that clotted them.

Beyond the house, on a road which I afterward learned ran toward Lewisboro, between the Three Lakes, Cross Pond, and Bouton's, a military convoy was passing, raising a prodigious cloud of dust. I could see, and faintly hear, sheep and cattle; there was a far crack of whips, a shouting of drovers and teamsters, and, through the dust, we caught the sparkle of a bayonet here and there.

Somewhere, doubtless, some half starved brigade of ours was gnawing its nails and awaiting this same convoy; and I silently prayed God to lead it safely to its destination.

"Pretty women everywhere!" whispered Boyd in my ear. "Our friend the Major seems to have a houseful. The devil take me if I leave this town tomorrow!"

As we rode into the yard and dismounted, and our rifleman took the bridles, across the crowded roadway we could see a noble house with its front doors wide open and a group of ladies and children there and many gentlemen saluting them as they entered or left the house.

"A respectable company," I heard Boyd mutter to himself, as he stood slapping the dust from hunting-shirt and leggings and smoothing the fringe. And, "Damme, Loskiel," he said, "we're like to cut a most contemptible figure among such grand folk—what with our leather breeches, and saddle-reek for the only musk we wear. Lord! But yonder stands a handsome girl—and my condition mortifies me so that I could slink off to the mews for shame and lie on straw with the hostlers."

There was, I knew, something genuine in his pretense of hurt vanity, even under the merry mask he wore; but I only laughed.

A great many people moved about, many, I could see, having arrived from the distant country; and there was a great noise of hammering, too, from a meadow below, where, a soldier told us, they were erecting barracks for Sheldon's and for other troops shortly expected.

"There is even talk of a fort for the ridge yonder," he said. "One may see the Sound from there."

We glanced up at the ridge, then gazed curiously around, and finally walked down along the stone wall to a pasture. Here, where they were building the barracks, there had been a camp; and the place was still smelling stale enough. Tents were now being loaded on ox wagons; and a company of Colonel Thomas's regiment was filing out along the road after the convoy which we had seen moving through the dust toward Lewisboro.

People stood about looking on; some poked at the embers of the smoky fires, some moused and prowled about to see what scrap they might pick up.

Boyd's roving gaze had been arrested by a little scene enacting just around the corner of the partly-erected barracks, where half a dozen soldiers had gathered around some camp-women, whose sullen attitude discouraged their gallantries. She was dressed in shabby finery. On her hair, which was powdered, she wore a jaunty chip hat tied under her chin with soiled blue ribbons, and a kerchief of ragged lace hid her bosom, pinned with a withered rose. The scene was sordid enough; and, indifferent, I gazed elsewhere.

"A shilling to a penny they kiss her yet!" he said to me presently, and for the second time I noticed the comedy—if you choose to call it so—for the wench was now struggling fiercely amid the laughing men.

"A pound to a penny!" repeated Boyd; "Do you take me, Loskiel?"

The next moment I had pushed in among them, forcing the hilarious circle to open; and I heard her quick, uneven breathing as I elbowed my way to her, and turned on the men good-humoredly.

"Come, boys, be off!" I said. "Leave rough sport to the lower party. She's sobbing." I glanced at her. "Why, she's but a child, after all! Can't you see, boys? Now, off with you all in a hurry!"

There had evidently been some discipline drilled into Colonel Thomas's regiments the men seemed instantly to know me for an officer, whether by my dress or voice I know not, yet Morgan's rifle frock could be scarcely familiar to them.

A mischievous sergeant saluted me, grinning, saying it was but idle sport and no harm meant; and so, some laughing, others seeming to be ashamed, they made haste to clear out. I followed them, with a nod of reassurance to the wench, who might have been their drab for aught I knew, all camps being full of such poultry.

"Gallantly done!" exclaimed Boyd derisively, as I came slowly back to where he stood. "But had I been fortunate enough to think of intervening, egad, I believe I would have claimed what she refused the rest, Loskiel!"

"From a ruddied camp drab?" I asked scornfully.

"Her cheeks and lips are not painted. I've discovered that," he insisted, staring back at her.

"Lord!" said I. "Would you linger here making sheep's eyes at yonder ragged baggage? Come, sir, if you please."

"I tell you, I would give a half year's pay to see her washed and clothed becomingly!"

"You never will," said I impatiently, and jogged his elbow to make him move. For he was ever a prey to strange and wayward fancies which hitherto I had only smiled at. But now, somehow —perhaps because there might have been some excuse for this one—perhaps because what a man rescues he will not willingly leave to another—even such a poor young thing as this plaything of the camp—for either of these reasons, or for none at all, this ogling of her did not please me.

Most unwillingly he yielded to the steady pressure of my elbow; and we moved on, he turning his handsome head continually. After a while he laughed.

"Nevertheless," said he, "there stands the rarest essence of real beauty I have ever seen, in lady born or beggar; and I am an ass to go my way and leave it for the next who passes."

I said nothing.

He grumbled for a while below his breath, then:

"Yes, sir! Sheer beauty—by the roadside yonder—in ragged ribbons and a withered rose. Only —such Puritans as you perceive it not."

After a silence, and as we entered the gateway to the manor house:

"I swear she wore no paint, Loskiel—whatever she is like enough to be."

"Good heavens!" said I. "Are you brooding on her still?"

Yet, I myself was thinking of her, too; and because of it a strange, slow anger was possessing me.

"Thank God," thought I to myself, "no woman of the common class could win a second glance from me. In which," I added with satisfaction, "I am unlike most other men."

A Philistine thought the same, one day—if I remember right.

CHAPTER II
POUNDRIDGE

We now approached the door of the manor house, where we named ourselves to the sentry, who presently fetched an officer of Minute Men, who looked us over somewhat coldly.

"You wish to see Major Lockwood?" he asked.

"Yes," said Boyd, "and you may say to him that we are come from headquarters express to speak with him on private business."

"From whom in Albany do you come, sir?"

"Well, sir, if you must have it, from General Clinton," returned Boyd in a lower voice. "But we would not wish it gossipped aloud."

The man seemed to be perplexed, but he went away again, leaving us standing in the crowded hall where officers, ladies of the family, and black servants were continually passing and repassing.

Very soon a door opened on our left, and we caught a glimpse of a handsome room full of officers and civilians, where maps were scattered in confusion over tables, chairs, and even on the floor. An officer in buff and blue came out of the room, glanced keenly at us, made a slight though courteous inclination, but instead of coming forward to greet us turned into another room on the right, which was a parlour.

Then the minute officer returned, directed us where to place our rifles, insisted firmly that we also leave under his care our war axes and the pistol which Boyd carried, and then ushered us into the parlour. And it occurred to me that the gentleman on whose head the British had set a price was very considerably inclined toward prudence.

Now this same gentleman, Major Lockwood, who had been seated behind a table when we entered the parlour, rose and received us most blandly, although I noted that he kept the table between himself and us, and also that the table drawer was open, where I could have sworn that the papers so carelessly heaped about covered a brace of pistols.

For to this sorry pass the Westchester folk had come, that they trusted no stranger, nor were like to for many a weary day to come. Nor could I blame this gentleman with a heavy price on his head, and, as I heard later, already the object of numerous and violent attempts in which, at times, entire regiments had been employed to take him.

But after he had carefully read the letter which Boyd bore from our General of Brigade, he asked us to be seated, and shut the table drawer, and came over to the silk-covered sofa on which we had seated ourselves.

"Do you know the contents of this letter?" he asked Boyd bluntly.

"Yes, Major Lockwood."

"And does Mr. Loskiel know, also?"

"Yes, sir," I answered.

The Major sat musing, turning over and over the letter between thumb and forefinger.

He was a man, I should say, of forty or a trifle more, with brown eyes which sometimes twinkled as though secretly amused, even when his face was gravest and most composed; a gentleman of middle height, of good figure and straight, and of manners so simple that the charm of them struck one afterward as a pleasant memory.

"Gentlemen," he said, looking up at us from his momentary abstraction, "for the first part of General Clinton's letter I must be brief with you and very frank. There are no recruits to be had in this vicinity for Colonel Morgan's Rifles. Riflemen are of the elite; and our best characters and best shots are all enlisted—or dead or in prison–" He made a significant gesture toward the south. And we thought of the Prison Ships and the Provost, and sat silent.

"There is," he added, "but one way, and that is to pick riflemen from our regiments here; and I am not sure that the law permits it in the infantry. It would be our loss, if we lose our best shots to your distinguished corps; but of course that is not to be considered if the interests of the land demand it. However, if I am not mistaken, a recruiting party is to follow you."

"Yes, Major."

"Then, sir, you may report accordingly. And now for the other matters. General Clinton, in this letter, recommends that we speak very freely together. So I will be quite frank, gentlemen. The man you seek, Luther Kinnicut, is a spy whom our Committee of Safety maintains within the lines of the lower party. If it be necessary I can communicate with him, but it may take a week. Might I ask why you desire to question him so particularly?"

Boyd said: "There is a Siwanois Indian, one Mayaro, a Sagamore, with whom we have need to speak. General Clinton believes that this man Kinnicut knows his whereabouts."

"I believe so, too," said the Major smiling. "But I ask your pardon, gentlemen; the Sagamore, Mayaro, although a Siwanois, was adopted by the Mohicans, and should be rated one."

"Do you know him, sir?"

"Very well indeed. May I inquire what it is you desire of Mayaro?"

"This," said Boyd slowly; "and this is the real secret with which I am charged—a secret not to be entrusted to paper—a secret which you, sir, and even my comrade, Mr. Loskiel, now learn for the first time. May I speak with safety in this room, Major?"

The Major rose, opened the door into the hall, dismissed the sentry, closed and locked the door, and returned to us.

"I am," he said smiling, "almost ashamed to make so much circumstance over a small matter of which you have doubtless heard. I mean that the lower party has seen fit to distinguish me by placing a price upon my very humble head; and as I am not only Major in Colonel Thomas's regiment, but also a magistrate, and also, with my friend Lewis Morris, a member of the Provincial Assembly, and of the Committee of Safety, I could not humour the lower party by permitting them to capture so many important persons in one net," he added, laughing. "Now, sir, pray proceed. I am honoured by General Clinton's confidence."

"Then, sir," said Boyd very gravely, "this is the present matter as it stands. His Excellency has decided on a daring stroke to be delivered immediately; General Sullivan has been selected to deal it, General Clinton is to assist. A powerful army is gathering at Albany, and another at Easton and Tioga. The enemy know well enough that we are concentrating, and they have guessed where the blow is to be struck. But, sir, they have guessed wrong!"

"Not Canada, then?" inquired the Major quietly.

"No, sir. We demonstrate northward; that is all. Then we wheel west by south and plunge straight into the wilderness, swift as an arrow files, directly at the heart of the Long House!"

"Sir!" he exclaimed, astonished.

"Straight at the heart o! the Iroquois Confederacy, Major! That is what is to be done—clean out, scour out, crush, annihilate those hell-born nations which have so long been terrorizing the Northland. Major Lockwood, you have read in the New England and Pennsylvania papers how we have been threatened, how we have been struck, how we have fought and suffered. But you, sir, have only heard; you have not seen. So I must tell you now that it is far worse with us than we have admitted. The frontier of New York State is already in ashes; the scalp yell rings in our forests day and night; and the red destructives under Brant, and the painted Tories under Walter Butler, spare neither age nor sex—for I myself have seen scalps taken from the tender heads of cradled infants—nay, I have seen them scalp the very hound on guard at the cabin door! And that is how it goes with us, sir. God save you, here, from the blue-eyed Indians!"

He stopped, hesitated, then, softly smiting one fist within the other:

"But now I think their doom is sounding—Seneca, lying Cayuga, traitorous Onondaga, Mohawk, painted renegade—all are to go down into utter annihilation. Nor is that all. We mean to sweep their empire from end to end, burn every town, every castle, every orchard, every grain field —lay waste, blacken, ravage, leave nothing save wind-blown ashes of that great Confederacy, and of the vast granary which has fed the British northern armies so long. Nothing must remain of the Long House; the Senecas shall die at the Western door; the Keepers of the Eastern door shall die. Only the Oneida may be spared—as many as have remained neutral or loyal to us—they and such of the Tuscaroras and Lenni-Lenape as have not struck us; and the Stockbridge and White Plains tribes, and the remnants of the Mohicans.

"And that is why we have come here for riflemen, and that is why we are here to find the Sagamore, Mayaro. For our Oneidas have told us that he knows where the castles of the Long House lie, and that he can guide our army unerringly to that dark, obscure and fearsome Catharines-town where the hag, Montour, reigns in her shaggy wilderness."

There was a long silence; and I for one, amazed at what I had heard—for I had made certain that we were to have struck at Canada—was striving to reconcile this astounding news with all my preconceived ideas. Yet, that is ever the way with us in the regiments; we march, not knowing whither; we camp at night not knowing why. Unseen authority moves us, halts us; unseen powers watch us, waking and sleeping, think for us, direct our rising and our lying down, our going forth and our return —nay, the invisible empire envelops us utterly in sickness and in health, ruling when and how much we eat and sleep, controlling every hour and prescribing our occupation for every minute. Only our thoughts remain free; and these, as we are not dumb, unthinking beasts, must rove afield to seek for the why and wherefore, garnering conclusions which seldom if ever are corroborated.

So I; for I had for months now made sure that our two armies in the North were to be flung pell mell on Quebec and on Niagara. Only regarding the latter place had I nearly hit the mark; for it seemed reasonable that our army, having once swept the Long House, could scarcely halt ere we had cleaned out that rat's nest of Indians and painted Tories which is known as Fort Niagara, and from which every dreadful raid of the destructives into Tryon County had been planned and executed.

Thinking of these things, my deep abstraction was broken by the pleasant voice of Major Lockwood.

"Mr. Boyd," he said, "I realise now how great is your need of riflemen to fill the State's quota. If there is anything I or my associates can do, under the law, it shall be done; and when we are able to concentrate, and when your recruiting party arrives, I will do what I can, if permitted, to select from the dragoons of Sheldon and Moylan, and from my own regiment such men as may, by marksmanship and character, qualify for the corps d'élite."

He rose and began to pace the handsome parlour, evidently worried and perplexed; and presently he halted before us, who had of course risen in respect.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I must lay bare to you our military necessity, embarrassment, and mortification in this country of Westchester, so that you may clearly understand the difficulty of furnishing the recruits you ask for.

"South of us, from New York to North Castle, our enemy is in possession. We are attempting to hold this line; but it is a vast country. We can count on very few Continental troops; our militia has its various rendezvous, and it turns out at every call. The few companies of my regiment of foot are widely scattered; one company left here as escort to the military train an hour ago. Sheldon's 2nd Light Dragoons are scattered all over the country. Two troops and headquarters remain now here at my house."

He waved his hand westward: "So desperate is our condition, gentlemen, that Colonel Moylan's Dragoons have been ordered here, and are at this moment, I suppose, on the march to join us. And—I ask you, gentlemen—considering that in New York City, just below us, there are ten thousand British regulars, not counting the partizan corps, the irregulars, the Tory militia, the numberless companies

of marauders—I ask you how you can expect to draw recruits from the handful of men who have been holding—or striving to hold—this line for the last three years!"

Boyd shook his head in silence. As for me, it was not my place to speak, nor had I anything to suggest.

After a moment the Major said, more cheerfully:

"Well, well, gentlemen, who knows after all? We may find ways and means. And now, one other matter remains to be settled, and I think I may aid you."

He went to the door and opened it. The sentry who stood across the hall came to him instantly and took his orders; and in a few moments there entered the room four gentlemen to whom we were made known by Major Lockwood. One of these was our Captain of Minute Men. They were, in order, Colonel Sheldon, a fretful gentleman with a face which seemed to me weak, almost stupid; Colonel Thomas, an iron-grey, silent officer, stern but civil; Captain William Fancher, a Justice of the Peace, Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, and holding his commission as Captain of Minute Men; and a Mr. Alsop Hunt, a Quaker, son-in-law of Major Lockwood, and a most quiet and courteous gentleman.

With one accord we drew chairs around the handsome centre table, where silver candlesticks glimmered and a few books lay in their fine, gilded bindings.

It was very evident to us that in the hands of these five gentlemen lay the present safety of Westchester County, military and civil. And to them Major Lockwood made known our needs—not, however, disturbing them in their preconceived notion, so common everywhere, that the blow to be struck from the North was to be aimed at the Canadas.

Colonel Sheldon's weak features turned red and he said almost peevishly that no recruits could be picked up in Westchester, and that we had had our journey for our pains. Anyway, he'd be damned if he'd permit recruiting for riflemen among his dragoons, it being contrary to law and common sense.

"I've a dozen young fellows who might qualify," said Colonel Thomas bluntly, "but if the law permits Mr. Boyd to take them my regiment's volleys wouldn't stop a charge of chipmunks!"

We all laughed a little, and Captain Fancher said:

"Minute Men are Minute Men, Mr. Boyd. You are welcome to any you can enlist from my company."

Alsop Hunt, being a Quaker, and personally opposed to physical violence, offered no suggestion until the second object of our visit was made known. Then he said, very quietly:

"Mayaro, the Mohican Sagamore, is in this vicinity."

"How do you know that, Alsop?" asked Major Lockwood quickly.

"I saw him yesterday."

"Here in Poundridge?"

Mr. Hunt glanced at Colonel Thomas, then with a slight colour mounting to his temples:

"The Sagamore was talking to one of the camp-women last evening—toward sundown on the Rock Hills. We were walking abroad for the air, my wife and I–" he turned to Major Lockwood: "Betsy whispered to me, 'There is a handsome wench talking to an Indian!' And I saw the Sagamore standing in the sunset light, conversing with one of the camp-women who hang about Colonel Thomas's regiment.".

"Would you know the slattern again?" asked Colonel Thomas, scowling.

"I think so, Colonel. And to tell the truth she was scarce a slattern, whatever else she may be—a young thing—and it seemed sad to us—to my wife and me."

"And handsome?" inquired Boyd, smiling at me.

"I may not deny it, sir," said Mr. Hunt primly. "The child possessed considerable comeliness."

"Why," said Boyd to me, laughingly, "she may be the wench you so gallantly rescued an hour since." And he told the story gayly enough, and with no harm meant; but it embarrassed and annoyed me.

"If the wench knows where the Sagamore may be found," said Major Lockwood, "it might be well for Mr. Loskiel to look about and try to find her."

"Would you know her again?" inquired Colonel Thomas.

"No, sir, I–" And I stopped short, because what I was about to say was not true. For, when I had sent the soldiers about their business and had rejoined Boyd—and when Boyd had bidden me turn again because the girl was handsome, there had been no need to turn. I had seen her; and I knew that when he said she was beautiful he said what was true. And the reason I did not turn, to look again was because beauty in such a woman should inspire no interest in me.

I now corrected myself, saying coolly enough:

"Yes, Colonel Thomas, on second thought I think I might know her if I see her."

"Perhaps," suggested Captain Fancher, "the wench has gone a-gypsying after the convoy."

"These drabs change lovers over night," observed Colonel Thomas grimly. "Doubtless Sheldon's troopers are already consoling her."

Colonel Sheldon, who had been fiddling uneasily with his sword-knot, exclaimed peevishly:

"Good God, sir! Am I also to play chaplain to my command?"

There was a curious look in Colonel Thomas's eyes which seemed to say: "You might play it as well as you play the Colonel;" but Sheldon was too stupid and too vain, I think, to perceive any affront.

And, "Where do you lodge, gentlemen?" inquired our Major, addressing us both; and when he learned that we were roofless he insisted that we remain under his roof, nor would he hear of any excuses touching the present unsuitability of our condition and attire.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen! I will not accept a refusal," he said. "We are plain folk and live plainly, and both bed and board are at your disposal. Lord, sir! And what would Clinton think were I to send two officers of his corps d'élite to a village ordinary!"

We had all risen and were moving toward the door. A black servant came when the Major pulled the bell card, and showed Boyd and myself to two pretty chambers, small, but very neat, where the linen on the beds smelled fresh and sweet, and the westering sun struck golden through chintz curtains drawn aside.

"Gad!" said Boyd, eying the bed. "It's long since my person has been intimately acquainted with sheet and pillow. What a pretty nest, Loskiel. Lord! And here's a vase of posies, too! The touch feminine—who could mistake it in the sweet, fresh whiteness of this little roam!"

Presently came our rifleman, Jack Mount, bearing our saddle-bags; and we stripped and washed us clean, and put on fresh linen and our best uniforms of soft doeskin, which differed from the others only in that they were clean and new, and that the thrums were gayer and the Iroquois beadwork more flamboyant.

"If I but had my hair in a snug club, and well powdered," sighed Boyd, lacing his shirt. "And I tell you, Loskiel, though I would not boast, this accursed rifle-shirt and these gaudy leggings conceal a supple body and a leg as neatly turned as any figure more fortunately clothed in silken coat and stockings!"

I began to laugh, and he laughed, too, vowing he envied me my hair, which was yellow and which curled of itself so that it needed no powder.

I can see him yet, standing there in the sunshine, both hands gripping his dark hair in pretense of grief, and vowing that he had a mind to scalp himself for very vexation. Alas! That I remember now such idle words, spoken in the pride and strength and gayety of youth! And always when I think of him I remember his dread of fire—the only fear he ever knew. These things—his brown eyes and quick, gay smile—his lithe and supple person—and his love of women—these I remember always, even while already much that concerned this man and me begins to fade with the stealthy years.

While the sun still hung high in the west, and ere any hint of evening was heard either in the robin's note or from the high-soaring martins, we had dressed. Boyd went away first, saying carelessly

that he meant to look to the horses before paying his respects to the ladies. A little later I descended, a black servant conducting me to the family sitting room.

Here our gallant Major made me known to his lady and to his numerous family—six young children, and still a seventh, the pretty maid whom we had seen on approaching the house, who proved to be a married daughter. Betsy, they called her—and she was only seventeen, but had been two years the wife of Alsop Hunt.

As for the Major's lady, who seemed scarce thirty and was six years older, she so charmed me with her grace, and with the bright courage she so sweetly maintained in a home which every hour of the day and night menaced, that even Mrs. Hunt, with her gay spirits, imperious beauty, and more youthful attractions, no more than shared my admiration for her mother.

In half an hour Lieutenant Boyd came in, was presented, and paid his homage gayly, as he always did. Yet, I thought a slight cloud rested on his brow, but this soon passed, and I forgot it.

So we talked of this and that as lightly as though no danger threatened this house; and Boyd was quickly at his best with the ladies. As for me, I courted the children. And I remember there were two little maids of fourteen and eleven, Ruhannah and Hannah, sweet and fresh as wild June roses, who showed me the tow cloth for our army which they were spinning, and blushed at my praise of their industry. And there was Mary, ten, and Clarissa, eight, and two little boys, one a baby—all save the last two children carding or spinning flax and tow.

It was not easy to understand that this blooming matron could be mother of all of these, so youthful she seemed in her Quaker-cut gown of dove-colour—though it was her handsome, high-spirited daughter who should have worn the sober garb.

"Not I," said she, laughing at Boyd. "I'd sooner don jack-boots and be a dragoon—and we would completely represent a holy cause, my husband with his broad-brim and I with my sword. What do you say, Mr. Boyd?"

"I beg of you first to consider the rifle-frock if you must enlist!" urged Boyd, with such fervour that we all laughed at his gallant effort to recruit such beauty for our corps; for even a mental picture of Betsy Hunt in rifle-frock seemed too adorable. Mr. Hunt, entering, smiled in his quiet, embarrassed way; and I thought that this wise and gentle-mannered man must have more than a handful in his spirited young wife, whose dress was anything but plain.

I had taken the tiny maid, Clarissa, upon my knees and was telling her of the beauty of our Northland, and of that great, dusky green ocean of giant pines, vast as the sea and as silent and uncharted, when Major Lockwood bent over me saying in a quiet voice that it might be well for me to look about in the town for the wench who knew the whereabouts of Mayaro.

"While there is still daylight," he added, as I set Clarissa on the floor and stood up, "and if she be yet here you should find her before supper time. We sup at six, Mr. Loskiel."

I bowed, took leave of the ladies, exchanged an irritated glance for Boyd's significant grin, and went out to the porch, putting on my light round cap of moleskin. I liked neither my present errand, nor Boyd's smile either.

Now, I had not thought to take with me my side-arms, but a slave waited at the door with my belt. And as I buckled it and hung war-axe and heavy hunting blade, I began to comprehend something of the imminent danger which so apparently lurked about this country. For all military men hereabouts went armed; and even in the house I had noticed that Major Lockwood wore his sword, as did the other officers—some even carrying their pistols.

The considerable throng of people whom we had first seen in the neighborhood of the house had scattered or gone off when the infantry had left. Carpenters were still sawing and hammering on the flimsy new barracks down in the meadow, and there seemed to be a few people there. But on strolling thither I saw nothing of the wench; so turned on my heel and walked briskly up the road.

About the village itself there was nothing to be seen of the girl, nor did I know how to make inquiries—perhaps dreading to do so lest my quest be misunderstood or made a jest of by some impertinent fellow.

In the west a wide bank of cloud had pushed up over the horizon and was already halving the low-hanging sun, which presently it entirely swallowed; and the countryside grew luminously grey and that intense green tinged the grass, which is with us the forerunner of an approaching storm.

But I thought it far off, not then knowing the Hudson's midsummer habits, nor the rapid violence of the July storms it hatches and drives roaring among the eastern hills and across the silvery Sound.

So, with a careless glance aloft, I pursued my errand, strolling hither and thither through the pleasant streets and lanes of old Poundridge, always approaching any groups of soldiers that I saw because I thought it likely that the wench might haunt her kind.

I did not find her; and presently I began to believe it likely that she had indeed gone off a-gypsying after the escort companies toward Lewisboro.

There is a road which, skirting the Stone Hills, runs east by north between Cross Pond and the Three Lakes; and, pursuing it, I came on a vidette of Sheldon's regiment, most carelessly set where he could see nothing, and yet be seen a mile away.

Supposing he would halt me, I walked up to him; and he continued to munch the green bough-apple he was eating, making me a most slovenly salute.

Under his leather helmet I saw that my dragoon was but a child of fifteen—scarce strong enough to swing the heavy sabre at his pommel or manage the sawed-off musket which he bore, the butt resting wearily on his thigh. And it made me sober indeed to see to what a pass our country had come, that we enlisted boys and were obliged to trust to their ignorance for our protection.

"It will rain before sundown," he said, munching on his apple; "best seek shelter, sir. When it comes it will come hard."

"Where runs this road?" I asked.

"To Boutonville."

"And what is Boutonville?"

"It's where the Boutons live—a mile or two north, sir. They're a wild parcel."

"Are they of our party?"

"Oh, yes, sir. But they hunt the leather-caps as we hunt quail—scare up a company, fire, and then track down the scattered."

"Oh; irregulars."

"No, sir, not skinners. They farm it until the British plague them beyond endurance. Then," he added significantly, "they go a-hunting with their dogs."

I had already turned to retrace my steps when it occurred to me that perhaps an inquiry of this lad might not be misunderstood.

So I walked up to his horse and stood caressing the sorry animal while I described to him the wench I was seeking.

"Yes, sir," he said seriously, "that's the one the boys are ever plaguing to make her rage."

"Do you know her?"

"By sight, yes, sir."

"She is one of the camp followers, I take it," said I carelessly.

"I don't know. The boys are ever plaguing her. She came from the North they say. All I know is that in April she was first seen here, loitering about the camp where the White Plains Indians were embodied. But she did not go off with the Continentals."

"She was loitering this afternoon by the camp of Colonel Thomas's men," I said.

"Very like, sir. Did the men plague her?"

"Yes."

He bit into his apple, unconcerned:

"They are all after her. But I never saw her kind to any man—whatever she may be."

Why, I did not know, but what he said gave me satisfaction.

"You do not know which way she went?" I asked.

"No, sir. I have been here but the half hour. She knows the Bouton boys yonder. I have seen her coming and going on this road, sometimes with an Indian–"

"With a Sagamore?"

He continued his munching. Having swallowed what he chewed, he said:

"I know nothing of savages or Sagamores. The Indian may have been a Sagamore."

"Do you know where he is to be found?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"Perhaps this young girl knows?"

"Doubtless she does, seeing she journeys about with him on the ridge yonder, which we call the Rock Hills."

"Do you know her name, soldier?"

"They call her Lois, I believe."

And that was all the news I could get of her; and I thanked the boy and slowly started to retrace my steps toward the village.

Already in the air there was something of that stillness which heralds storms; no leaves on bush and tree were now stirring; land and sky had grown sombre all around me; and the grass glimmered intensely green.

Where the road skirted the Stone Hills were no houses, nothing, in fact, of human habitation to be seen save low on the flank of the rocky rampart a ruined sugar house on the edge of a maple ridge, I do not know what made me raise my head to give it a second glance, but I did; and saw among the rocks near it a woman moving.

Nor do I know, even now, how at that distance and in the dusk of a coming storm I could perceive that it was she whom I was now seeking. But so certain was I of this that, without even taking thought to consider, I left the highway, turned to the right, and began to mount the hillside where traces of a path or sheep-walk were faintly visible under foot among the brambles. Once or twice I glanced upward to see whether she observed me, but the scrubby foliage now hid her as well as the sap-house, and I hastened because the light was growing very dim now, and once or twice, far away, I thought I heard the muttering of thunder.

It was not long before I perceived the ramshackle sap-house ahead of me among the maples. Then I caught sight of her whom I was seeking.

It was plain that she had not yet discovered me, though she heard me moving in the thicket. She stood in a half-crouching, listening attitude, then slowly began to retreat, not cowering, but sullenly and with a certain defiance in her lithe movement, like some disturbed and graceful animal which is capable of defending itself but prefers to get away peaceably if permitted.

I stepped out into the clearing and called to her through the increasing gloom; and for a moment thought she had gone. Then I saw her, dimly, watching me from the obscurity of the dark doorway.

"You need have no fear of me," I called to her pleasantly. "You know me now, do you not?"

She made no answer; and I approached the doorway and stood peering into her face through the falling twilight. And for a moment I thought I had been mistaken; but it was she after all.

Yet now she wore neither the shabby chip hat with its soiled blue ribbon tied beneath her chin, nor any trace of hair powder, nor dotted kerchief cross-fastened at her breast and pinned with the withered rose.

And she seemed younger and slimmer and more childish than I had thought her, her bosom without its kerchief meagre or unformed, and her cheeks not painted either, but much burned by the July sun. Nor were her eyes black, as I had supposed, but a dark, clear grey with black lashes; and her unpowdered hair seemed to be a reddish-chestnut and scarce longer than my own, but more curly.

"Child," I said, smiling at her, I know not why, "I have been searching for you ever since I first saw you–"

And: "What do you want of me?" said she, scarce moving her lips.

"A favour."

"Best mount your cobbler's mare and go a-jogging back, my pretty lad."

The calm venom in her voice and her insolent grey eyes took me aback more than her saucy words.

"Doubtless," I said, "you have not recognized in me the officer who was at some slight pains to be of service–"

"What is it you desire?" said she, so rudely that I felt my face burn hot.

"See here, my lass," said I sharply, "you seem to misunderstand my errand here."

"And am like to," said she, "unless you make your errand short and plainer—though I have learned that the errands which bring such men as you to me are not too easily misunderstood."

"Such men as I–"

"You and your friend with the bold, black eyes. Ask him how much change he had of me when he came back."

"I did not know he had seen you again," said I, still redder. And saw that she believed me not.

"Birds sing; men lie," said she. "So if–"

"Be silent! Do you hear!" I cut her short with such contempt that I saw the painful colour whip her cheeks and her eyes quiver.

Small doubt that what she had learned of men had not sweetened her nor taught her confidence. But whatever she had been, and whatever she was, after all concerned not me that I should take pains to silence her so brutally.

"I am sorry I spoke as I did," said I, "—however mistaken you are concerning my seeking you here."

She said nothing.

"Also," I added, with a sudden resurgance of bitterness that surprised myself, "my conduct earlier in your behalf might have led you to a wiser judgment."

"I am wise enough—after my own fashion," she said indifferently.

"Does a man save and then return to destroy?"

"Many a hunter has saved many a spotted fawn from wolf and fox—so he might kill it himself, one day."

"You do yourself much flattery, young woman," I said, so unpleasantly that again the hot colour touched her throat and brow.

"I reason as I have been taught," she said defiantly. "Doubtless you are self-instructed."

"No; men have taught me. You witnessed, I believe, one lesson. And your comrade gave me still another."

"I care to witness nothing," I said, furious; "far less desire to attempt your education. Is all plain now?"

"Your words are," she said, with quiet contempt.

"My words are one with my intention," said I, angrily; far in spite of my own indifference and contempt, hers was somehow arousing me with its separate sting hidden in every word she uttered. "And now," I continued, "all being plain and open between us, let me acquaint you with the sole object of my visit here to you."

She shrugged her shabby shoulders and waited, her eyes, her expression, her very attitude indifferent, yet dully watchful.

"You know the Sagamore, Mayaro?" I asked.

"You say so."

"Where is he to be found?" I continued patiently.

"Why do you desire to know?"

The drab was exasperating me, and I think I looked it, for the slightest curl of her sullen lips hinted a scornful smile.

"Come, come, my lass," said I, with all the patience I could still command, "there is a storm approaching, and I do not wish to get wet. Answer my civil question and I'll thank you and be off about my business. Where is this Sagamore to be found?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"Because I desire to consult him concerning certain matters."

"What matters?"

"Matters which do not concern you!" I snapped out.

"Are you sure of that, pretty boy?"

"Am I sure?" I repeated, furious. "What do you mean? Will you answer an honest question or not?"

"Why do you desire to see this Sagamore?" she repeated so obstinately that I fairly clenched my teeth.

"Answer me," I said. "Or had you rather I fetched a file of men up here?"

"Fetch a regiment, and I shall tell you nothing unless I choose."

"Good God, what folly!" I exclaimed. "For whom and for what do you take me, then, that you refuse to answer the polite and harmless question of an American officer!"

"You had not so named yourself."

"Very well, then; I am Euan Loskiel, Ensign in Morgan's rifle regiment!"

"You say so."

"Do you doubt it?"

"Birds sing," she said. Suddenly she stepped from the dark doorway, came to where I stood, bent forward and looked me very earnestly in the eyes—so closely that something—her nearness—I know not what—seemed to stop my heart and breath for a second.

Then, far on the western hills lightning glimmered; and after a long while it thundered.

"Do you wish me to find this Sagamore for you?" she asked very quietly.

"Will you do so?"

A drop of rain fell; another, which struck her just where the cheek curved under the long black lashes, fringing them with brilliancy like tears.

"Where do you lodge?" she asked, after a silent scrutiny of me.

"This night I am a guest at Major Lockwood's. Tomorrow I travel north again with my comrade, Lieutenant Boyd."

She was looking steadily at me all the time; finally she said:

"Somehow, I believe you to be a friend to liberty. I know it—somehow."

"It is very likely, in this rifle dress I wear," said I smiling.

"Yet a man may dress as he pleases."

"You mistrust me for a spy?"

"If you are, why, you are but one more among many hereabouts. I think you have not been in Westchester very long. It does not matter. No boy with the face you wear was born to betray anything more important than a woman."

I turned hot and scarlet with chagrin at her cool presumption—and would not for worlds have had her see how the impudence stung and shamed me.

For a full minute she stood there watching me; then:

"I ask pardon," she said very gravely.

And somehow, when she said it I seemed to experience a sense of inferiority—which was absurd and monstrous, considering what she doubtless was.

It had now begun to rain in very earnest; and was like to rain harder ere the storm passed. My clothes being my best, I instinctively stepped into the doorway; and, of a sudden, she was there too, barring my entry, flushed and dangerous, demanding the reason of my intrusion.

"Why," said I astonished, "may I not seek shelter from a storm in a ruined sugar-house, without asking by your leave?"

"This sap-house is my own dwelling!" she said hotly. "It is where I live!"

"Oh, Lord," said I, bewildered, "—if you are like to take offense at everything I say, or look, or do, I'll find a hospitable tree somewhere–"

"One moment, sir–"

"Well?"

She stood looking at me in the doorway, then slowly dropped her eyes, and in the same law voice I had heard once before:

"I ask your pardon once again," she said. "Please to come inside—and close the door. An open door draws lightning."

It was already drawing the rain in violent gusts.

The thunder began to bang with that metallic and fizzling tone which it takes on when the bolts fall very near; flash after flash of violet light illuminated the shack at intervals, and the rafters trembled as the black shadows buried us.

"Have you a light hereabout?" I asked.

"No,"

For ten minutes or more the noise of the storm made it difficult to hear or speak. I could scarce see her now in the gloom. And so we waited there in silence until the roar of the rain began to die away, and it slowly grew lighter outside and the thunder grew more distant.

I went to the door, looked out into the dripping woods, and turned to her.

"When will you bring the Sagamore to me?" I demanded.

"I have not promised."

"But you will?"

She waited a while, then:

"Yes, I will bring him."

"When?"

"Tonight."

"You promise?"

"Yes."

"And if it rains again"

"It will rain all night, but I shall send you the Sagamore. Best go, sir. The real tempest is yet to break. It hangs yonder above the Hudson. But you have time to gain the Lockwood House."

I said to her, with a slight but reassuring smile, most kindly intended:

"Now that I am no longer misunderstood by you, I may inform you that in what you do for me you serve our common country." It did not seem a pompous speech to me.

"If I doubted that," she said, "I had rather pass the knife you wear around my throat than trouble myself to oblige you."

Her words, and the quiet, almost childish voice, seemed so oddly at variance that I almost laughed; but changed my mind.

"I should never ask a service of you for myself alone," I said so curtly that the next moment I was afraid I had angered her, and fearing she might not keep her word to me, smiled and frankly offered her my hand.

Very slowly she put forth her own—a hand stained and roughened, but slim and small. And so I went away through the dripping bush, and down the rocky hill. A slight sense of fatigue invaded me; and I did not then understand that it came from my steady and sustained efforts to ignore what any

eyes could not choose but see—this young girl's beauty—yes, despite her sorry mien and her rags —a beauty that was fashioned to trouble men; and which was steadily invading my senses whether I would or no.

Walking along the road and springing over the puddles, I thought to myself that it was small wonder such a wench was pestered in a common soldier's camp. For she had about her everything to allure the grosser class—a something—indescribable perhaps—but which even such a man as I had become unwillingly aware of. And I must have been very conscious of it, for it made me restless and vaguely ashamed that I should condescend so far as even to notice it. More than that, it annoyed me not a little that I should bestow any thought upon this creature at all; but what irritated me most was that Boyd had so demeaned himself as to seek her out behind my back.

When I came to the manor house, it had already begun to rain again; and even as I entered the house, a tempest of rain and wind burst once more over the hills with a violence I had scarcely expected.

Encountering Major Lockwood and Lieutenant Boyd in the hall, I scowled at the latter askance, but remembered my manners, and smoothed my face and told them of my success.

"Rain or no," said I, "she has promised me to send this Sagamore here tonight. And I am confident she will keep her word."

"Which means," said Boyd, with an unfeigned sigh, "that we travel north tomorrow. Lord! How sick am I of saddle and nag and the open road. Your kindly hospitality, Major, has already softened me so that I scarce know how to face the wilderness again."

And at supper, that evening, Boyd frankly bemoaned his lot, and Mrs. Lockwood condoled with him; but Betsy Hunt turned up her pretty nose, declaring that young men were best off in the woods, which kept them out o' mischief. She did not know the woods.

And after supper, as she and my deceitful but handsome lieutenant lingered by the stairs, I heard her repeat it again, utterly refusing to say she was sorry or that she commiserated his desperate lot. But on her lips hovered a slight and provoking smile, and her eyes were very brilliant under her powdered hair.

All women liked Boyd; none was insensible to his charm. Handsome, gay, amusing—and tender, alas!—too often—few remained indifferent to this young man, and many there were who found him difficult to forget after he had gone his careless way. But I was damning him most heartily for the prank he played me.

I sat in the parlour talking to Mrs. Lockwood. The babies were long since in bed; the elder children now came to make their reverences to their mother and father, and so very dutifully to every guest. A fat black woman in turban and gold ear-hoops fetched them away; and the house seemed to lose a trifle of its brightness with the children's going.

Major Lockwood sat writing letters on a card-table, a cluster of tall candles at his elbow; Mr. Hunt was reading; his wife and Boyd still lingered on the stairs, and their light, quick laughter sounded prettily at moments.

Mrs. Lockwood, I remember, had been sewing while she and I conversed together. The French alliance was our topic; and she was still speaking of the pleasure it had given all when Lewis Morris brought to her house young Lafayette. Then, of a sudden, she turned her head sharply, as though listening.

Through the roar of the storm I thought I heard the gallop of a horse. Major Lockwood lifted his eyes from his letters, fixing them on the rain-washed window.

Certainly a horseman had now pulled up at our very porch; Mr. Hunt laid aside his book very deliberately and walked to the parlour door, and a moment later the noise of the metal knocker outside rang loudly through the house.

We were now all rising and moving out into the hall, as though a common instinct of coming trouble impelled us. The black servant opened; a drenched messenger stood there, blinking in the candle light.

Major Lockwood went to him instantly, and drew him in the door; and they spoke together in low and rapid tones.

Mrs. Lockwood murmured in my ear:

"It's one of Luther's men. There is bad news for us from below, I warrant you."

We heard the Major say:

"You will instantly acquaint Colonels Thomas and Sheldon with this news. Tell Captain Fancher, too, in passing."

The messenger turned away into the storm, and Major Lockwood called after him:

"Is there no news of Moylan's regiment?"

"None, sir," came the panting answer; there ensued a second's silence, a clatter of slippery hoofs, then only the loud, dull roar of the rain filled the silence.

The Major, who still stood at the door, turned around and glanced at his wife.

"What is it, dear—if we may know?" asked she, quite calmly.

"Yes," he said, "you should know, Hannah. And it may not be true, but—somehow, I think it is. Tarleton is out."

"Is he headed this way, Ebenezer?" asked Mr. Hunt, after a shocked silence.

"Why—yes, so they say. Luther Kinnicut sends the warning. It seems to be true."

"Tarleton has heard, no doubt, that Sheldon's Horse is concentrating here," said Mr. Hunt. "But I think it better for thee to leave, Ebenezer."

Mrs. Lockwood went over to her husband and laid her hand on his sleeve lightly. The act, and her expression, were heart-breaking, and not to be mistaken. She knew; and we also now surmised that if the Legion Cavalry was out, it was for the purpose of taking the man who stood there before our eyes. Doubtless he was quite aware of it, too, but made no mention of it.

"Alsop," he said, turning to his son-in-law, "best take the more damaging of the papers and conceal them as usual. I shall presently be busied with Thomas and Sheldon, and may have no time for such details."

"Will they make a stand, do you think?" I whispered to Boyd, "or shall we be sent a-packing?"

"If there be not too many of them I make a guess that Sheldon's Horse will stand."

"And what is to be our attitude?"

"Stand with them," said he, laughing, though he knew well that we had been cautioned to do our errand and keep clear of all brawls.

CHAPTER III
VIEW HALLOO!

It rained, rained, rained, and the darkness and wind combined with the uproar of the storm to make venturing abroad well nigh impossible. Yet, an orderly, riding at hazard, managed to come up with a hundred of the Continental foot, convoying the train, and, turning them in their slopping tracks, start back with them through a road running shin-high in mud and water.

Messengers, also, were dispatched to call out the district militia, and they plodded all night with their lanterns, over field and path and lonely country road.

As for Colonel Sheldon, booted, sashed, and helmeted, he sat apathetic and inert in the hall, obstinately refusing to mount his men.

"For," says he, "it will only soak their powder and their skins, and nobody but a fool would ride hither in such a storm. And Tarleton is no fool, nor am I, either; and that's flat!" It was not as flat as his own forehead.

"Do you mean that I am a fool to march my men back here from Lewisboro?" demanded Colonel Thomas sharply, making to rise from his seat by the empty fireplace.

Duels had sprung from less provocation than had been given by Colonel Sheldon. Mr. Hunt very mildly interposed; and a painful scene was narrowly averted because of Colonel Thomas's cold contempt for Sheldon, which I think Captain Fancher shared.

Major Lockwood, coming in at the moment, flung aside his dripping riding cloak.

"Sir," said he to Sheldon, "the rumour that the Legion is abroad has reached your men, and they are saddling in my barns."

"What damned nonsense!" exclaimed Sheldon, in a pet; and, rising, strode heavily to the door, but met there his Major, one Benjamin Tallmadge, coming in, all over mud.

This fiery young dragoon's plume, helmet, and cloak were dripping, and he impatiently dashed the water from feathers and folds.

"Sir!" began Colonel Sheldon loudly, "I have as yet given no order to saddle!"

And, "By God, sir," says Tallmadge, "the orders must have come from somebody, for they're doing it!"

"Sir—sir!" stammered Sheldon, "What d'ye mean by that?"

"Ah!" says Tallmadge coolly, "I mean what I say. Orders must have been given by somebody."

No doubt; for the orders came from himself, the clever trooper that he was—and so he left Sheldon a-fuming and Major Lockwood and Mr. Hunt most earnestly persuading him to sanction this common and simple precaution.

Why he conducted so stupidly I never knew. It required all the gentle composure of Mr. Hunt and all the vigorous logic of Major Lockwood to prevent him from ordering his men to off-saddle and retire to the straw above the mangers.

Major Tallmadge and a cornet passed through the hall with their regimental standard, but Sheldon pettishly bade them to place it in the parlour and await further orders—for no reason whatever, apparently, save to exhibit a petty tyranny.

And all the while a very forest of candles remained lighted throughout the house; only the little children were asleep; the family servants and slaves remained awake, not daring to go to bed or even to close their eyes to all these rumours and uncertainties.

Colonel Thomas, his iron-grey head sunk on his breast, paced the hall, awaiting the arrival of the two escort companies of his command, yet scarcely hoping for such good fortune, I think, for his keen eyes encountered mine from time to time, and he made me gestures expressive of angry resignation.

As for Sheldon, he pouted and sulked on a sofa, and drank mulled wine, peevishly assuring everybody who cared to listen that no attack was to be apprehended in such a storm, and that Colonel Tarleton and his men now lay snug abed in New York town, a-grinning in their dreams.

A few drenched and woe-begone militia men, the pans of their muskets wrapped in rags, reported, and were taken in charge by Captain Fancher as a cattle guard for Major Lockwood's herd.

None of Major Lockwood's messengers were yet returned. Our rifleman had saddled our own horses, and had brought them up under one of a row of sheds which had recently been erected near the house. A pair of smoky lanterns hung under the dripping rafters; and by their light I perceived the fine horses of Major Lockwood, and of Colonels Sheldon and Thomas also, standing near ours, bridled and saddled and held by slaves.

Mrs. Lockwood sat near the parlour door, quietly sewing, but from time to time I saw her raise her eyes and watch her husband. Doubtless she was thinking of those forty golden guineas which were to be paid for the delivery of his head—perhaps she was thinking of Bloody Cunningham, and the Provost, and the noose that dangled in a painted pagoda betwixt the almshouse and the jail in that accursed British city south of us.

Mrs. Hunt had far less to fear for her quiet lord and master, who combatted the lower party only with his brains. So she found more leisure to listen to Boyd's whispered fooleries, and to caution him with lifted finger, glancing at him sideways; and I saw her bite her lips at times to hide the smile, and tap her slender foot, and bend closer over her tabouret while her needle flew the faster.

As for me, my Sagamore had not arrived; and I finally cast a cloak about me and went out to the horse-sheds, where our rifleman lolled, chewing a lump of spruce and holding our three horses.

"Well, Jack," said I, "this is rare weather for Colonel Tarleton's fox hunting."

"They say he hunts an ass, sir, too," said Jack Mount under his breath. "And I think it must be so, for there be five score of Colonel Sheldon's dragoons in yonder barns, drawing at jack-straws or conning their thumbs—and not a vidette out—not so much as a militia picket, save for the minute men which Colonel Thomas and Major Lockwood have sent out afoot."

There was a certain freedom in our corps, but it never warranted such impudent presumption as this; and I sharply rebuked the huge fellow for his implied disrespect toward Colonel Sheldon.

"Very well, sir. I will bite off this unmilitary tongue o' mine and feed it to your horse. Then, sir, if you but ask him, he will tell you very plainly that none of his four-footed comrades in the barn have carried a single vidette on their backs even as far as Poundridge village, let alone Mile-Square."

I could scarcely avoid smiling.

"Do you then, for one, believe that Colonel Tarleton will venture abroad on such a night?"

"I believe as you do," said the rifleman coolly, "—being some three years or more a soldier of my country."

"Oh! And what do I believe, Jack?"

"Being an officer who commands as good a soldier as I am, you, sir, believe as I do."

I was obliged to laugh.

"Well, Jack—so you agree with me that the Legion Cavalry is out?"

"It is as sure that nested snake's eggs never hatched out rattlers as it is certain that this wild night will hatch out Tarleton!"

"And why is it so certain in your mind, Jack Mount?"

"Lord, Mr. Loskiel," he said with a lazy laugh, "you know how Mr. Boyd would conduct were he this same Major Tarleton! You know what Major Parr would do—and what you and I and every officer and every man of Morgan's corps would do on such a night to men of Sheldon's kidney!"

"You mean the unexpected."

"Yes, sir. And this red fox on horseback, Tarleton, has ever done the same, and will continue till we stop his loping with a bit o' lead."

I nodded and looked out into the rain-swept darkness. And I knew that our videttes should long since have been set far out on every road twixt here and Bedford village.

Captain Fancher passed with a lantern, and I ventured to accost him and mention very modestly my present misgivings concerning our present situation.

"Sir," said the Captain, dryly, "I am more concerned in this matter than are you; and I have taken it upon myself to protest to Major Tallmadge, who is at this moment gone once more to Colonel Sheldon with very serious representations."

"Lieutenant Boyd and I have volunteered as a scout of three," I said, "but Colonel Sheldon has declined our services with scant politeness."

Fancher stood far a moment, his rain-smeared lantern hanging motionless at his side.

"Tarleton may not ride tonight," he said, and moved off a step or two; then, turning: "But, damn him, I think he will," said he. And walked away, swinging his light as furiously as a panther thrashes his tail.

By the pointers of my watch it now approached three o'clock in the morning, and the storm was nothing abating. I had entirely despaired of the Sagamore's coming, and was beginning to consider the sorry pickle which this alarm must leave us in if Tarleton's Legion came upon us now; and that with our widely scattered handfuls we could only pull foot and await another day to find our Sagamore; when, of a sudden there came a-creeping through the darkness, out o' the very maw of the storm, a slender shape, wrapped to the eyes in a ragged scarlet cape. I knew her; but I do not know how I knew her.

"It is you!" I exclaimed, hastening forward to draw her under shelter.

She came obediently with me, slipping in between the lanterns and among the horses, moving silently at my elbow to the farther shed, which was empty.

"You use me very kindly," I said, "to venture abroad tonight on my behalf."

"I am abroad," she said, "on behalf of my country."

Only her eyes I could see over the edge of the scarlet cloak, and they regarded me very coldly.

"I meant it so," I said hastily, "What of the Sagamore? Will he come?"

"He will come as I promised you."

"Here?" I said, delighted. "This very night?"

"Yes, here, this night."

"How good—how generous you have been!" I exclaimed with a warmth and sincerity that invaded every fibre of me. "And have you come through this wild storm all the long way afoot?"

"Yes," she said, calmly, "afoot. Since when, sir, have beggars ridden to a tryst except in pretty fables?"

"Had I known it, I would have taken horse and gone for you and brought you here riding pillion behind me."

"Had I desired you to come for me, Mr. Loskiel, I should not have troubled you here."

She loosened the shabby scarlet cloak so that it dropped from below her eyes and left the features exposed. Enough of lantern light from the other shed fell on her face for me to see her smooth, cool cheeks all dewy with the rain, as I had seen them once before in the gloom of the coming storm.

She turned her head, glancing back at the other shed where men and horses stood in grotesque shadow shapes under the windy lantern light; then she looked cautiously around the shed where we stood.

"Come nearer," she motioned.

And once again, as before, my nearness to her seemed for a moment to meddle with my heart and check it; then, as though to gain the beats they lost, every little pulse began to hurry faster.

She said in a low voice:

"The Sagamore is now closeted with Major Lockwood. I left him at the porch and came out here to warn you. Best go to him now, sir. And I will bid you a—good night."

"Has he business also with Major Lockwood?"

"He has indeed. You will learn presently that the Sagamore came by North Castle, and that the roads south of the church are full of riders—hundreds of them—in jack-boots and helmets."

"Were their jackets red?"

"He could not tell. They were too closely cloaked,"

"Colonel Moylan's dragoons?" I said anxiously. "Do you think so?"

"The Sagamore did not think so, and dared not ask, but started instantly cross-country with the information. I had been waiting to intercept him and bring him here to you, as I promised you, but missed him on the Bedford road, where he should have passed. Therefore, I hastened hither to confess to you my failure, and chanced to overtake him but a moment since, as he crossed the dooryard yonder."

Even in my growing anxiety, I was conscious of the faithfulness that this poor girl had displayed —this ragged child who had stood in the storm all night long on the Bedford road to intercept the Indian. Faithful, indeed! For, having missed him, she had made her way here on foot merely to tell me that she could not keep her word to me.

"Has the Sagamore spoken with Colonel Sheldon?" I asked gently.

"I do not know."

"Will you tarry here till I return?"

"Have you further use of me, Mr. Loskiel?"

Her direct simplicity checked me. After all, now that she had done her errand, what further use had I for her? I did not even know why I had asked her to tarry here until my return; and searched my mind seeking the reason. For it must have been that I had some good reason in my mind.

"Why, yes," I said, scarce knowing why, "I have further use for you. Tarry for a moment and I shall return. And," I added mentally, "by that time I shall have discovered the reason."

She said nothing; I hastened back to the house, where even from the outside I could hear the loud voice of Sheldon vowing that if what this Indian said were true, the cavalry he had discovered at North Castle must be Moylan's and no other.

I entered and listened a moment to Major Lockwood, urging this obstinate man to send out his patrols; then I walked over to the window where Boyd stood in whispered consultation with an Indian.

The savage towered at least six feet in his soaking moccasins; he wore neither lock nor plume, nor paint of any kind that I could see, carried neither gun nor blanket, nor even a hatchet. There was only a heavy knife at the beaded girdle, which belted his hunting shirt and breeches of muddy tow-cloth.

As I approached them, the Mohican turned his head and shot a searching glance at me. Boyd said:

"This is the great Sagamore, Mayaro, Mr. Loskiel; and I have attempted to persuade him to come north with us tomorrow. Perhaps your eloquence will succeed where my plain speech has failed." And to the tall Sagamore he said: "My brother, this is Ensign Loskiel, of Colonel Morgan's command—my comrade and good friend. What this man's lips tell you has first been taught them by his heart. Squirrels chatter, brooks babble, and the tongues of the Iroquois are split. But this is a man, Sagamore, such as are few among men. For he lies not even to women." And though his countenance was very grave, I saw his eyes laughing at me.

The Indian made no movement until I held out my hand. Then his sinewy fingers touched mine, warily at first, like the exploring antennae of a nervous butterfly. And presently his steady gaze began to disturb me.

"Does my brother the Sagamore believe he has seen me somewhere heretofore?" I asked, smilingly. "Perhaps it may have been so—at Johnson Hall—or at Guy Park, perhaps, where came many chiefs and sachems and Sagamores in the great days of the great Sir William—the days that are no more, O Sagamore!"

And: "My brother's given name?" inquired the savage bluntly.

"Euan—Euan Loskiel, once of the family of Guy Johnson, but now, for these three long battle years, officer in Colonel Morgan's regiment," I said. "Has the wise Sagamore ever seen me before this moment?"

The savage's eyes wavered, then sought the floor.

"Mayaro has forgotten," he replied very quietly, using the Delaware phrase—a tongue of which I scarcely understood a word. But I knew he had seen me somewhere, and preferred not to admit it. Indian caution, thought I, and I said:

"Is my brother Siwanois or Mohican?"

A cunning expression came into his features:

"If a Siwanois marries a Mohican woman, of what nation are the children, my new brother, Loskiel?"

"Mohican," I said in surprise,—"or so it is among the Iroquois," and the next moment could have bitten off my tongue for vexation that I should have so clumsily reminded a Sagamore of a subject nation of his servitude, by assuming that the Lenni-Lenape had conformed even to the racial customs of their conquerors.

The hot flush now staining my face did not escape him, and what he thought of my stupid answer to him or of my embarrassment, I did not know. His calm countenance had not altered—not even had his eyes changed, which features are quickest to alter when Indians betray emotion.

I said in a mortified voice:

"The Siwanois Sagamore will believe that his new brother, Loskiel, meant no offense." And I saw that the compliment had told.

"Mayaro has heard," he said, without the slightest emphasis of resentment. Then, proudly and delicately yielding me reason, and drawing his superb figure to its full and stately height: "When a Mohican Sagamore listens, all Algonquins listen, and the Siwanois clan grow silent in the still places. When a real man speaks, real men listen with respect. Only the Canienga continue to chirp and chatter; only the Long House is full of squirrel sounds and the noise of jays." His lip curled contemptuously. "Let the echoes of the Long House answer the Kanonsis. Mayaro's ears are open."

Boyd, with a triumphant glance at me, said eagerly:

"Is not this hour the hour for the great Siwanois clan of the Lenni-Lenape to bid defiance to the Iroquois? Is it not time that the Mohawks listen to the reading of those ancient belts, and count their dishonoured dead with brookside pebbles from the headwaters of the Sacandaga to the Delaware Capes?"

"Can squirrels count?" retorted Mayaro disdainfully. "Does my white brother understand what the blue-jays say one to another in the yellowing October woods? Not in the Kanonsis, nor yet in the Kanonsionni may the Mohicans read to the Mohawks the ancient wampum records. The Lenni-Lenape are Algonquin, not Huron-Iroquois. Let those degraded Delawares who still sit in the Long House count their white belts while, from both doors of the Confederacy, Seneca and Mohawk belt-bearers hurl their red wampum to the four corners of the world."

"The Mohicans, while they wait, may read of glory and great deeds," I said, "but the belts in their hands are not white. How can this be, my brother?"

The Sagamore's eyes flashed:

"The belts we remember are red!" he said. "We Mohicans have never understood Iroquois wampum. Let the Lenape of the Kansonsionni bear Iroquois belts!"

"In the Long House," said I, "the light is dim. Perhaps the Canienga's ambassadors can no longer perceive the red belts in the archives of the Lenape."

It had so far been a careful and cautious exchange of subtlest metaphor between this proud and sensitive Mohican and me; I striving to win him to our cause by recalling the ancient greatness and the proud freedom of his tribe, yet most carefully avoiding undue pressure or any direct appeal for

an immediate answer to Boyd's request. But already I had so thoroughly prepared the ground; and the Sagamore's responses had been so encouraging, that the time seemed to have come to put the direct and final question. And now, to avoid the traditional twenty-four hours' delay which an Indian invariably believes is due his own dignity before replying to a vitally important demand, I boldly cast precedent and custom to the four winds, and once more seized on allegory to aid me in this hour of instant need.

I began by saluting him with the most insidious and stately compliment I could possibly offer to a Sagamore of a conquered race—a race which already was nearly extinct—investing this Mohican Sagamore with the prerogatives of his very conquerors by the subtlety of my opening phrase:

"O Sagamore! Roya-neh! Noble of the three free clans of a free Mohican people! Our people have need of you. The path is dark to Catharines-town. Terror haunts those frightful shades. Roya-nef! We need you!

"Brother! Is there occasion for belts between us to confirm a brother's words, when this leathern girth I wear around my body carries a red wampum which all may see and read—my war axe and my knife?"

I raised my right arm slowly, and drew with my forefinger a great circle in the air around us:

"Brother! Listen attentively! Since a Sagamore has read the belt I yesterday delivered, the day-sun has circled us where we now stand. It is another day, O Roya-neh! In yonder fireplace new ashes whiten, new embers redden. We have slept (touching my eyelids and then laying my right hand lightly over his); we have eaten (again touching his lips and then my own); and now—now here—now, in this place and on this day, I have returned to the Mohican fire—the Fire of Tamanund! Now I am seated (touching both knees). Now my ears are open. Let the Sagamore of the Mohicans answer my belt delivered! I have spoken, O Roya-neh!"

For a full five minutes of intense silence I knew that my bold appeal was being balanced in the scales by one of a people to whom tradition is a religion. One scale was weighted with the immemorial customs and usages of a great and proud people; the other with a white man's subtle and flattering recognition of these customs, conveyed in metaphor, which all Indians adore, and appealing to imagination—an appeal to which no Huron, no Iroquois, no Algonquin, is ever deaf.

In the breathless silence of suspense the irritable, high-pitched voice of Colonel Sheldon came to my ears. It seemed that after all he had sent out a few troopers and that one had just returned to report a large body of horsemen which had passed the Bedford road at a gallop, apparently headed for Ridgefield. But I scarcely noted what was being discussed in the further end of the hall, so intent was I on the Sagamore's reply—if, indeed, he meant to answer me at all. I could even feel Boyd's body quivering with suppressed excitement as our elbows chanced to come in contact; as for me, I scarce made out to control myself at all, and any nether lip was nearly bitten through ere the Mohican lifted his symmetrical head and looked me full and honestly in the eyes.

"Brother," he said, in a curiously hushed voice, "on this day I come to you here, at this fire, to acquaint you with my answer; answering my brother's words of yesterday."

I could hear Boyd's deep breath of profound relief. "Thank God!" I thought.

The Sagamore spoke again, very quietly:

"Brother, the road is dark to Catharines-town. There are no stars there, no moon, no sun—only a bloody mist in the forest. For to that dreadful empire of the Iroquois only blind trails lead. And from them ghosts of the Long House arise and stand. Only a thick darkness is there—an endless gloom to which the Mohican hatchets long, long ago dispatched the severed souls they struck! In every trail they stand, these ghosts of the Kanonsi, Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga—ghosts of the Tuscarora. The Mohawk beasts who wear the guise of men are there. Mayaro spits upon them! And upon their League! And upon their Atotarho the Siwanois spit!"

Suddenly his arm shot out and he grasped the hilt of my knife, drew it from my belt, and then slowly returned it. I drew his knife and rendered it again.

"Brother," he said, "I have this day heard your voice coming to me out of the Northland! I have read the message on the belt you bore and wear; your voice has not lied to my ears; your message is clear as running springs to my eyes. I can see through to their pleasant depths. No snake lies hidden under them. So now—now, I say—if my brother's sight is dimmed on the trail to Catharines-town, Mayaro will teach him how to see under the night-sun as owls see, so that behind us, the steps of many men shall not stumble, and the darkness of the Long House shall become redder than dawn, lighted by the flames of a thousand rifles!

"Brother! A Sagamore never lies. I have drawn my brother's knife! Brother, I have spoken!"

And so it was done in that house and in the dark of dawn. Boyd silently gave him his hands, and so did I; then Boyd led him aside with a slight motion of dismissal to me.

As I walked toward the front door, which was now striding open, I saw Major Tallmadge go out ahead of me, run to the mounting-block, and climb into his saddle. Colonel Sheldon followed him to the doorway, and called after him:

"Take a dozen men with you, and meet Colonel Moylan! A dozen will be sufficient, Major!"

Then he turned back into the house, saying to Major Lockwood and Mr. Hunt he was positive that the large body of dragoons in rapid motion, which had been seen and reported by one of our videttes a few minutes since, could be no other than Moylan's expected regiment; and that he would mount his own men presently and draw them up in front of the Meeting House.

The rain had now nearly ceased; a cloudy, greyish horizon became visible, and the dim light spreading from a watery sky made objects dimly discernible out of doors.

I hastened back to the shed where I had left the strange maid swathed in her scarlet cape; and found her there, slowly pacing the trampled sod before it.

As I came up with her, she said:

"Why are the light dragoons riding on the Bedford road? Is aught amiss?"

"A very large body of horse has passed our videttes, making toward Ridgefield. Colonel Sheldon thinks it must be Moylan's regiment."

"Do you?"

"It may be so."

"And if it be the leather-caps?"

"Then we must find ourselves in a sorry pickle."

As I spoke, the little bugle-horn of Sheldon's Horse blew boots and saddles, and four score dragoons scrambled into their saddles down by the barns, and came riding up the sloppy road, their horses slipping badly and floundering through the puddles and across the stream, where, led by a captain, the whole troop took the Meeting House road at a stiff canter.

We watched them out of sight, then she said:

"I have awaited your pleasure, Mr. Loskiel. Pray, in what further manner can I be of service to—my country?"

"I have come back to tell you," said I, "that you can be of no further use. Our errand to the Sagamore has now ended, and most happily. You have served your country better than you can ever understand. I have come to say so, and to thank you with—with a heart—very full."

"Have I then done well?" she asked slowly.

"Indeed you have!" I replied, with such a warmth of feeling that it surprised myself.

"Then why may I not understand this thing that I have done—for my country?"

"I wish I might tell you."

"May you not?"

"No, I dare not."

She bit her lip, gazing at nothing over the ragged collar of her cape, and stood so, musing. And after a while she seemed to come to herself, wearily, and she cast a tragic upward glance at me. Then,

dropping her eyes, and with the slightest inclination of her head, not looking at me at all, she started across the trampled grass.

"Wait–" I was by her side again in the same breath.

"Well, sir?" And she confronted me with cool mien and lifted brows. Under them her grey eyes hinted of a disdain which I had seen in them more than once.

"May I not suitably express my gratitude to you?" I said.

"You have already done so."

"I have tried to do so properly, but it is not easy for me to say how grateful to you we men of the Northland are—how deeply we must ever remain in your debt. Yet—I will attempt to express our thanks—if you care to listen."

After a pause: "Then—if there is nothing more to say—"

"There is, I tell you. Will you not listen?"

"I have been thanked—suitably.... I will say adieu, sir."

"Would you—would you so far favour me as to make known to me your name?" I said, stammering a little.

"Lois is my name," she said indifferently.

"No more than that?"

"No more than that."

How it was now going with me I did not clearly understand, but it appeared to be my instinct not to let her slip away into the world without something more friendly said—some truer gratitude expressed—some warmth.

"Lois," I said very gravely, "what we Americans give to our country demands no ignoble reward. Therefore, I offer none of any sort. Yet, because you have been a good comrade to me—and because now we are about to go our different ways into the world before us—I ask of you two things. May I do so?"

After a moment, looking away from me across the meadow:

"Ask," she said.

"Then the first is—will you take my hand in adieu—and let us part as good soldiers part?"

Still gazing absently across the meadow, she extended her hand. I retained it for a moment, then released it. Her arm fell inert by her side, but mine tingled to the shoulder.

"And one more thing," I said, while this strange and curious reluctance to let her go was now steadily invading me.

"Yes?"

"Will you wear a comrade's token—in memory of an hour or two with him?"

"What!"

She spoke with a quick intake of breath and her grey eyes were on me now, piercing me to the roots of speech and motive.

I wore a heavy ring beaten out of gold; Guy Johnson gave it. This I took from my trembling finger, scarce knowing why I was doing it at all, and stooping and lifting her little, wind-roughened hand, put it on the first finger I encountered—blindly, now, and clumsily past all belief, my hand was shaking so absurdly.

If my face were now as red as it was hot, hers, on the contrary, had become very strange and still and white. For a moment I seemed to read distrust, scorn, even hatred, in her level stare, and something of fear, too, in every quickening breath that moved the scarlet mantle on her breast. Then, in a flash, she had turned her back on me and was standing there in the grey dawn, with both hands over her face, straight and still as a young pine. But my ring was shining on her finger.

Emotion of a nature to which I was an utter stranger was meddling with my breath and pulses, now checking, now speeding both so that I stood with mind disconcerted in a silly sort of daze.

At length I gathered sufficient composure to step to her side again.

"Once more, little comrade, good-bye," I said. "This ends it all."

Again she turned her shoulder to me, but I heard her low reply:

"Good-bye—Mr. Loskiel."

And so it ended.

A moment later I found myself walking aimlessly across the grass in no particular direction. Three times I turned in my tracks to watch her. Then she disappeared beyond the brookside willows.

I remember now that I had turned and was walking slowly back to where our horses stood, moving listlessly through the freshly mowed meadow between drenched haystacks—the first I had seen that year—and God alone knows where were my thoughts a-gypsying, when, very far away, I heard a gun-shot.

At first I could perceive nothing, then on the distant Bedford road I saw one of our dragoons running his horse and bending low in his saddle.

Another dragoon appeared, riding a diable—and a dozen more behind these; and on their heels a-galloping, a great body of red-jacketed horsemen—hundreds of them—the foremost shooting from their saddles, the great mass of them swinging their heavy cutlasses and spurring furiously after our flying men.

I had seen far more than was necessary, and I ran for my horse. Other officers came running, too—Sheldon, Thomas, Lockwood, and my Lieutenant Boyd.

As we clutched bridle and stirrup and popped upward into out saddles, it seemed that the red-coats must cut us off, but we spurred out of the meadow into the Meeting House road, and Boyd cried furiously in my ear:

"See what this damned Sheldon has done for us now! God! What disgrace is ours!"

I saw Colonel Sheldon presently, pale as death, and heard him exclaim:

"Oh, Christ! I shall be broke for this! I shall be broke!"

I made out to say to Boyd:

"The enemy are coming in hundreds, sir, and we have scarce four score men mounted by the Meeting House."

"They'll never stand, either," he panted. "But if they do we'll see this matter to an end."

"Our orders?" I asked.

"Damn our orders," said he. "We'll see this matter to an end."

We rode hard, but already some of Tallmadge's terror-stricken patrol were overhauling us, and the clangor of the British cavalry broke louder and louder on our ears as we came in sight of the Meeting House. Sheldon's four score troopers heard the uproar of the coming storm, wavered, broke, and whirled their horses about into a most disorderly flight along the Stamford road. Everybody ran —there was no other choice for officers and men—and close on our heels came pelting the 17th British Dragoons, the Hussars, and Mounted Yagers of the Legion; and behind these galloped their mounted infantry.

A mad anxiety to get away from this terrible and overwhelming force thundering on our heels under full charge possessed us all, I think, and this paramount necessity held shame and fury in abeyance. There was nothing on earth for us to do but to ride and try to keep our horses from falling headlong on the rocky, slippery road; for it was now a very hell of trampling horsemen, riding frantically knee against knee, buffeted, driven, crowded, crushed, slipping; and trooper after trooper went down with a crash under the terrible hoofs, horse and rider battered instantly into eternity.

For full three-quarters of a mile they ran us full speed, and we drove on headlong; then at the junction of the New Canaan road our horsemen separated, and I found myself riding in the rear beside Boyd and Jack Mount once more. Turning to look back, I perceived the Legion Cavalry were slowing to a trot to rest their hard-blown horses; and gradually our men did the same. But the Hussars continued to come on, and we continued our retreat, matching our speed to theirs.

They let drive at us once with their heavy pistols, and we in the rear returned their fire, emptying one saddle and knocking two horses into the roadside bushes.

Then they ran us hard again, and strove to flank us, but the rocky country was too stiff for their riders, and they could not make out to cut us off or attain our flanks.

"What a disgrace! What a disgrace!" was all Boyd found to say; and I knew he meant the shameful surprise, not the retreat of our eighty light horsemen before the thundering charge of their heavy hundreds.

Our troopers did not seem really frightened; they now jogged along doggedly, but coolly enough. We had with us on the New Canaan road some twenty light dragoons, not including Boyd, myself, and Jack Mount—one captain, one cornet and a trumpeter lad, the remainder being rank and file, and several mounted militiamen.

The captain, riding in the rear with us, was ever twisting his hatless head to scowl back at the Hussars; and he talked continually in a loud, confident voice to reassure his men.

"They're dropping off by tens and twenties," he said. "If they keep to that habit we'll give 'em a charge. Wait till the odds lessen. Steady there, boys! This cattle chase is not ended. We'll fetch 'em a crack yet. We'll get a chance at their mounted infantry yet. All in God's time, boys. Never doubt it."

The bugle-horns of the Legion were now sounding their derisive, fox-hunting calls, and behind us we could hear the far laughter and shouting: "Yoicks! Forrard! Stole away—stole away!"

My cheeks began to burn; Boyd gnawed his lips continually, and I saw our dragoons turning angrily in their saddles as they understood the insult of the British trumpets.

Half a mile farther on there ran a sandy, narrow cross road into the woods on either side of us.

The captain drew bridle, stood up in his stirrups, and looked back. For some time, now, the taunting trumpets had not jeered us, and the pursuit seemed to have slackened after nearly three hard miles of running. But they still followed us, though it was some minutes before their red jackets came bobbing up again over the sandy crest of the hill behind us.

All our men who had been looking back were now wheeled; and we divided, half backing into the sandy road to the right, half taking the left-hand road under command of Lieutenant Boyd.

"They are not too many," said the dragoon captain coolly, beckoning to his little bugle-horn.

Willows hid us until their advanced troopers were close to where we sat—so close that one of our excited dragoons, spurring suddenly forward into the main road, beat down a Hussar's guard, flung his arms around him, and tore him from his saddle. Both fell from their horses and began to fight fisticuffs in the sandy ditch.

We charged instantly, and the enemy ran for it, our troopers raising the view halloo in their turn and whipping out their sabres. And all the way back to the Stamford road we ran them, and so excited became our dragoons that we could scarce hold them when we came in sight once more of the British main body now reforming under the rolling smoke of Poundridge village, which they had set on fire.

But further advance was madness, even when the remainder of our light troop came cantering down the Stamford road to rejoin us and watch the burning town, for we could now muster but two score and ten riders, having lost nearly thirty dead or missing.

A dozen of Captain Fancher's militia came up, sober farmers of the village that lay below us buried in smoke; and our dragoons listened to the tales of these men, some of whom had been in the village when the onset came, and had remained there, skulking about to pick off the enemy until their main forces returned.

"Tarleton was in a great rage, I warrant you," said one big, raw-boned militiaman. "He rode up to Major Lockwood's house with his dragoons, and says he: 'Burn me this arch rebel's nest!' And the next minute the Yagers were running in and out, setting fire to the curtains and lighting bundles of hay in every room. And I saw the Major's lady stand there on her doorstep and demand the reason for such barbarity—the house already afire behind her. Mrs. Hunt and the servants came out with the children in their arms. And, 'By God, madam,' says Tarleton, 'when shots are fired at my men

from houses by the inhabitants of any town in America, I'll burn the town and hang the men if I can get 'em.' Some Hussars came up, driving before them the Major's fine herd of imported cattle —and a troop of his brood mares—the same he has so often had to hide in the Rock Hills. 'Stand clear, madam!' bawls Tarleton. 'I'll suffer nothing to be removed from that house!' At this the Major's lady gives one long look after her children, which Betsy Hunt and the blacks are carrying through the orchard; then she calmly enters the burning house and comes out again with a big silver platter and a load of linen from the dining-room in her arms. And at that a trooper draws his sabre and strikes her with the flat o' the blade—God, what a blow!—so that the lady falls to her knees and the heavy silver platter rolls out on the grass and the fine linen is in the mud. I saw her blacks lift her and get her off through the orchard. I sneaked out of the brook willows, took a long shot at the beast who struck her, and then pulled foot."

There was a shacked silence among the officers who had gathered to listen. Until this moment our white enemies had offered no violence to ladies. So this brutality toward the Major's lady astounded us.

Somebody said in a low voice:

"They've fired the church, now."

Major Lockwood's house was also burning furiously, as also were his barns and stables, his sheds, and the new, unfinished barracks. We could see it all very plainly from the hilltop where we had gathered.

"Alsop Hunt was taken," said a militiaman. "They robbed him of his watch and purse, damning him for a rebel broad-brim. He's off to the Provost, I fear."

"They took Mr. Reed, too," said another. "They had a dozen neighbours under guard when I left."

Sheldon, looking like death, sat his saddle a little apart. No one spoke to him. For even a deeper disgrace had now befallen the dragoons in the loss of their standard left behind in Lockwood's house.

"What a pitiful mess!" whispered Boyd. "Is there nothing to be done but sit here and see the red beasts yonder sack the town?"

Before I could answer, I caught the sound of distant firing on the Lewisboro road. Colonel Thomas reared stiffly in his saddle, and:

"Those are my own men!" he said loudly, "or I lie like a Tory!"

A hill half a mile north of us suddenly became dark with men; we saw the glitter of their muskets, saw the long belt of white smoke encircle them, saw red-jacketed men run out of a farmhouse, mount, and gallop toward the burning town.

Along the road below us a column of Continental infantry appeared on the run, cheering us with their hats.

A roar from our dragoons answered them; our bugle-horn spoke, and I saw Major Tallmadge, with a trumpeter at his back, rein in while the troopers were reforming and calling off amid a whirlwind of rearing horses and excited men.

Below in the village, the British had heard and perfectly understood the volley from Thomas's regiment, and the cavalry and mounted infantry of the Legion were assembling in the smoke, and already beginning a rapid retreat by the Bedford road.

As Boyd and I went clattering down the hill, we saw Major Lockwood with Thomas's men, and we rode up to him. He passed his sword to the left hand, and leaning across in his saddle, exchanged a grip with us. His face was ghastly.

"I know—I know," he said hurriedly. "I have seen my wife and children. My wife is not badly injured. All are in safety. Thank you, gentlemen."

We wheeled our horses and fell in beside our infantry, now pressing forward on a heavy run, so that Colonel Thomas and Major Lockwood had to canter their horses.

Firing instantly broke out as we entered the smoky zone where the houses were burning. Into it, an our left, galloped Sheldon's light dragoons, who, having but five muskets in the command, went at the Yagers with naked sabres; and suddenly found themselves in touch with the entire Legion cavalry, who set up a Loud bawling:

"Surrender, you damned rebels! Pull up, there! Halt!"

I saw a trooper, one Jared Hoyt, split the skull of a pursuing British dragoon straight across the mouth with a back-handed stroke, as he escaped from the melee; and another, one John Buckhout, duck his head as a dragoon fired at him, and, still ducking and loudly cursing the fellow, rejoin us as we sheered off from the masses of red-jacketed riders, wheeled, and went at the mounted Yagers, who did not stand our charge.

There was much smoke, and the thick, suffocating gloom was lighted only by streaming sparks, so that in the confusion and explosion of muskets it was difficult to manoeuvre successfully and at the same time keep clear of Tarleton's overwhelming main body.

This body was now in full but orderly retreat, driving with it cattle, horses, and some two dozen prisoners, mostly peaceable inhabitants who had taken no part in the affair. Also, they had a wagon piled with the helmets, weapons, and accoutrements of Sheldon's dead riders; and one of their Hussars bore Sheldon's captured standard in his stirrup.

To charge this mass of men was not possible with the two score horsemen left us; and they retreated faster than our militia and Continentals could travel. So all we could do was to hang on their rear and let drive at them from our saddles.

As far as we rode with them, we saw a dozen of their riders fall either dead or wounded from their horses, and saw their comrades lift them into one of the wagons. Also we saw our dragoons and militia take three prisoners and three horses before we finally turned bridle after our last long shot at their rear guard.

For our business here lay not in this affair, and Boyd had disobeyed his orders in not avoiding all fighting. He knew well enough that the bullets from our three rifles were of little consequence to our country compared to the safe accomplishment of our mission hither, and our safe return with the Siwanois. Fortune had connived at our disobedience, for no one of us bore so much as a scratch, though all three of us might very easily have been done to death in the mad flight from the Meeting House, amid that plunging hell of horsemen.

Fortune, too, hung to our stirrup leathers as we trotted into Poundridge, for, among a throng of village folk who stood gazing at the smoking ashes of the Lockwood house, we saw our Siwanois standing, tall, impassive, wrapped in his blanket.

And late that afternoon we rode out of the half-ruined village, northward. Our saddle-bags were full; our animals rested; and, beside us, strode the Sagamore, fully armed and accoutred, lock braided, body oiled and painted for war—truly a terrific shape in the falling dusk.

On the naked breast of this Mohican warrior of the Siwanois clan, which is called by the Delawares "The Clan of the Magic Wolf," outlined in scarlet, I saw the emblem of his own international clan—as I supposed—a bear.

And of a sudden, within me, vaguely, something stirred—some faint memory, as though I had once before beheld that symbol on a dark and naked breast, outlined in scarlet. Where had I seen it before? At Guy Park? At Johnson Hall? Fort Johnson? Butlersbury? Somewhere I had seen that symbol, and in that same paint. Yes, it might easily have been. Every nation of the Confederacy possessed a clan that wore the bear. And yet—and yet—this bear seemed somehow different—and yet familiar—strangely familiar to me—but in a manner which awoke within me an unrest as subtle as it was curious.

I drew bridle, and as the Sagamore came up, I said uneasily:

"Brother, and ensign of the great bear clan of many nations, why is the symbol that you wear familiar to me—and yet so strangely unfamiliar?"

He shot a glance of lightning intelligence at me, then instantly his features became smoothly composed and blank again.

"Has my brother never before seen the Spirit Bear?" he asked coldly.

"Is that a clan, Mayaro?"

"Among the Siwanois only." "That is strange," I muttered. "I have never before seen a Siwanois. Where could I have seen a Siwanois? Where?"

But he only shook his head.

Boyd and Mount had pricked forward; I still lingered by the Mohican. And presently I said:

"That was a brave little maid who bore our message to you."

He made no answer.

"I have been wondering," I continued carelessly, "whether she has no friends—so poor she seems—so sad and friendless, Have you any knowledge of her?"

The Indian glanced at me warily, "My brother Loskiel should ask these questions of the maid herself."

"But I shall never see her again, Sagamore. How can I ask her, then?"

The Indian remained silent. And, perhaps because I vaguely entertained some future hope of loosening his tongue in her regard, I now said nothing more concerning her, deeming that best. But I was still thinking of her as I rode northward through the deepening dusk.

A great weariness possessed me, no doubt fatigue from the day's excitement and anxiety. Also, for some hours, that curious battle-hunger had been gnawing at my belly so that I had liked to starve there in my saddle ere Boyd gave the signal to off-saddle for the night.

CHAPTER IV
A TRYST

Above the White Plains the territory was supposed to be our own. Below, seventeen thousand red-coats held the city of New York; and their partisans, irregulars, militia, refugee-corps, and Legion-horsemen, harried the lines. Yet, except the enemy's cruisers which sometimes strayed far up the Hudson, like impudent hawks circling within the very home-yard, we saw nothing of red-rag or leather-cap north of our lines, save only once, when Lieutenant-Colonel Simcoe nearly caught us.

His Excellency's army lay in position all around us, now, from West Point down the river; and our light-horsemen patrolled as far south as the unhappy country from which we had retired through the smoke of Bedford's burning farms and the blaze of church and manor at Poundridge. That hilly strip was then our southern frontier, bravely defended by Thomas and Lockwood, shamefully neglected by Sheldon, as we had seen. For which he was broke, poor devil, and a better man set there to watch the red fox Tarleton, to harry Emmeriek, and to throw the fear o' God into that headlong blockhead, Simcoe, a brave man, but so possessed by hatred for "Mr." Washington that every move he made was like a goaded bull—his halts merely the bewilderment of baffled fury, his charges blind and bellowing.

I know how he conducted, not from hearsay alone, but because at sunrise on our second day northward, before we struck the river-road, we had like to have had a brush with him, his flankers running afoul of us not far beyond a fortified post heavily held by our Continentals.

It was the glimpse of cannon and levelled bayonets that bewildered him; and his bawling charge sheered wide o' the shabby Continental battle-line, through which we galloped into safety, our Indian sticking to my crupper like a tree-cat with every claw. And I remember still the grim laughter that greeted us from those unshaven, powder-blackened ranks, and how they laughed, too, as they fired by platoons at the far glimmer of Simcoe's helmets through the chestnut trees.

And in the meantime, all the while, even from the very first evening when we off-saddled in the rocky Westchester woods and made our first flying-camp, I had become uneasy concerning the Siwanois—uncertain concerning his loyalty to the very verge of suspicion.

I said nothing of this to Lieutenant Boyd, having nothing definite to communicate. Nor did I even hint my suspicions, because distrust in the mind of such a man as Boyd would be very difficult to eradicate, and the slightest mishandling of our delicate situation might alienate the Sagamore forever.

Yet, of one thing I had become almost convinced: the Siwanois, while we slept, met and held communication with somebody outside our camp.

On the first night this had happened; for, awaking and missing the Sagamore, who had been left on guard, I lay a-watching under my blanket, and when he came in to the fire once more, it seemed to me that far in the woods I heard the faint sound of another person retiring stealthily through the tell-tale bushes that choke all second growth hereabouts.

On the second day we crossed to the other side of the Hudson in flat boats, with our horses. But on that night it was the same, I feigning sleep when it came time for the Siwanois to relieve the man on guard. And once again, after he had silently inspected us all, the Sagamore stole away into leafy depths, but halted as before within earshot still. And once again some nascent sense within me seemed to become aware of another human being somewhere moving in the woods outside our fire.

How I divined it I do not know, because this time I could hear no sound in the starry obscurity of the Western Catskills, save only those familiar forest sounds which never cease by night—unseen stirrings of sleeping birds, the ruffle, of feathers, the sudden rustle of some furry thing alarmed, the scratchings and pickings in rotting windfalls, the whisper of some falling leaf severed by insects or relaxing its brief clasp of the mother stem in the precocity of a maturity premature.

Yet, so strong now had become my suspicions that I was already preparing to unroll my blanket, rise, and creep after the Siwanois, when his light and rapid footfall sounded on the leaves close to my head; and, as before, while again I feigned sleep, far in the thicket somebody moved, cautiously retreating into tangled depths. But whether I really heard or only guessed, I do not know down to this very day.

On the third night it rained and we made a bark hut. Perhaps the Siwanois did his talking with this unseen visitor while away in pretense of peeling bark, for he did not creep abroad that night. But, somehow, I knew he had kept some tryst.

Now, on this fourth day, and our journey drawing to its end, I resolved to follow the Siwanois if he stirred from our fire, and discover for myself with what manner of visitor he held these stealthy councils.

During the long day's march I lagged and watched and listened in vain for any follower along our route. Sometimes I even played at flanker, sometimes rode far on ahead, and, at times, stuck to the Indian hour after hour, seeming not to watch him, but with every sense alert to surprise some glance, some significant movement, some cunning and treacherous signal, to convince me that the forest had eyes that marked us, and ears which heard us, and that the Siwanois knew it, and aided and abetted under our very gaze.

But I had seen him do nothing that indicated him to be in secret communication with anybody. He marked neither tree nor stone, nor leaf nor moss, as far as I could see; dropped nothing, made no sound at all save when he gravely answered some observation that we offered. Once, even, I found a pretext to go back on the trail, searching to find some sign he might have left behind him: and had my journey for my pains.

Now, had this same Indian been an Iroquois I might have formed some reasonable judgment concerning his capacity for treachery; but I had seen few Delawares in my life, and had never heard them speak at all, save to boast in their cups of Uncas, Tamanund, and Miontonomoh. As for a Siwanois Mohican, this Sagamore of the Magic Clan was the first of his tribe and ensign that I had ever beheld. And with every motive and every interest and desire in the world to believe him honest —and even in my secret heart believing him to be so—yet I could not close eyes and ears to what so stealthily was passing in the midnight woods around me. And truly it was duty, nor any motive baser, that set me after him that starlit night, when, as before, being on guard, he left the fire about midnight: and I out of my blanket and after him in a trice.

The day was the 7th of July, a Wednesday, I remember, as I had writ it in my journal, my habit being to set down every evening, or as near the date as convenient, a few words which briefly recorded the day's events.

The night before we had camped in the woods along the Catskill road leading toward Cobus-kill; this night, being fine and warm, we made open camp along a stream, within a few miles' journey of the Middle Fort; and, soupaan being eaten, let the coals die and whiten into ashes. This, partly because we needed not the warmth, partly from precaution. For although on the open roads our troops in detachments were now concentrating, moving on Otsego Lake and the upper waters of the Delaware and Susquehanna, this was no friendly country, and we knew it. So the less firelight, the snugger we might lie in case of some stray scalping party from the west or north.

Now, as I say, no sooner did the Siwanois leave his post and go a-roving than I went after him, with infinite precaution; and I flatter myself that I made no more noise on the brookside moss than the moon-cast shadow of a flying cloud. Guy Johnson was no skilful woodsman, but his Indians were; and of them I learned my craft. And scout detail in Morgan's Rifles, too, was a rare school to finish any man and match him with the best who ran the woods.

Too near his heels I dared not venture, as long as his tall form passed like a shadow against the white light that the stars let in through the forest cleft, where ran the noisy stream. But presently he turned off, and for a moment I thought to lose him in the utter blackness of the primeval trees. And

surely would have had I not seen close to me a vast and smoothly slanting ledge of rock which the stars shining on made silvery, and on which no tree could grow, scarce even a tuft of fern, so like a floor it lay in a wide oval amid the forest gloom.

Somewhere upon that dim and sparkling esplanade the Siwanois had now seated himself. For a while, straining my eyes where I lay flat among the taller fringing ferns, I could just make out a blot in the greyness where he sat upright, like a watching catamount under the stars.

Then, across the dimness, another blot moved to join him; and I felt my hair stir as chilling certainty shocked from me my lingering hope that I had been mistaken.

Faintly—oh, scarce audible at all—the murmur of two voices came to me there where I lay under the misty lustre of the stars. Nearer, nearer I crept, nearer, nearer, until I lay flat as a shadow there, stark on the shelf of rock. And, as though they had heard me, and as if to spite me, their voices sank to whispers. Yet, I knew of a certainty that I had neither been observed nor heard.

Hushed voices, whispers, undertones as soft as summer night winds—that was all I heard, all I could make of it; and sniffed treason as I lay there, making no question of the foulness of this midnight tryst.

It was an hour, I think, they sat there, two ghostly figures formless against the woods; then one rose, and presently I saw it was the Sagamore.

Noiselessly he retraced his steps across the silvery esplanade of rock; and if my vague, flat outline were even visible to him I passed for a shadow or a cleft beneath his notice—perhaps for a fallen branch or heap of fern and withered leaf—I know not. But I let him go, unstirring, my eyes riveted upon the other shape, seated there like some grey wraith upon a giant's tombstone, under the high stars.

Beyond the ferns I saw the shadow of the Sagamore against the stream pass toward our camp. Then I addressed myself to the business before me; loosened knife and hatchet in their beaded sheaths, stirred, moved forward inch by inch, closer, closer, then to the left to get behind, nearer, ever nearer, till the time had come for me to act. I rose silently to my moccasined feet, softly drew my heavy knife against events, and lightly struck the ringing blade against my hatchet.

Instantly the grey shape bounded upright, and I heard a whispering cry of terror stifled to a sob.

And then a stunning silence fell between us twain.

For I was staring upon the maid who had brought the Sagamore to us, and she was looking back at me, still swaying on her feet and all a-tremble from the dreadful fear that still possessed her.

"Lois?" I made out to whisper.

She placed one hand against her side, fighting for breath; and when she gained it sighed deeply once or twice, with a low sound like the whimpering wings of doves.

At her feet I saw a cup of water shining, a fragment of corn bread and meat. Near these lay a bundle with straps on it.

"In God's name," I said in a ghostly voice, "what does this mean? Why have you followed us these four days past? Are you mad to risk a scalping party, or, on the open road, hazard the rough gallantries of soldiers' bivouacs? If you had business in these parts, and desired to come, why did you not tell me so and travel with us?"

"I did not wish to ask that privilege of–" She hesitated, then bent her head. "–of any man. What harm have I caused you by following?"

I said, still amazed and wondering:

"I understand it all now. The Sagamore brings you food. Is that true?"

"Yes," she said sullenly.

"And you have kept in touch with us ever since we started?"

"With Mayaro."

"Why?"

"I have told you that I had no wish to travel in your company."

"But for protection–"

"Protection! I have heard that, too, from men. It is ever on men's lips—that word meaning damnation. I thank you, Mr. Loskiel, I require no protection."

"Do you distrust Lieutenant Boyd or me? Or what?"

"Men! And you twain are two of them."

"You fear such men as we are!" I demanded impatiently.

"I know nothing of you," she answered, "save that you are men."

"Do you mean Mr. Boyd—and his thoughtless gallantry–"

"I mean men! All men! And he differs in nothing from the rest that I can see. Which is why I travel without your leave on my own affairs and by myself—spite of the Iroquois." She added bitterly; "And it is known to civilization that the Iroquois are to be trusted where the white man is not!"

Her meaning was plain enough now. What this young girl had seen and suffered and resented amid a world of men I did not know. Boyd's late gallantry, idle, and even ignoble as it had appeared to me, had poisoned her against me also, confirming apparently all she ever had known of men.

If this young, lonely, ragged thing were what her attitude and words made plain, she had long endured her beauty as a punishment. What her business might be in lingering around barracks and soldiers' camps I could not guess; but women who haunted such resorts seldom complained of the rough gallantries offered. And if their charms faded, they painted lip and cheek, and schooled the quivering mouth to smile again.

What her business might now be in following our little detail northward I could not surmise. Here was no barracks wench! But wench or gypsy or what not, it was impossible that I should leave her here alone. Even the thought of it set one cold.

"Come into camp this night," I said.

"I will not."

"You must do so. I may not leave you here alone."

"I can care for myself."

"Yes—as you cared for yourself when I crept up behind you. And if I had been a savage—then what?"

"A quick end," she said coolly.

"Or a wretched captivity—perhaps marriage to some villainous Iroquois–"

"Yes, sir; but nothing worse than marriage!"

"Child!" I exclaimed. "Where have you lived to belie the pitiful youth of you with such a worldly-worn and bitter tongue? I tell you all men are not of that stripe! Do you not believe me?"

"Birds sing, sir."

"Will you come into camp?" I repeated hotly.

"And if I will not?"

"Then, by heaven, I'll carry you in my arms! Will you come?"

She laughed at me, dangerously calm, seated herself, picked up the partly eaten food, and began to consume it with all the insolent leisure in the world.

I stood watching her for a few moments, then sat down cross-legged before her.

"Why do you doubt me, Lois?" I asked.

"Dear sir, I do not doubt you," she answered with faintest malice.

"I tell you I am not of that stripe!" I said angrily.

"Then you are not a man at all. I tell you I have talked with men as good as you, and heard them protest as you do—yes, with all the gentle condescension that you use, all of your confidence and masterful advice. Sooner or later all have proved the same," she shrugged; "–proved themselves men, in plainer words."

She sat eating thoughtfully, looking aloft now and then at the thick splendor of the firmament.

Then, breaking a bit of corn bread, she said gravely:

"I do not mean that you have not been kind, as men mean kindness. I do not even mean that I blame men. God made them different from us. And had He made me one, doubtless I had been as all men are, taking the road through life as gaily, sword on thigh and hat in hand to every pretty baggage that a kindly fate made wayfarer with me. No, I have never blamed a man; only the silly minx who listens."

After a short silence, I said: "Who, in the name of heaven, are you, Lois?"

"Does that concern you?"

"I would have it concern me—if you wish."

"Dear sir," she said very coolly, "I wish nothing of the kind."

"You do not trust me."

"Why, yes, as I trust every man—except a red one."

"Yet, I tell you that all that animates me is a desire to render you a comrade's service–"

"And I thank you, Mr. Loskiel, because, like other men, you mean it generously and well. Yet, you are an officer in the corps d'élite; and you would be ashamed to have the humblest bugler in your regiment see you with such a one as I."

She broke another morsel from her bread:

"You dare not cross a camp-parade beside me. At least the plaything of an officer should walk in silk, whatever clothes a soldier's trull. Sir, do you suppose I do not know?"

She looked up at the stars, and then quietly at me.

"The open comradeship of any man with me but marks us both. Only his taste is criticized, not his morals. But the world's judgment leaves me nothing to cover me except the silk or rags I chance to wear. And if I am brave and fine it would be said of me, 'The hussy's gown is brave and fine!' And if I go in tatters, 'What slattern have we here, flaunting her boldness in the very sun?' So a comradeship with any man is all one to me. And I go my way, neither a burden nor a plaything, a scandal only to myself, involving no man high or low save where their advances wrong us both in the world's eyes—as did those of your friend, yonder by a dead fire asleep."

"All men are not so fashioned. Can you not believe me?"

"You say so, sir."

"Yes; and I say that I am not."

"Birds sing."

"Lois, will you let me aid you?"

"In what? The Sagamore feeds me; and the Middle Fort is not so far."

"And at the Middle Fort how will you live?"

"As I have lived; wash for the soldiers; sew for them—contrive to find a living as I journey."

"Whither?"

"It is my own affair."

"May I not aid?"

"You could not if you would; you would not if you could."

"Ask me, Lois."

"No." She shook her head. Then, slowly: "I do thank you for the wish, Mr. Loskiel. But the Siwanois himself refuses what I ask. And you would, also, did you know my wish."

"What is your wish?"

She shook her head: "It is useless to voice it—useless."

She gathered the scant fragments of her meal, wrapped them in a bit of silver birch-bark, unrolled her bundle, and placed them there. Then she drained the tin cup of its chilly water, and, still sitting there cross-legged on the rock, tied the little cup to her girdle. It seemed to me, there in the dusk, that she smiled very faintly; and if it was so it was the first smile I had had of her when she said:

"I travel light, Mr. Loskiel. But otherwise there is nothing light about me."

"Lois, I pray you, listen. As I am a man, I can not leave you here."

"For that reason, sir, you will presently take your leave."

"No, I shall remain if you will not come into camp with us."

She said impatiently:

"I lie safer here than you around your fire. You mean well; now take your leave of me—with whatever flight of fancy," she added mockingly, "that my present condition invests me with in the eyes of a very young man."

The rudeness of the fling burnt my face, but I answered civilly:

"A scalping party may be anywhere in these woods. It is the season; and neither Oneida Lake nor Fort Niagara itself are so distant that their far-hurled hatchets may not strike us here."

"I will not go with you," said she, making of her bundle a pillow. Then, very coolly, she extended her slim body and laid her head on the bundle.

I made no answer, nor any movement for fully an hour. Then, very stealthily, I leaned forward to see if she truly slept. And found her eyes wide open.

"You waste time mounting sentry over me," she said in a low voice. "Best employ your leisure in the sleep you need."

"I can not sleep."

"Nor I—if you remain here awake beside me."

She raised herself on her elbow, peering through the darkness toward the stream.

"The Siwanois has been standing yonder by the stream watching us this full hour past. Let him mount sentry if he wishes."

"You have a tree-cat's eyes," I said. "I see nothing."

Then I rose and unbuckled my belt. Hatchet and knife dangled from it. I stooped and laid it beside her. Then, stepping backward a pace or two, I unlaced my hunting shirt of doe-skin, drew it off, and, rolling it into a soft pillow, lay down, cradling my cheek among the thrums.

I do not know how long I lay there before I fell asleep from very weariness of the new and deep emotions, as strange to me as they were unwelcome. The restlessness, the misgivings which, since I first had seen this maid, had subtly invaded me, now, grown stronger, assailed me with an apprehension I could neither put from me nor explain. Nor was this vague fear for her alone; for, at moments, it seemed as though it were for myself I feared—fearing myself.

So far in my brief life, I had borne myself cleanly and upright, though the times were loose enough, God knows, and the master of Guy Park had read me no lesson or set me no example above the morals and the customs of his class and of the age.

It may have been pride—I know not what it was, that I could notice the doings of Sir John and of young Walter Butler and remain aloof, even indifferent. Yet, this was so. Never had a woman's beauty stirred me otherwise than blamelessly, never had I entertained any sentiment toward fashionable folly other than aversion and a kind of shamed contempt.

Nor had I been blind at Guy Park and Butlersbury and Tribes Hill, nor in Albany, either. I knew Clarissa Putnam; I also knew Susannah Wormwood and her sister Elizabeth, and all that pretty company; and many another pretty minx and laughing, light-minded lass in county Tryon. And a few in Cambridge, too. So I was no niais, no naive country fool, unless to remain aloof were folly. And I often wondered to myself how this might really be, when Boyd rallied me and messmates laughed.

And now, as I lay there under the clustered stars, my head pillowed on my deer-skin shirt, my mind fell a-groping for reason to bear me out in my strained and strange perplexity.

Why, from the time I first had spoken to her, should thoughts of this strange and ragged maid have so possessed me that each day my memory of her returned, haunting me, puzzling me, plaguing my curiosity till imagination awoke, spurring my revery to the very border of an unknown land where rides Romance, in armour, vizor down.

Until this night I had not crossed that border, nor ever thought to, or dreamed of doing it. No beggar-maiden-seeking king was I by nature, nor ever felt for shabby dress and common folk aught

but the mixture of pity and aversion which breeds a kind of charity. And, I once supposed, were the Queen of Sheba herself to pass me in a slattern's rags, only her rags could I ever see, for all her beauty.

But how was it now with me that, from the very first, I had been first conscious of this maid herself, then of her rags. How was it that I felt no charity, nor pity of that sort, only a vague desire that she should understand me better—know that I meant her kindness—God knows what I wished of her, and why her grey eyes haunted me, and why I could not seem to put her from my mind.

That now she fully possessed my mind I convinced myself was due to my very natural curiosity concerning her; forgetting that a week ago I should not have condescended to curiosity.

Who and what was she? She had been schooled; that was plain in voice and manner. And, though she used me with scant courtesy, I was convinced she had been schooled in manners, too, and was no stranger to usages and customs which mark indelibly where birth and breeding do not always.

Why was she here? Why alone? Where were her natural protectors then? What would be her fate a-gypsying through a land blackened with war, or haunting camps and forts, penniless, in rags—and her beauty ever a flaming danger to herself, despite her tatters and because of them.

I slept at last; I do not know how long. The stars still glittered overhead when I awoke, remembered, and suddenly sat upright.

She was gone. I might have known it. But over me there came a rush of fear and anger and hurt pride; and died, leaving a strange, dull aching.

Over my arm I threw my rifle-frock, looked dully about to find my belt, discovered it at my feet. As I buckled it, from the hatchet-sling something fell; and I stooped to pick it up.

It was a wild-rose stem bearing a bud unclosed. And to a thorn a shred of silver birch-bark clung impaled. On it was scratched with a knife's keen point a message which I could not read until once more I crept in to our fire, which Mount had lighted for our breakfast.

And there I read her message: "A rose for your ring, comrade. And be not angry with me."

I read it again, then curled it to a tiny cylinder and placed it in my pouch, glancing sideways at the reclining Mohican. Boyd began to murmur and stretch in his blanket, then relaxed once more.

So I lay down, leaving Jack Mount a-cooking ashen cakes, and yawning.

CHAPTER V
THE GATHERING

Now, no sooner had we broken camp, covered our fire, packed, saddled, and mounted, than all around us, as we advanced, the wilderness began to wear an aspect very different to that brooding solitude which hitherto had been familiar to us—our shelter and our menace also.

For we had proceeded on our deeply-trodden war trail no more than a mile or two before we encountered the raw evidences of an army's occupation. Everywhere spotted leads, game trails, and runways had been hacked, trimmed, and widened into more open wood-walks; foot-paths enlarged to permit the passage of mounted men; cattle-roads cleared, levelled, made smoother for wagons and artillery; log bridges built across the rapid streams that darkled westward, swamps and swales paved with logs, and windfalls hewn in twain and the huge abattis dragged wide apart or burnt to ashes where it lay. Yet, still the high debris bristling from some fallen forest giant sprawling athwart the highway often delayed us. Our details had not yet cleared out the road entirely.

We were, however, within a wolf-hound's easy run to Cherry Valley, Fort Hunter, and the Mohawk—the outer edges of my own country. Northeast of us lay Schenectady behind its fort; north of us lay my former home, Guy Park, and near it old Fort Johnson and Johnson Hall. Farther still to the northward stretched the Vale and silvery Sacandaga with its pretty Fish House settlement now in ashes; and Summer House Point and Fonda's Bush were but heaps of cinders, too, the brave Broadalbin yeomen prisoners, their women and children fled to Johnstown, save old man Stoner and his boys, and that Tory villain Charlie Cady who went off with Sir John.

Truly I should know something of these hills and brooks and forests that we now traversed, and of the silent, solitary roads that crept into the wilderness, penetrating to distant, lonely farms or grist mills where some hardy fellow had cleared the bush and built his cabin on the very borders of that dark and fearsome empire which we were gathering to enter and destroy.

Here it lay, close on our left flank—so close that its strange gigantic shadow fell upon us, like a vast hand, stealthy and chill.

And it was odd, but on the edges of these trackless shades, here, even with fresh evidences on every side that our own people lately passed this way—yes, even when we began to meet or overtake men of our own color—the stupendous desolation yielded nothing of its brooding mystery and dumb magnificence.

Westward, the green monotony of trees stretched boundless as an ocean, and as trackless and uncharted—gigantic forests in the depths of which twilight had brooded since first the world was made.

Here, save for the puny, man-made trail—save for the tiny scars left by his pygmy hacking at some high forest monument, all this magic shadow-land still bore the imprint of our Lord's own fingers.

The stillness and the infinite majesty, the haunting fragrance clinging to the craftsmanship of hands miraculous; all the sweet odour and untainted beauty which enveloped it in the making, and which had remained after creation's handiwork was done, seemed still to linger in this dim solitude. And it was as though the twilight through the wooded aisles was faintly tinctured still, where the sweet-scented garments of the Lord had passed.

There was no underbrush, no clinging sprays or fairy brambles intertwined under the solemn arches of the trees; only the immemorial strata of dead leaves spread one above another in endless coverlets of crumbling gold; only a green and knee-deep robe of moss clothing the vast bases of the living columns.

And into this enchanted green and golden dusk no sunlight penetrated, save along the thread-like roads, or where stark-naked rocks towered skyward, or where, in profound and velvet depths, crystalline streams and rivers widened between their Indian willow bottoms. And these were always set with wild flowers, every bud and blossom gilded by the sun.

As we journeyed on, the first wayfarer we encountered after passing our outer line of pickets was an express rider from General Sullivan's staff, one James Cook, who told us that the right division of the army, General James Clinton's New York brigade, which was ours, was still slowly concentrating in the vicinity of Otsego Lake; that innumerable and endless difficulties in obtaining forage and provisions had delayed everything; that the main division, Sullivan's, was now arriving at Easton and Wyoming; and that, furthermore, the enemy had become vastly agitated over these ominous preparations of ours, but still believed, from their very magnitude, that we were preparing for an advance into Canada.

"Ha-ha!" said Boyd merrily. "So much the better, for if they continue to believe that, they will keep their cursed scalping parties snug at home."

"No, sir," said the express soberly. "Brant and his Mohawks are out somewhere or other, and so is Walter Butler and his painted crew."

"In this same district?"

"No doubt of it, sir. Indians fired on our pickets last week. It will go hard with the outlying farms and settlements. Small doubt, too, that they will strike heavily and strive to draw this army from whatever plan it meditated."

"Then," said Boyd with a careless laugh, "it is for us to strike more heavily still and draw them with the very wind of our advance into a common vortex of destruction with the Iroquois."

The express rode on, and Boyd, in excellent humour, continued talking to me, saying that he knew our Commander-in-Chief, and that he was an officer not to be lightly swayed or turned from the main purpose, but would hew to the line, no matter what destruction raged and flamed about him.

"No, Loskiel, they may murder and burn to right and left of us, and it may wring his heart and ours to hear the agonized appeals for aid; but if I judge our General, he will not be halted or drawn aside until the monstrous, loathesome body of this foul empire lies chopped to bits, writhing and dying in the flames of Catharines-town."

"He must truly be a man of iron," said I, "if we win through."

"We will win through, Loskiel," he said gaily, "—to Catharines-town or paradise—to hell or heaven. And what a tale to tell our children—we who survive!"

An odd expression came into his handsome face, and he said in a low and dreamy voice:

"I think that almost every man will live to tell that story—yet, I can never hear myself telling the tale in years to come."

On paths and new-made highways we began to encounter people and cattle—now a long line of oxen laden with military stores or with canoes and flatboats, and conducted by batt-men in smock and frock, now a sweating company of military surveyors from headquarters, burdened with compass, chain, and Jacob-staff, already running their lines into the wilderness. Here trudged the frightened family of some settler, making toward the forts; there a company of troops came gaily marching out on some detail, or perhaps, with fixed bayonets, herded sheep and cattle down some rutted road.

It seemed scarce possible that we were already within scouting range of that never-to-be-forgotten region of Wyoming, where just one year ago old John Butler with his Rangers, his hell-born Senecas, and Johnson's Greens, had done their bloody business; where, in "The Shades of Death," a hundred frightened women and little children had perished in that ghastly darkness. Also, we were but a few miles from that scene of terror where, through the wintry dawn at Cherry Valley, young Walter Butler damned his soul for all eternity while men, women, and children, old and young, died horribly amid the dripping knives and bayonets of his painted fiends, or fell under the butchering hatchets of his Senecas.

I could see that Boyd also was thinking of this ghastly business, as I caught his sombre eye. He seemed to shudder, then:

"Patience," he muttered grimly, with a significant nod toward the Siwanois, who strode silently between our horses. "We have our guide at last. A Siwanois hates the Iroquois no more fiercely than do we white-skins. Wait till he leads our van within rifle-range of Catharines-town! And if Walter Butler be there, or that bloodless beast Sir John, or Brant, or any of that hell-brood, and if we let them get away, may God punish us with the prisoner's fire! Amen."

Never before had I heard him speak that way, or with such savage feeling; and his manner of expression, and the uncanny words he used concerning fire caused me to shudder, too—knowing that if he had ever dreaded anything it was the stake, and the lingering death that lasted till the very soul lay burnt to cinders before the tortured body died. We exchanged no further conversation; many people passed and repassed us; the woods opened somewhat; the jolly noise of axes resounded near at hand among the trees.

Just ahead of us the road from Mattisses' Grist Mill and Stoney Kill joined ours, where stood the Low Dutch Church. Above us lay the Middle Fort, and the roads to Cherry Valley and Schenectady forked beyond it by the Lutheran Church and the Lower Fort. We took the Cherry Valley Road.

Here, through this partly cleared and planted valley of the Scoharie Kill, between the river and the lake, was now gathering a great concourse of troops and of people; and all the roads were lively with their comings and goings. Every woodland rang with the racket of their saws and axes; over the log bridges rumbled their loaded transport wagons; road and trail were filled with their crowding cattle; the wheels of Eckerson's and Becker's grist mills clattered and creaked under the splash of icy, limpid waters, and everywhere men were hammering and sawing and splitting, erecting soldiers' huts, huts for settlers, sheds, stables, store-houses, and barracks to shelter this motley congregation assembling here under the cannon of the Upper Fort, the Lower, and the Middle.

As we rode along, many faces we passed were familiar to us; we encountered officers from our own corps and from other regiments, with whom we were acquainted, and who greeted us gaily or otherwise, according to their temper and disposition. But everybody—officers, troops, batt-men—looked curiously at our Siwanois Indian, who returned the compliment not at all, but with stately stride and expressionless visage moved straight ahead of him, as though he noticed nothing.

Twice since we had started at daybreak that morning, I had managed to lag behind and question him concerning the maid who now shared well-nigh every thought of mine—asking if he knew who she was, and where she came from, and why she journeyed, and whither.

He answered—when he replied at all—that he had no knowledge of these things. And I knew he lied, but did not know how I might make him speak.

Nor would he tell me how and when she had slipped away from me the night before, or where she had likely gone, pretending that I had been mistaken when I told him I had seen him watching us beside the star-illumined stream.

"Mayaro slept," he said quite calmly. "The soldier, Mount, stood fire-guard. Of what my brother Loskiel and this strange maiden did under the Oneida Dancers and the Belt of Tamanund, Mayaro has no knowledge."

Why should he lie? I did not know. And even were I to attempt to confound his statement by an appeal to Mount, the rifleman must corroborate him, because doubtless the wily Siwanois had not awakened Mount to do his shift at sentry until the maid had vanished, leaving me sleeping.

"Mayaro," I said, "I ask these things only because I pity her and wish her well. It is for her safety I fear. Could you tell me where she may have gone?"

"Fowls to the home-yard; the wild bird to the wood," he said gravely. "Where do the rosy-throated pigeons go in winter? Does my brother Loskiel know where?"

"Sagamore," I said earnestly, "this maid is no wild gypsy thing—no rose-tinted forest pigeon. She has been bred at home, mannered and schooled. She knows the cote, I tell you, and not the bush, where the wild hawk hangs mewing in the sky. Why has she fled to the wilderness alone?"

The Indian said cunningly:

"Why has my brother Loskiel abandoned roof and fire for a bed on the forest moss?"

"A man must do battle for his own people, Sagamore."

"A white maid may do what pleases her, too, for aught I know," he said indifferently.

"Why does it please her to roam abroad alone?"

"How should I know?"

"You do know!"

"Loskiel," he said, "if I know why, perhaps I know of other matters, too. Ask me some day —before they send you into battle."

"What matters do you know of?"

"Ask me no more, Loskiel—until your conch-horns blowing in the forest summon Morgan's men to battle. Then ask; and a Sagamore will answer—a Siwanois Mohican—of the magic clan. Hiero!"

That ended it; he had spoken, and I was not fool enough to urge him to another word.

And now, as I rode, my mind was still occupied with my growing concern for the poor child I had come to pity so. Within me a furtive tenderness was growing which sometimes shamed, sometimes angered me, or left me self-contemptuous, restless, or dully astonished that my pride permitted it. For in my heart such sentiments for such a maid as this—tenderness, consciousness of some subtlety about her that attracted me—should have no place. There was every reason why I should pity her and offer aid; none why her grey eyes should hold my own; none why the frail body of her in her rags should quicken any pulse of mine; none why my nearness to her should stop my heart and breath.

Yet, all day long her face and slim shape haunted me—a certain sullen sweetness of the lips, too—and I remembered the lithe grace of her little hands as she broke the morsels of that midnight meal and lifted the cup of chilly water in which I saw the star-light dancing. And "Lord!" thought I, amazed at my own folly. "What madness lies in these midsummer solitudes, that I should harbor such fantastic thoughts?"

Seldom, as yet, had dream of woman vexed me—and when I dreamed at all it was but a tinselled figment that I saw—the echo, doubtless, of some tale I read concerning raven hair and rosy lips, and of a vague but wondrous fairness adorned most suitably in silks and jewels.

Dimly I was resigned toward some such goal, first being full of honours won with sword and spur, laden with riches, too, and territories stretching to those sunset hills piled up like sapphires north of Frenchman's Creek.

Out of the castled glory of the dawn, doubtless, I thought, would step one day my vision—to admire my fame and riches. And her I'd marry—after our good King had knighted me.

Alas! For our good King had proved a bloody knave; my visionary lands and riches all had vanished; instead of silk attire and sword, I wore a rifle-shirt and skinning-knife; and out of the dawn-born glory of the hills had stepped no silken damsel of romance to pause and worship me—only a slender, ragged, grey-eyed waif who came indifferent as the chilly wind in spring; who went as April shadows go, leaving no trace behind.

We were riding by the High Dutch Church at last, and beyond, between the roads to Duansboro and Cobus-Kill, we saw the tents and huts of the New York brigade—or as much of it as had arrived —from which we expected soon to be detached.

On a cleared hill beyond the Lower Fort, where the Albany Road runs beside the Fox-Kill, we saw the headquarters flag of the 4th brigade, and Major Nicholas Fish at his tent door, talking to McCrea, our brigade surgeon.

Along the stream were the huts lately tenanted by Colonel Philip Van Cortlandt's Second New York Regiment, which had gone off toward Wyalusing. Schott's riflemen camped there now, and, as we rode by, the soldiers stared at our Indian. Then we passed Gansevoort's Third Regiment, under tents and making ready to march; and the log cantonment of Colonel Lamb's artillery, where the cannoneers saluted, then, for no reason, cheered us. Beyond were camped Alden's Regiment, I think, and in the rear the Fourth and Fifth New York. A fort flew our own regimental flag beside the pretty banner of our new nation.

"Oho!" said Boyd, with an oath. "I'm damned if I care for barracks when a bed in the open is good enough. Why the devil have they moved us indoors, do you think?"

I knew no more than did he, and liked our new quarters no better.

At the fort gate the sentry saluted, and we dismounted. Our junior ensign, Benjamin Chambers, a smart young dandy, met us at the guard-house, directed Boyd to Captain Simpson's log quarters, and then led the Sagamore inside.

"Is this our Moses?" whispered the young ensign in my ear. "Egad, Loskiel, he looks a treacherous devil, in his paint, to lead us to the promised land."

"He is staunch, I think," said I. "But for heaven's sake, Benny, are we to sleep in filthy barracks in July?"

"Not you, I hear," he said, laughing, "–though they're clean enough, by the way! But the Major's orders were to build a hut for you and this pretty and fragrant aborigine down by the river, and lodge him there under your eye and nose and rifle. I admit very freely, Loskiel, no man in Morgan's envies you your bed-fellow!" And he whisked his nose with a scented handkerchief.

"They would envy me if they knew this Sagamore as I think I know him," said I, delighted that I was not to lie in barracks foul or clean. "Where is this same humble hut, my fashionable friend?"

"I'll show you presently. I think that Jimmy Parr desires to see your gentle savage," he added flippantly.

We seated ourselves on the gate-bench to await the Major's summons; the dandified young ensign crossed the parade, mincing toward the quarters of Major Parr. And I saw him take a pinch o' the scented snuff he affected, and whisk his supercilious nose again with his laced hanker. It seemed odd that a man like that should have saved our Captain Simpson's life at Saratoga.

Riflemen, drovers, batt-men, frontier farmers, and some of the dirty flotsam—trappers, forest-runners, and the like—were continually moving about the parade, going and coming on petty, sordid business of their own; and there were women there, too—pallid refugees from distant farms, and now domiciled within the stockade; gaunt wives of neighbouring settlers, bringing baskets of eggs or pails of milk to sell; and here and there some painted camp-wanton lingering by the gateway on mischief bent, or gossiping with some sister trull, their bold eyes ever roving.

Presently our mincing ensign came to us again, saying that the Sagamore and I were to report ourselves to the Major.

"Jimmy Parr is in good humour," he whispered. "Leave him in that temper, for mercy's sake, Loskiel; he's been scarcely amiable since you left to catch this six-foot savage for him."

He was a brave soldier, our Major, a splendid officer, and a kind and Christian man, but in no wise inclined to overlook the delinquencies of youthful ensigns; and he had rapped our knuckles soundly more than once. But we all loved him in our small mess of five—Captain Simpson, Lieutenant Boyd, and we two ensigns; and I think he knew it. Had we disliked him, among ourselves we would have dubbed him James, intending thereby disrespect; but to us he was Jimmy, flippantly, perhaps, but with a sure affection under all our impudence. And I think, too, that he knew we spoke of him among ourselves as Jimmy, and did not mind.

"Well, sir," he said sternly, as I entered with the Sagamore and gave him the officer's salute, "I have a good report of you from Lieutenant Boyd. I am gratified, Mr. Loskiel, that my confidence in

your ability and in your knowledge of the Indians was not misplaced. And you may inform me now, sir, how it is proper for me to address this Indian guide."

I glanced at Captain Simpson and Lieutenant Boyd, hesitating for a moment. Then I said:

"Mayaro is a Sagamore, Major—a noble and an ensign of a unique clan—the Siwanois, or magic clan, of the Mohican tribe of the great Delaware nation. You may address him as an equal. Our General Schuyler would so address him. The corps of officers in this regiment can scarce do less, I think."

Major Parr nodded, quietly offered his hand to the silent Siwanois, and, holding that warrior's sinewy fist in an iron grip that matched it, named him to Captain Simpson. Then, looking at me, he said slowly, in English:

"Mayaro is a great chief among his people—great in war, wise in council and debate. The Sagamore of the Siwanois Mohicans is welcome in this army and at the headquarters of this regiment. He is now one of us; his pay is the pay of a captain in the rifles. By order of General Clinton, commanding the Fourth, or New York, Brigade, I am requested to say to the Mohican Sagamore that valuable presents will be offered him for his services by General Sullivan, commander-in-chief of this army. These will be given when the Mohican successfully conducts this army to the Genessee Castle and to Catharines-town. I have spoken."

And to me he added bluntly:

"Translate, Mr. Loskiel."

"I think the Sagamore has understood, sir," said I. "Is it not so, Sagamore?"

"Mayaro has understood," said the Indian quietly.

"Does the great Mohican Sagamore accept?"

"My elder brother," replied the Sagamore calmly, "Mayaro has pledged his word to his younger brother Loskiel. A Mohican Sagamore never lies. Loskiel is my friend. Why should I lie to him? A Sagamore speaks the truth."

Which was true in a measure, at least as far as wanton or idle lying is concerned, or cowardly lying either, But he had lied to me concerning his knowledge of the strange maid, Lois, which kind of untruth all Indians consider more civil than a direct refusal to answer a question.

Boyd stood by, smiling, as the Major very politely informed me of the disposition he had made of the Sagamore and myself, recommended Mayaro to my most civil attention, and added that, for the present, I was relieved from routine duty with my battalion.

If the Siwanois perceived any undue precaution in the Major's manner of lodging him, he did not betray by the quiver of an eyelash that he comprehended he was practically under guard. He stalked forth and across the parade beside me, head high, bearing dignified and tranquil.

At the outer gate our junior ensign languidly dusted a speck of snuff from his wristband, and indicated the roof of our hut, which was visible above the feathery river willows. So we proceeded thither, I resigning my horse to the soldier, Mount, who had been holding him, and who was now detailed to act as soldier-servant to me still.

"Jack," said I, "if there be fresh-baked bread in the regimental ovens yonder, fetch a loaf, in God's name. I could gnaw black-birch and reindeer moss, so famished am I—and the Sagamore, too, no doubt, could rattle a flam with a wooden spoon."

But our chief baker was a Low-Dutch dog from Albany; and it was not until I had bathed me in the Mohawk, burrowed into my soldier's chest, and put on clean clothing that Jack Mount managed to steal the loaf he had asked for in vain. And this, with a bit of salt beef and a bowl of fresh milk, satisfied the Siwanois and myself.

I had been relieved of all routine duty, and was henceforth detailed to foregather with, amuse, instruct and casually keep an eye on my Mohican. In other words, my only duty, for the present, was to act as mentor to the Sagamore, keep him pleasantly affected toward our cause, see that he was

not tampered with, and that he had his bellyful three times a day. Also, I was to extract from him in advance any information concerning the Iroquois country that he might have knowledge of.

It was a warm and pleasant afternoon along the river where the batteaux, loaded with stores and soldiers, were passing up, and Oneida canoes danced across the sparkling water toward Fort Plain.

Many of our soldiers were bathing, sporting like schoolboys in the water; Lamb's artillerymen had their horses out to let them swim; many of the troops were washing their shirts along the gravelly reaches, or, seated cross-legged on the bank, were mending rents with needle and thread. Half a dozen Oneida Indians sat gravely smoking and blinking at the scene—no doubt belonging to our corps of runners, scouts, and guides, for all were shaved, oiled, and painted for war, and, under their loosened blankets, I could see their lean and supple bodies, stark naked, except for clout and ankle moccasin.

I sat in the willow-shade before the door of our hut, cross-legged, too, writing in my journal of what had occurred since last I set down the details of the day. This finished, I pouched quill, ink-horn, and journal, and sat a-thinking for a while of that strange maid, and what mischance might come of her woodland roving all alone—with Indian Butler out, and all that vile and painted, blue-eyed crew under McDonald.

Sombre thoughts assailed me there on that sunny July afternoon; I rested my elbow on my knee, forehead pressed against my palm, pondering. And ever within my breast was I conscious of a faint, dull aching—a steady and perceptible apprehension which kept me restless, giving my mind no peace, my brooding thoughts no rest.

That this shabby, wandering girl had so gained me, spite of the rudeness with which she used me, I could never seem to understand; for she had done nothing to win even my pity, and she was but a ragged gypsy thing, and had conducted with scant courtesy.

Why had I given her my ring? Was it only because I pitied her and desired to offer her a gift she might sell when necessary? Why had I used her as a comrade—who had been but the comrade of an hour? Why had I been so loath to part with her whom I scarce had met? What was it in her that had fixed my attention? What allure? What unusual quality? What grace of mind or person?

A slender, grey-eyed gypsy-thing in rags! And I could no longer rid my mind of her!

What possessed me? To what lesser nature in me was such a woman as this appealing? I would have been ashamed to have any officer or man of my corps see me abroad in company with her. I knew it well enough. I knew that if in this girl anything was truly appealing to my unquiet heart I should silence even the slightest threat of any response—discourage, ignore, exterminate the last unruly trace of sentiment in her regard.

Yet I remained there motionless, thinking, thinking—her faded rosebud lying in my hand, drooping but still fragrant.

Dismiss her from my thoughts I could not. The steady, relentless desire to see her; the continual apprehension that some mischance might overtake her, left me no peace of mind, so that the memory of her, not yet a pleasure even, nagged, nagged, nagged, till every weary nerve in me became unsteady.

I stretched out above the river bank, composing my body to rest—sleep perhaps. But flies and sun kept me awake, even if I could have quieted my mind.

So up again, and walked to the hut door, where within I beheld the Sagamore gravely repainting himself with the terrific emblems of death. He was seated cross-legged on the floor, my camp mirror before him—a superb specimen of manhood, naked save for clout, beaded sporran, and a pair of thigh moccasins, the most wonderful I had ever seen.

I admired his war-girdle and moccasins, speaking somewhat carelessly of the beautiful shell-work designs as "wampum"—an Iroquois term.

"Seawan," he said coldly, correcting me and using the softer Siwanois term. Then, with that true courtesy which ever seeks to ease a merited rebuke, he spoke pleasantly concerning shell-beads, and how they were made and from what, and how it was that the purple beads were the gold, the white beads the silver, and the black beads the copper equivalents in English coinage. And so we conducted

very politely and agreeably there in the hut, the while he painted himself like a ghastly death, and brightened the scarlet clan-symbol tatooed on his breast by touching its outlines with his brilliant paint. Also, he rebraided his scalp-lock with great care, doubtless desiring that it should appear a genteel trophy if taken from him, and be an honour to his conqueror and himself.

These matters presently accomplished, he drew from their soft and beaded sheaths hatchet and knife, and fell to shining them up as industriously as a full-fed cat polishes her fur.

"Mayaro," said I, amused, "is a battle then near at hand that you make so complete a preparation for it?"

A half-smile appeared for a moment on his lips:

"It is always well to be prepared for life or death, Loskiel, my younger brother."

"Oho!" said I, smiling. "You understood the express rider when he said that Indians had fired on our pickets a week ago!"

The stern and noble countenance of the Sagamore relaxed into the sunniest of smiles.

"My little brother is very wise. He has discovered that the Siwanois have ears like white men."

"Aye—but, Sagamore, I was not at all certain that you understood in English more than 'yes' and 'no.'"

"Is it because," he inquired with a merry glance at me, "my brother has only heard as yet the answer 'no' from Mayaro?"

I bit my lip, reddened, and then laughed at the slyly taunting reference to my lack of all success in questioning him concerning the little maiden, Lois.

At the same time, I realized on what a friendly footing I already stood with this Mohican. Few white men ever see an Iroquois or a Delaware laugh; few ever witness any relaxation in them or see their coldly dignified features alter, except in scorn, suspicion, pride, and anger. Only in time of peace and amid their own intimates or families do our Eastern forest Indians put off the expressionless and dignified mask they wear, and become what no white man believes them capable of becoming—human, tender, affectionate, gay, witty, talkative, as the moment suits.

At Guy Park, even, I had never seen an Iroquois relax in dignity and hauteur, though, of course, it was also true that Guy Johnson was never a man to inspire personal confidence or any intimacy. Nor was Walter Butler either; and Brant and his Mohawks detested and despised him.

But I had been told that Indians—I mean the forest Indians, not the vile and filthy nomad butchers of the prairies—were like ourselves in our own families; and that, naturally, they were a kindly, warm-hearted, gay, and affectionate people, fond of their wives and children, and loyal to their friends.

Now, I could not but notice how, from the beginning, this Siwanois had conducted, and how, when first we met, his eye and hand met mine. And ever since, also—even when I was watching him so closely—in my heart I really found it well-nigh impossible to doubt him.

He spoke always to me in a manner very different to that of any Indian I had ever known. And now it seemed to me that from the very first I had vaguely realized a sense of unwonted comradeship with this Siwanois.

At all events, it was plain enough now that, for some reason unknown to me, this Mohican not only liked me, but so far trusted me—entertained, in fact, so unusual a confidence in me—that he even permitted himself to relax and speak to me playfully, and with the light familiarity of an elder brother.

"Sagamore," I said, "my heart is very anxious for the safety of this little forest-running maid. If I could find her, speak to her again, I think I might aid her."

Mayaro's features became smooth and blank.

"What maiden is this my younger brother fears for?" he asked mildly.

"Her name is Lois. You know well whom I mean."

"Hai!" he exclaimed, laughing softly. "Is it still the rosy-throated pigeon of the forest for whom my little brother Loskiel is spreading nets?"

My face reddened again, but I said, smilingly:

"If Mayaro laughs at what I say, all must be well with her. My elder brother's heart is charitable to the homeless."

"And to children, also," he said very quietly. And added, with a gleam of humour, "All children, O Loskiel, my littlest brother! Is not my heart open to you?"

"And mine to you, Mayaro, my elder brother."

"Yet, you watched me at the fire, every night," he said, with keenest delight sparkling in his dark eyes.

"And yet I tracked and caught you after all!" I said, smiling through my slight chagrin.

"Is my little brother very sure I did not know he followed me?" he asked, amused.

"Did you know, Mayaro?"

The Siwanois made a movement of slight, but good-humoured, disdain:

"Can my brother who has no wings track and follow the October swallow?"

"Then you were willing that I should see the person to whom you brought food under the midnight stars?"

"My brother has spoken."

"Why were you willing that I should see?"

"Where there are wild pigeons there are hawks, Loskiel. But perhaps the rosy throat could not understand the language of a Siwanois."

"You warned her not to rove alone?"

He inclined his head quietly.

"She refused to heed you! Is that true? She left Westchester in spite of your disapproval?"

"Loskiel does not lie."

"She must be mad!" I said, with some heat. "Had she not managed to keep our camp in view, what had become of her now, Sagamore?" I added, reluctantly admitting by implication yet another defeat for me.

"Of course I know that you must have kept in communication with her—though how you did so I do not know."

The Siwanois smiled slyly.

"Who is she? What is she, Mayaro? Is she, after all, but a camp-gypsy of the better class? I can not believe it—yet—she roves the world in tatters, haunting barracks and camps. Can you not tell me something concerning her?"

The Indian made no reply.

"Has she made you promise not to?"

He did not answer, but I saw very plainly that this was so.

Mystified, perplexed, and more deeply troubled than I cared to admit to myself, I rose from the door-sill, buckled on belt, knife, and hatchet, and stood looking out over the river in silence for a while.

The Siwanois said pleasantly, yet with a hidden hint of malice:

"If my brother desires to walk abroad in the pleasant weather, Mayaro will not run away. Say so to Major Parr."

I blushed furiously at the mocking revelation that he had noted and understood the precautions of Major Parr.

"Mayaro," I said, "I trust you. See! You are confided to me, I am responsible for you. If you leave I shall be disgraced. But—Siwanois are free people! The Sagamore is my elder brother who will not blacken my face or cast contempt upon my uniform. See! I trust my brother Mayaro, I go."

The Sagamore looked me square in the eye with a face which was utterly blank and expressionless. Then he gathered his legs under him, sprang noiselessly to his feet, laid his right hand on the hilt of my knife, and his left one on his own, drew both bright blades with a simultaneous and graceful movement, and drove his knife into my sheath, mine into his own.

My heart stood still; I had never expected even to witness such an act—never dared believe that I should participate in it.

The Siwanois drew my knife from his sheath, touched the skin of his wrist with the keen edge. I followed his example; on our wrists two bright spots of blood beaded the skin.

Then the Sagamore filled a tin cup with clean water and extended his wrist. A single drop of blood fell into it. I did the same.

Then in silence still, he lifted the cup to his lips, tasted it, and passed it to me. I wet my lips, offered it to him again. And very solemnly he sprinkled the scarcely tinted contents over the grass at the door-sill.

So was accomplished between this Mohican and myself the rite of blood brotherhood—an alliance of implicit trust and mutual confidence which only death could end.

CHAPTER VI
THE SPRING WAIONTHA

It happened the following afternoon that, having written in my journal, and dressed me in my best, I left the Mohican in the hut a-painting and shining up his weapons, and walked abroad to watch the remaining troops and the artillery start for Otsego Lake.

A foot regiment—Colonel Gansevoort's—had struck tents and marched with its drums and colours early that morning, carrying also the regimental wagons and batteaux. However, I had been told that this veteran regiment was not to go with the army into the Iroquois country, but was to remain as a protection to Tryon County. But now Colonel Lamb's remaining section of artillery was to march to the lake; and whether this indicated that our army at last was fairly in motion, nobody knew. Yet, it seemed scarcely likely, because Lieutenant Boyd had been ordered out with a scout of twenty men toward the West branch of the Delaware, and he told me that he expected to be absent for several days. Besides, it was no secret that arms had not yet been issued and distributed to all the recruits in the foot regiments; that Schott's riflemen had not yet drawn their equipment, and that as yet we had not collected half the provisions required for an extensive campaign, although nearly every day the batteaux came up the river with stores from Schenectady and posts below.

Strolling up from the river that afternoon, very fine in my best, and, I confess, content with myself except for the lack of hair powder, queue, and ribbon, which ever disconcerted me, I saw already the two guns of the battalion of artillery moving out of their cantonment, the limbers, chests, and the forge well horsed and bright with polish and paint, the men somewhat patched and ragged, but with queues smartly tied and heads well floured.

Had our cannoneers been properly and newly uniformed, it had been a fine and stirring sight, with the artillery bugle-horn sounding the march, and the camp trumpets answering, and Colonel Lamb riding ahead with his mounted officers, very fine and nobly horsed, the flag flying smartly and most beautiful against the foliage of the terraced woods.

A motley assembly had gathered to see them march out; our General Clinton and his staff, in the blue and buff of the New York Line, had come over, and all the officers and soldiers off duty, too, as well as the people of the vicinity, and a horde of workmen, batteaux-men, and forest runners, including a dozen Oneida Indians of the guides.

Poor Alden's 6th Massachusetts foot regiment, which was just leaving for the lake on its usual road-mending detail, stood in spiritless silence to see the artillery pass; their Major, Whiting, as well as the sullen rank and file, seeming still to feel the disgrace of Cherry Valley, where their former colonel lost his silly life, and Major Stacia was taken, and still remained a prisoner.

As for us of Morgan's, we were very sorry for the mortified New Englanders, yet not at all forgetful of their carping and insolent attitude toward the ragged New York Line—where at least the majority of our officers were gentlemen and where proper and military regard for rank was most decently maintained. Gad! To hear your New Englander talk, a man might think that this same war was being maintained and fought by New England alone. And, damn them, they got Schuyler laid aside after all. But the New York Line went about its grim and patient business, unheeding their New England arrogance as long as His Excellency understood the truth concerning the wretched situation. And I for one marvelled that the sniffling 'prentices of Massachusetts and the Connecticut barbers and tin-peddlers had the effrontery to boast of New England valour while that arch-malcontent, Ethan Allen, and his petty and selfish yokels of Vermont, openly defied New York and Congress, nor scrupled to conduct most treasonably, to their everlasting and black disgrace. No Ticonderoga, no Bennington, could wipe out that outrageous treachery, or efface the villainy of what was done to Schuyler—the man who knew no fear, the officer without reproach.

The artillery jolted and clinked away down the rutty road which their wheels and horses cut into new and deeper furrows; a veil of violet dust hung in their wake, through which harness, cannon, and drawn cutlass glittered and glimmered like sunlit ripples through a mist.

Then came our riflemen marching as escort, smart and gay in their brown forest-dress, the green thrums rippling and flying from sleeve and leggin' and open double-cape, and the raccoon-tails all a-bobbing behind their caps like the tails that April lambkins wriggle.

Always the sight of my own corps thrilled me. I thanked God for those big, sun-masked men with their long, silent, gliding stride, their shirts open to their mighty chests, and the heavy rifles all swinging in glancing unison on their caped shoulders, carried as lightly as so many reeds.

I stood at salute as our Major and Captain Simpson strode by; grinned ever so little as Boyd came swinging along, his naked cutlass drawn, scarlet fringes tossing on his painted cape. He whispered as he passed:

"Murphy and Elerson took two scalps last night. They're drying on hoops in the barracks. Look and see if they be truly Seneca."

At that I was both startled and disgusted; but it was well-nigh impossible to prevent certain of our riflemen who had once been wood-runners from treating the Iroquois as the Iroquois treated them. And they continued to scalp them as naturally as they once had clipped pads and ears from panther and wolf. Mount and the rifleman Renard no longer did it, and I had thought to have persuaded Murphy and Elerson to conduct more becoming. But it seemed that I had failed.

My mind was filled with resentful thoughts as I entered the Lower Fort and started across the swarming parade toward the barracks, meaning to have a look at these ghastly trophies and judge to what nation they belonged.

People of every walk in life were passing and repassing where our regimental wagons were being loaded, and I threaded my way with same difficulty amid a busy throng, noticing nobody, unless it were one of my own corps who saluted my cockade.

Halfway across, a young woman bearing a gunny-sack full of linen garments and blankets to be washed blocked my passage, and being a woman I naturally gave her right of way. And the next instant saw it was Lois.

She had averted her head, and was now hurriedly passing on, and I turned sharply on my heel and came up beside her.

"Lois," I managed to say with a voice that was fairly steady, "have you forgotten me?"

Her head remained resolutely averted; and as I continued beside her, she said, without looking at me:

"Do you not understand that you are disgracing yourself by speaking to me on the parade? Pass on, sir, for your own sake."

"I desire to speak to you," I said obstinately.

"No. Pass on before any officers see you!"

My face, I know, was fiery red, and for an instant all the ridicule, the taunts, the shame which I might well be storing up for myself, burned there for anyone to see. But stronger than fear of ridicule rose a desperate determination not to lose this maid again, and whether what I was doing was worthy, and for her sake, or unworthy, and for my own, I did not understand or even question.

"I wish to talk with you," I said doggedly. "I shall not let you go this time."

"Are you mad to so conduct under the eyes of the whole fort?" she whispered. "Go your way!"

"I'd be madder yet to let you get away again. My way is yours."

She halted, cheeks blazing, and looked at me for the first time.

"I ask you not to persist," she said, "–for my sake if not for yours. What an officer or a soldier says to a girl in this fort makes her a trull in the eyes of any man who sees. Do you so desire to brand me, Mr. Loskiel?"

"No," I said between my teeth, and turned to leave her. And, I think, it was something in my face that made her whisper low and hurriedly:

"Waiontha Spring! If you needs must see me for a moment more, come there!"

I scarcely heard, so tight emotion had me by the throat, and walked on blindly, all a-quiver. Yet, in my ears the strange wards sounded: "Waiontha—Waiontha—come to the Spring Waiontha —if you needs must see me."

On a settle before the green-log barrack, some of Schott's riflemen were idling, and now stood, seeing an officer.

"Boys," I said, "where is this latest foolery of Tim Murphy hung to dry?"

They seemed ashamed, but told me, As I moved on, I said carelessly, partly turning:

"Where is the Spring Waiontha?"

"On the Lake Trail, sir—first branch of the Stoney-Kill."

"Is there a house there?"

"Rannock's."

"A path to find it?"

"A sheep walk only. Rannock is dead. The destructives murdered him when they burned Cherry Valley. Mrs. Rannock brings us eggs and milk."

I walked on and entered the smoky barracks, and the first thing I saw was a pair o' scalps, stretched and hooped, a-dangling from the rafters.

Doubtless, Murphy and Elerson meant to sew them to their bullet pouches when cured and painted. And there was one reckless fellow in my company who wore a baldrick fringed with Shawanese scalps; but as these same Shawanese had murdered his father, mother, grandmother, and three little brothers, no officer rebuked him, although it was a horrid and savage trophy; but if the wearing of it were any comfort to him I do not know.

I looked closely at the ornamented scalps, despite my repugnance. They were not Mohawk, not Cayuga, nor Onondaga. Nor did they seem to me like Seneca, being not oiled and braided clean, but tagged at the root with the claws of a tree-lynx. They were not Oneida, not Lenape. Therefore, they must be Seneca scalps. Which meant that Walter Butler and that spawn of satan, Sayanquarata, were now prowling around our outer pickets. For the ferocious Senecas and their tireless war-chief, Sayanquarata, were Butler's people; the Mohawks and Joseph Brant holding the younger Butler in deep contempt for the cruelty he did practice at Cherry Valley.

Suddenly a shaft of fear struck me like a swift arrow in the breast, as I thought of Butler and of his Mountain Snakes, and of that mad child, Lois, a-gypsying whither her silly inclination led her; and Death in the forest-dusk watching her with a hundred staring eyes.

"This time," I muttered, "I shall put a stop to all her forest-running!" And, at the thought, I turned and passed swiftly through the doorway, across the thronged parade, out of the gate.

Hastening my pace along the Lake Road, meeting many people at first, then fewer, then nobody at all, I presently crossed the first little brook that feeds the Stoney-Kill, leaping from stone to stone. Here in the woods lay the Oneida camp. I saw some squaws there sewing.

The sheep walk branched a dozen yards beyond, running northward through what had been a stump field. It was already grown head-high in weeds and wild flowers, and saplings of bird-cherry, which spring up wherever fire has passed. A few high corn-stalks showed what had been planted there a year ago.

After a few moments following the path, I found that the field ended abruptly, and the solid walls of the forest rose once more like green cliffs towering on every side. And at their base I saw a house of logs, enclosed within a low brush fence, and before it a field of brush.

Shirts and soldiers' blankets lay here and there a-drying on the bushes; a wretched garden-patch showed intensely green between a waste of fire-blackened stumps. I saw chickens in a coop, and a cow switching forest flies. A cloud of butterflies flew up as I approached, where the running water of a tiny

rill made muddy hollows on the path. This doubtless must be the outlet to Waiontha Spring, for there to the left a green lane had been bruised through the elder thicket; and this I followed, shouldering my way amid fragrant blossom and sun-hot foliage, then through an alder run, and suddenly out across a gravelly reach where water glimmered in a still and golden pool.

Lois knelt there on the bank. The soldiers' linen I had seen in her arms was piled beside her. In a willow basket, newly woven, I saw a heap of clean, wet shirts and tow-cloth rifle-frocks.

She heard me behind her—I took care that she should—but she made no sign that she had heard or knew that I was there. Even when I spoke she continued busy with her suds and shirts; and I walked around the gravelly basin and seated myself near her, cross-legged on the sand, both hands clasping my knees.

"Well?" she asked, still scrubbing, and her hair was fallen in curls about her brow—hair thicker and brighter, though scarce longer, than my own. But Lord! The wild-rose beauty that flushed her cheeks as she laboured there! And when she at last looked up at me her eyes seemed like two grey stars, full of reflections from the golden pool.

"I have come," said I, "to speak most seriously."

"What is it you wish?"

"A comrade's privilege."

"And what may that be, sir?"

"The right to be heard; the right to be answered—and a comrade's privilege to offer aid."

"I need no aid."

"None living can truthfully say that," said I pleasantly.

"Oh! Do you then require charity from this pleasant world we live in?"

"I did not offer charity to you."

"You spoke of aid," she said coldly.

"Lois—is there in our brief companionship no memory that may warrant my speaking as honestly as I speak to you?"

"I know of none, Do you?"

I had been looking at her chilled pink fingers. My ring was gone.

"A ring for a rose is my only warrant," I said.

She continued to soap the linen and to scrub in silence. After she had finished the garment and wrung it dry, she straightened her supple figure where she was kneeling, and, turning toward me, searched in her bosom with one little, wet hand, drawing from it a faded ribbon on which my ring hung.

"Do you desire to have it of me again?" she asked, without any expression on her sun-freckled face.

"What? The ring?"

"Aye! Desire it!" I repeated, turning red. "No more than you desire the withered bud you left beside me while I slept."

"What bud, sir?"

"Did you not leave me a rose-bud?"

"I?"

"And a bit of silver birch-bark scratched with a knife point?"

"Now that I think of it, perhaps I may have done so—or some such thing—scarce knowing what I was about—and being sleepy. What was it that I wrote? I can not now remember—being so sleepy when I did it."

"And that is all you thought about it, Lois?"

"How can one think when half asleep"

"Here is your rose," I said angrily. "I will take my ring again."

She opened her grey eyes at that.

"Lord!" she murmured in an innocent and leisurely surprise. "You have it still, my rose? Are roses scarce where you inhabit, sir? For if you find the flower so rare and curious I would not rob you of it—no!" And, bending, soaked and soaped another shirt.

"Why do you mock me, Lois?"

"I! Mock you! La! Sir, you surely jest."

"You do so! You have done so ever since we met. I ask you why?" I repeated, curbing my temper.

"Lord!" she murmured, shaking her head. "The young man is surely going stark! A girl in my condition—such a girl as I mock at an officer and a gentleman? No, it is beyond all bounds; and this young man is suffering from the sun."

"Were it not," said I angrily, "that common humanity brought me here and bids me remain for the moment, I would not endure this."

"Heaven save us all!" she sighed. "How very young is this young man who comes complaining here that he is mocked—when all I ventured was to marvel that he had found a wild rose-bud so rare and precious!"

I said to myself: "Damn! Damn!" in fierce vexation, yet knew not how to take her nor how to save my dignity. And she, with head averted, was laughing silently; I could see that, too; and never in my life had I been so flouted to my face.

"Listen to me!" I broke out bluntly. "I know not who or what you are, why you are here, whither you are bound. But this I do know, that beyond our pickets there is peril in these woods, and it is madness for man or maid to go alone as you do."

The laughter had died out in her face. After a moment it became grave.

"Was it to tell me this that you spoke to me in the fort, Mr. Loskiel?" she asked.

"Yes, Two days ago our pickets were fired on by Indians. Last night two riflemen of our corps took as many Seneca scalps. Do you suppose that when I heard of these affairs I did not think of you—remembering what was done but yesterday at Cherry Valley?"

"Did you—remember—me?"

"Good God, yes!" I exclaimed, my nerves on edge again at the mere memory of her rashness. "I came here as a comrade—wishing to be of service, and—you have used me–"

"Vilely," she said, looking serenely at me.

"I did not say that, Lois–"

"I say it, Mr. Loskiel. And yet—I told you where to find me. That is much for me to tell to any man. Let that count a little to my damaged credit with you.... And—I still wear the ring you gave.... And left a rose for you, Let these things count a little in my favour. For you can scarcely guess how much of courage it had cost me." She knelt there, her bared arms hanging by her side, the sun bright on her curls, staring at me out of those strange, grey eyes.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.