Chambers Robert William

Cardigan

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Chambers R.

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Содержание

Chambers Robert W. Robert William Cardigan

INTRODUCTION

This is the Land of the Pioneer,
Where a life-long feud was healed;
Where the League of the Men whose Coats were Red
With the Men of the Woods whose Skins were Red
Was riveted, forged, and sealed.
Now, by the souls of our Silent Dead,
God save our sons from the League of Red!

Plough up the Land of Battle
Here in our hazy hills;
Plough! to the lowing of cattle;
Plough! to the clatter of mills;
Follow the turning furrows'
Gold, where the deep loam breaks,
While the hand of the harrow burrows,
Clutching the clod that cakes;
North and south on the harrow's line,
Under the bronzed pines' boughs,
The silvery flint-tipped arrows shine
In the wake of a thousand ploughs!

Plough us the Land of the Pioneer,
Where the buckskinned rangers bled;
Where the Redcoats reeled from a reeking field,
And a thousand Red Men fled;
Plough us the land of the wolf and deer,
The land of the men who laughed at fear,
The land of our Martyred Dead!

Here where the ghost-flower, blowing,
Grows from the bones below,
Patters the hare, unknowing,
Passes the cawing crow:
Shadows of hawk and swallow,
Shadows of wind-stirred wood,
Dapple each hill and hollow,
Here where our dead men stood:
Wild bees hum through the forest vines
Where the bullets of England hummed,
And the partridge drums in the ringing pines
Where the drummers of England drummed.

This is the Land of the Pioneer,
Where a life-long feud was healed;
Where the League of the Men whose Coats were Red
With the Men of the Woods whose Skins were Red
Was riveted, forged, and sealed.
Now, by the blood of our Splendid Dead,
God save our sons from the League of Red!

R. W. C.

Broadalbin.

PREFACE

Those who read this romance for the sake of what history it may contain will find the histories from which I have helped myself more profitable.

Those antiquarians who hunt their hobbies through books had best drop the trail of this book at the preface, for they will draw but a blank covert in these pages. Better for the antiquarian that he seek the mansion of Sir William Johnson, which is still standing in Johnstown, New York, and see with his own eyes the hatchet-scars in the solid mahogany banisters where Thayendanegea hacked out polished chips. It would doubtless prove more profitable for the antiquarian to thumb those hatchet-marks than these pages.

But there be some simple folk who read romance for its own useless sake.

To such quiet minds, innocent and disinterested, I have some little confidences to impart: There are still trout in the Kennyetto; the wild ducks still splash on the Vlaie, where Sir William awoke the echoes with his flintlock; the spot where his hunting-box stood is still called Summer-House Point; and huge pike in golden-green chain-mail still haunt the dark depths of the Vlaie water, even on this fair April day in the year of our Lord 1900.

The Author.

CHAPTER I

On the 1st of May, 1774, the anchor-ice, which for so many months had silver-plated the river's bed with frosted crusts, was ripped off and dashed into a million gushing flakes by the amber outrush of the springtide flood.

On that day I had laid my plans for fishing the warm shallows where the small fry, swarming in early spring, attract the great lean fish which have lain benumbed all winter under their crystal roof of ice.

So certain was I of a holiday undisturbed by school-room tasks that I whistled up boldly as I sat on my cot bed, sorting hooks according to their sizes, and smoothing out my feather-flies to make sure the moths had not loosened wing or body. It was, therefore, with misgiving that I heard Peter and Esk go into the school-room, stamping their feet to make what noise they were able, and dragging their horn-books along the balustrade.

Now we had no tasks set us for three weeks, for our schoolmaster, Mr. Yost, journeying with the post to visit his mother in Pennsylvania, had been shot and scalped at Eastertide near Fort Pitt – probably by some drunken Delaware.

My guardian, Sir William Johnson, who, as all know, was Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Crown, had but recently returned from the upper castle with his secretary, Captain Walter Butler; and, preoccupied with the lamentable murder of Mr. Yost, had found no time to concern himself with us or our affairs.

However, having despatched a messenger with strings and belts to remonstrate with the sachems of the Lenni-Lenape – they being, as I have said, suspected of the murder – we discovered that Sir William had also written to Albany for another schoolmaster to replace Mr. Yost; and it gave me, for one, no pleasure to learn it, though it did please Silver Heels, who wearied me with her devotion to her books.

So, hearing Esk and fat Peter on their way to the school-room, I took alarm, believing that our new schoolmaster had arrived; so seized my fish-rod and started to slip out of the house before any one might summon me. However, I was seen in the hallway by Captain Butler, Sir William's secretary, and ordered to find my books and report to him at the school-room.

I, of course, paid no heed to Mr. Butler, but walked defiantly down-stairs, although he called me twice in his cold, menacing voice. And I should have continued triumphantly out of the door and across the fields to the river had not I met Silver Heels dancing through the lower hallway, her slate and pencil under her arm, and loudly sucking a cone of maple sugar.

"Oh, Michael," she cried, "you don't know! Captain Butler has consented to instruct us until the new schoolmaster comes from Albany."

"Oh, has he?" I sneered. "What do I care for Mr. Butler? I'm going out! Let go my coat!"

"No, you're not! No, you're not!" retorted Silver Heels, in that teasing sing-song which she loved to make me mad withal. "Sir William says you are to take your ragged old book of gods and nymphs and be diligent lest he catch you tripping! So there, clumsy foot!" – for I had tried to trip her.

"Who told you that?" I answered, sulkily, snatching at her sugar.

"Aunt Molly; she set me to seek you. So now who's going fishing, my lord?"

The indescribable malice of her smile, her sing-song mockery as she stood there swaying from her hips and licking her sugar-cone, roused all the sullen obstinacy in me.

"If I go," said I, "I won't study my books anyway. I'm too old to study with you and Peter, and I won't! You will see!"

Sir William's favourite ferret, Vix, with muzzle on, came sneaking along the wall, and I grasped the lithe animal and thrust it at Silver Heels, whereupon she kicked my legs with her moccasins, which did not hurt, and ran up-stairs like a wild-cat.

There was nothing for me but to go to the school-room. I laid my rod in the corner, pocketed the ferret, dragged my books from under the library table, and went slowly up the stairs.

At sixteen I was as wilful a dunce as ever dangled feet in a school-room, knowing barely sufficient Latin to follow Cæsar through Gaul, loathing mathematics, scorning the poets, and even obstinately marring my pen-writing with a heavy backward stroke in defiance of Sir William and poor Mr. Yost.

As for mythology, my tow-head was over-crammed with kennel-lore and the multitude of small details bearing upon fishing and the chase, to accommodate the classics.

Destined, against my will, for Dartmouth College by my guardian, who very well understood that I desired to be a soldier, I had resolutely set myself against every school-room accomplishment, with the result that, at sixteen, I presented an ignorance which should have shamed a lad of ten, but did not mortify me in the least.

And now, to my dismay and rage, Sir William had set me once more in the school-room – and under Mr. Butler, too!

"Master Cardigan," said Mr. Butler when I entered the room, "Sir William desires you to prepare a recitation upon the story of Proserpine."

I muttered rebelliously, but jerked my mythology from the pile of books and began to thumb the leaves noisily. Presently tiring of dingy print, I moved up to the bench where sat the children, Peter and Esk, a-conning their horn-books.

Silver Heels pulled a face at me behind her French grammar book, and I pinched her arm smartly for her impudence. Then, casting about for something to do, I remembered the ferret in my pocket, and dragged it out. Removing the silver bit I permitted the ferret to bite Peter's tight breeches, not meaning to hurt him; but Peter screeched and Mr. Butler birched him well, knowing all the while it was no fault of Peter's; yet such was the nature of the man that, when angry, the innocent must suffer when the guilty were beyond his wrath.

I had remuzzled the ferret, and Peter was smearing the tears from his cheeks, when Sir William came in, very angry, saying that Mistress Molly could hear us in the nursery, and that the infant had fallen a-roaring with his new teeth.

"I did it, sir," said I, "and Mr. Butler punished Peter – "

"Silence!" said Sir William, sharply. "Put that ferret out the window!"

"The ferret is your best one – Vix," I answered. "She will run to the warren and we shall have to dig her out – "

"Pocket her, then," said Sir William, hastily. "Who gave you leave to pouch my ferrets? Eh? What has a ferret to do in school? Eh? Idle again? Captain Butler, is he idle?"

"He is a dunce," said Mr. Butler, with a shrug.

"Dunce!" echoed Sir William, quickly. "Why should he be a dunce when I have taught him? Granted his Latin would shame a French priest, and his mathematics sicken a Mohawk, have I not read the poets with him?"

Mr. Butler, a gentleman and an officer of rank and fortune, whose degraded whims led him now to instruct youth as a pastime, sharpened a quill in silence.

"Gad," muttered Sir William, "have I not read mythology with him till I dreamed of nymphs and satyrs and capered in my dreams till Mistress Molly – but that's neither here nor there. Micky!"

"Sir," I replied, sulkily.

Then he began to question me concerning certain gods and demi-gods, and I gaped and floundered as though I were no better than the inky rabble ruled over by Mr. Butler.

Sir William lounged by the window in his spurred boots and scarlet hunting-coat, and smelling foul of the kennels, which, God knows, I do not find unpleasant; and at every slap of the whip over his boots, he shot me through and through with a question which I had neither information nor inclination to answer before the grinning small fry.

Now to be hectored and questioned by Sir William like a sniffling lad with one eye on the birch and the other on Mr. Butler, did not please me. Moreover, the others were looking on – Esk with ink on his nose, Peter in tears, a-licking his lump of spruce, and that wild-cat thing, Silver Heels —

With every question of Sir William I felt I was losing caste among them. Besides, there was Mr. Butler with his silent, deathly laugh – a laugh that never reached his eyes – yellow, changeless eyes, round as a bird's.

Slap came the whip on the polished boot-tops, and Sir William was at it again with his gods and goddesses:

"Who carried off Proserpine? Eh?"

I looked sullenly at Esk, then at Peter, who put out his tongue at me. I had little knowledge of mythology beyond what concerned that long-legged goddess who loved hunting – as I did.

"Who carried off Proserpine?" repeated Sir William. "Come now, you should know that; come now – a likely lass, Proserpine, out in the bush pulling cowslips, bless her little fingers – when – ho! – up pops – eh? – who, lad, who in Heaven's name?"

"Plato!" I muttered at hazard.

"What!" bawled Sir William.

I felt for my underlip and got it between my teeth, and for a space not another word would I speak, although that hollow roar began to sound in Sir William's voice which always meant a scene. His whip, too, went slap-slap! on his boots, like the tail of a big dog rapping its ribs.

He was perhaps a violent man, Sir William, yet none outside of his own family ever suspected it or do now believe it, he having so perfect a control over himself when he chose. And I often think that his outbursts towards us were all pretence, and to test his own capacity for temper lest he had lost it in a long lifetime of self-control. At all events, none of us ever were the worse for his roaring, although it frightened us when very young; but we soon came to understand that it was as harmless as summer thunder.

"Come, sir! Come, Mr. Cardigan!" said Sir William, grimly. "Out with the gentleman's name – d'ye hear?"

It was the first time in my life that Sir William had spoken to me as Mr. Cardigan. It might have pleased me had I not seen Mr. Butler sneer.

I glared at Mr. Butler, whose face became shadowy and loose, without expression, without life, save for the fixed stare of those round eyes.

Slap! went Sir William's whip on his boots.

"Damme!" he shouted, in a passion, "who carried off that slut Proserpine?"

"The Six Nations, for aught I know!" I muttered, disrespectfully.

Sir William's face went redder than his coat; but, as it was ever his habit when affronted, he stood up very straight and still; and that tribute of involuntary silence which was always paid to him at such moments, we paid, sitting awed and quiet as mice.

"Turn the children free, Captain Butler," said Sir William, in a low voice.

Mr. Butler flung back the door. The children followed him, Esk bestowing a wink upon me, Peter grinning and toeing in like a Devon duck, and that wild-cat thing, Silver Heels —

"You need not wait, Captain Butler," said Sir William, politely.

Mr. Butler retired, leaving the door swinging. Out in the dark hallway I fancied I could still see his shallow eyes shining. I may have been mistaken. But all men know now that Walter Butler hath eyes that see as well by dark as by the light of the sun; and none know it so well as the people of New York Province and of Tryon County.

"Michael," said Sir William, "go to the slate."

I walked across the dusty school-room.

"Chalk!" shouted Sir William, irritated by my lagging steps.

I picked up a lump of chalk, balancing it in my palm as boys do a pebble in a sling.

Something in my eyes may have infuriated Sir William.

The next moment he had me by the arm, then by the collar, whip whistling like the chimney wind – and whistling quite as idly, for the blow never fell.

I freed myself; he made no effort to hold me.

"Keep your lash for your hounds!" I stammered.

He did not seem to hear me, but I planted myself in a corner and cried out that he dare not lay his whip on me, which was a shameful thing to taunt him with, for he had promised me never to lay rod to me; and I knew, as all the world knows, that Sir William Johnson had never broken his word to man or savage.

But still I faced him, now hurling safe defiance, now muttering revenge, until the scornful rebuke in his eyes began to shame me into silence. Tingling already with self-contempt, I dropped my head a little, not so low but what I could see Sir William's bulk motionless before me.

Presently he said, as though to himself: "If the boy's a coward, no man can lay the sin to me."

"I am not a coward!" I burst out, all a-quiver again, "and I ask your pardon, sir, for daring you to lay whip on me, – knowing your promise!"

Sir William scowled at me.

"To prove it," I went on, desperately, still trembling at the word "coward," "I will give you leave to drive a fish-hook through my hand and cut it out with your knife; and I'll laugh at the pain – as did that Mohawk lad when you cut the pike-hook out of his hand!"

"What the devil have I to do with your fish-hook and your Mohawks!" shouted Sir William, with a hearty oath.

Mortified, I shrank back while he fumed and cracked his whip and swore I was doomed to folly and a most vicious future.

"You assume the airs of a man," he roared – "you with your sixteen unbirched years – you with your gross ignorance and grosser impudence! A vicious lad, a bad, undutiful, sullen lad, ever at odds with the others, never diligent save with the fishing-rod – a lazy, quarrelsome rustic, a swaggering, forest-running fellow, without the polish or the presence of a gentleman's son! Shame on you!"

I set my teeth and shut both eyes, opening one, however, when I heard him move.

"I'll polish you yet!" he said, with an oath; "I'll polish you, and I'll temper you like the edge on a Mohawk hatchet."

"One red belt," I added, impudently, meaning that I defied him.

"Which you will cover with a white belt before the fires in this hearth are dead," he answered, gulping down the disrespect.

He laid his heavy hand on the door, then, turning, he bade me write with the chalk on the slate the history of Proserpine in verse, and await his further pleasure.

Sir William had shut the school-room door upon me. I listened. Had he locked it I should have kicked the panelling out into the hallway.

Standing there alone in the school-room beside the great slate, I read in dull anger the names of those who, tasks ended, were now free of the hateful place; here Esk had left his name above his sum, all smears; here fat Peter had written seven times, "David did die and so must I."

With a bit of buckskin I dusted these scrawls from the slate, slowly, for I was not yet of a mind to begin my task.

I opened the window behind me. A sweet spring wind was blowing. Putting up my nose to scent it, I saw the sky bluer than a heron's egg, and a little white cloud a-sailing up there all alone.

That year the snow had gone out in April, and the same day the blue-birds flew into the sheep-fold. Now, on this second day of May, robins were already running over the ground below the school-room window, a-tilting for worms like jack-snipes along the creek.

Folding my arms to lean on the sill, I could see a corner of the northern block-house, with a soldier standing guard below in the sunshine, and I peppered him well with spit-balls, he being a friend of mine.

His mystified anger brought but temporary pleasure to me. Behind me lay that villanous slate, and my task to deal with the ravishment of that silly creature, Proserpine – and that, too, in verse! Had it been my long-legged Diana with her view-halloo and her hounds and shooting her arrows like a Huron squaw from the lakes! But no! – my business lay with a puny, cowslip-pulling maid who had strayed from the stockade and got her deserts, too, for aught I know.

Leaning there in the breezy casement I tried to forget the jade, attentively observing the birds and the young fruit-trees, Sir William's pride. Now that the snow had melted I could see where mice, working under the crust in midwinter, had fatally girdled two young apple-trees; and I was sorry, loving apples as I do.

For a while my mind was occupied in devising a remedy against girdling; then the distant sparkle of the river caught my eye, and straightway my thoughts slipped into their natural channel, smoothly as the river flowed there in the sunshine; and I laid my plans for the taking of that bull-trout who had so grossly deceived and flouted me the past year – ay, not only me, but also that master of the craft, Sir William himself.

Thinking of Sir William, my lagging thoughts drifted back again to my desk. It madded me to pine here, making rhymes, while outside the sweet wind whispered: "Come out, Michael – come out into the green delight!"

Now Sir William had bidden me, not only to write my verses, but also to bide here awaiting his good pleasure. That meant he would return by-and-by. I had no stomach for further quarrels. Besides, I was ashamed of my disrespect and temper, and indeed, selfish, idle beast that I was, I did truly love Sir William because I knew he was the greatest man of our times – and because he loved me.

Resolved at last to accomplish some verses as proof of a contrite and diligent spirit, I set to work; and this is what I made:

"Proserpine did roam the hills,
Intent on culling daffydills;
Alas, in gleeful girlish sport,
She wandered too far from the fort,
Forgetting that no belt of peace,
Bound the people of Pluto from war to cease;
Alas, old Pluto lay in wait,
To ambush all who stayed out late;
And with a dreadful war-whoop he
Ran after the doomed Proserpine – "

Absorbed in my task, and, moreover, considerably affected by the piteous plight of the maid, I stepped back from the slate and for a moment conceived a generous idea of introducing somebody to rescue Proserpine and leave Pluto damaged – perhaps scalped. Reflection, however, dissuaded me from such a liberty, not that I found the anachronism at all discordant, for, living all my life in a family where Indians were oftener seen than white men, my hazy notions concerning classic myths were inextricably mixed with the reality of my own life, and were also gayly coloured by the legends I learned from my red neighbours. So, lazy dunce that I was, with but a fraction of my attention fixed on my tasks, mythology to me was but a Græco-Mohawk medley of jumbled fables, interesting only when they concerned war or the chase.

Still I did not feel at liberty to rescue Proserpine in my verses or plump a war-arrow into Pluto. Besides I knew it would enrage Sir William.

As I stood there, breathing hard, resolved to finish the wretched maiden quickly and let the metre go a-limping, behind me I heard the door stealthily open, and I knew that long-legged wild-cat thing, Silver Heels, had crept in, her moccasins making no noise.

I pretended not to notice her, knowing she had come to taunt me; and, for a space, she stood behind me, very still. Clearly, she was reading my verses, and I became angry. Not to show it, I made out to whistle and to draw a picture of a fish on the slate. Then she knew I had seen her and laughed hatefully.

"Oh," said I, "if there is somebody come a-prying, it must be Silver Heels!" And I turned around, pretending amazement at the justness of my hazard.

"You saw me," she answered, disdainfully.

"It is your hour for the stocks," I hinted.

"I won't go," she retorted.

To secure that grace of carriage and elegance of presence necessary for a young lady of quality, and to straighten her back, which truly was as straight as a pine, Sir William and Mistress Molly were accustomed to strap her to a pine plank and lock her in the stocks for an hour at noon, forbidding Peter, Esk, and me to tickle the soles of her feet.

It was noon now; I could hear the guard changing at the north block-house, tramp! tramp! tramp! across the stony way.

"If you don't go to the stocks now," I said, "you'll be sorry when you do go."

"If you tickle my feet, you great booby, I'll tell Sir William," she retorted, balancing defiantly from one heel to the other.

"Will you go, Silver Heels?" I insisted.

"My name isn't Silver Heels," she observed, still coolly tilting back and forth on heels and toes. "Call me by my right name and perhaps I'll go – and perhaps I won't. So there, Mr. Micky Dunce!"

"If I call you Felicity Warren, will you go?" I inquired cautiously.

"There! you have called me Felicity Warren!" she cried in triumph.

"I didn't," said I, in a temper; "I only said that there was such a person. But you are not that person! Anyway, you toe in like a Mohawk. Anyway, you're half wild-cat, half Mohawk."

"It's a lie!" she flashed; "I'm all white to the bones of my body!"

It was true. Indeed, she was kin to Sir William and niece to Sir Peter Warren, but, to torment her, we feigned to believe her one of Mistress Molly's brood, half Mohawk; and it madded her. Besides, had not the Mohawks dubbed her Silver Heels, a year ago, when, with naked flying feet, she had beaten us all in the foot-race before Sir William and half the people of the Six Nations?

The prize had been a Barlow jack-knife, which, before the race, I had looked upon as mine. Besides, I had rashly given my old knife to Esk, and that left me without a blade to notch whistles.

"You are a Mohawk," I said, resentfully; "also you are a cat-child beneath notice. When you are hungry you cry, 'Miau! *Eso cautfore!*' – like Peter."

"I don't!" she said, stamping her moccasin.

"Anyway," said I, disdaining to torment her further, "the guard is changed these ten minutes, and Sir William will come to find you here a-prying. *Esogee cadagcariax*," I added, incautiously.

"Who is Mohawk, now!" she cried, clapping her hands. "Bah, Mister Micky, it is spoon-meat *you* require to make you run the faster after jack-knives!"

This outrageous taunt ruffled me, the more for her laughter. I attempted to hold my head in the air and look down at the presumptuous child, but it appeared she had grown very fast in the past months since the race, and I was disturbed to find her eyes already on a straight line with mine, though she was but fifteen and I sixteen.

"I'm as high as you," she said.

"I can jump and touch the ceiling," said I; and did so.

She strove in vain, then called me dunce, and vowed what brains I had were in my feet. For that, and because she pushed me, I seized the chalk and wrote high on the slate:

"Silver Heels is Mohock she toes in like ducks."

She caught up the buckskin to wipe out the taunt, jostling me till the ferret in my pocket jumped out and ran round and round the room.

I jostled her; then she gave me a blow and a quick shove, whereupon I stumbled, pulling her to the floor to rub her face with chalk. She twisted and turned, kicking and striking while I rubbed chalk into her skin, till of a sudden she coiled up and bit me clean through the hand.

I was on my feet with a bound; she also, all white in the face and her eyes aflame.

The blood began welling up, running into my palm and along the fingers to the floor. At that same instant I heard the door of the nursery open, and I knew that Sir William was coming through the hall to the school-room.

From instinct I thrust my wounded hand into my breeches-pocket.

"Don't tell!" whispered Silver Heels, in a fright; "don't tell – and here is the jack-knife."

She thrust it into my right hand, then sped across the floor to the open window, and over the sill, dropping light as a cat on the grass below.

My first impulse was to follow her and give her such a spank as Mistress Molly administered the day she trounced her for pushing Peter into the creek. However, it was already too late; Sir William came quickly along the hall, and I had scarce time to step to the slate when he marched in.

Sir William had changed his clothing for the buckskin hunting-shirt and breeches which he was accustomed to wear when angling. He carried, too, that light, seasoned rod, fashioned for him by Thayendanegea, and on his bosom he wore a bouquet of gayly coloured feather-flies, made by Mistress Molly during the winter.

He approached the slate whereon my verses stared white and unfinished; and at first his brows knitted and he said, "Fudge, fudge, fudge!" Then of a sudden he sat down on the bench, clapping his hand to his brow.

"Oh Lord!" said he, and fell a-laughing, while I, hot, ashamed, and a little dizzy, my breeches-pocket being full of blood, gnawed my lips and glowered askance.

"The Lord's will be done," said he, taking breath. "Who am I to ordain, when He who fashioned yon tow-head designed it to hold neither Latin nor the classics?"

"It pleases you to laugh, sir," I muttered.

"Pleases me! Pleases me, quotha! Lad, it stabs me like a French dirk, nor can I guard the thrust in tierce! I have been wrong. A friar is not made with a twisted rope nor a man hanged with words. If you are not born a scholar, 'twas the mint-mark I could not read aright; and no blame to you, lad, no blame to you. Micky boy! Shall we leave Cæsar to go marching with his impedimenta and his Tenth Legion? Shall we consign the hypothenuse of all triangles to those who mend pens from the quills of wild-geese which better men have brought down with a single ball?"

I was regarding him wildly, uncertain of his meaning.

"Shall we," cried Sir William, heartily, "bid the nymphs and dryads farewell forever, lad, and save our learning for Roderick Random and a bowl of cider and the bitter nights of December?"

His meaning was dawning upon me slowly, for what with the pain of my hand and the dizziness, I was perhaps more stupid than usual.

"No," said Sir William, with a thump of his fist on his knee, "the college which my Lord Dartmouth has endowed is a haven for those who seek it, not a prison for men to be driven to."

He paused.

"I should have sought it," he said, dropping his head. "No wilderness, no wintry terrors, neither French scalping parties nor the savages of all the Canadas could have kept me from instruction had I, in my youth, been favoured by the opportunity I offer you."

I gazed at him in silence while the blood, overrunning my leather pocket, ran down to my knee-buckles.

"I was poor, without means, without counsel, save for the letters Sir Peter Warren wrote me. I traded for my daily bread; I read Ovid by lighted pine splinters; I worked – God knows I worked my flesh to the bone."

He sat, fingering the bunch of scarlet feather-flies in his breast.

"Our Lord gives us according to our needs —*when we take it*," he said, without irreverence. "I could have gone to England, to Oxford; I had saved enough. I did neither; I did not take the instruction I wished for, and God did not teach me Greek in my dreams," he added, bitterly.

The blood was now stealing down my stocking towards my shoe. I turned the leg so he could not observe it.

"Come, lad," he said, brightening up; "learning lies not always between thumbed leaves. I only wish that you bear yourself modestly and nobly through the world; that you keep faith with men, that your word once given shall never be withdrawn.

"This is the foundation. It includes courage. Further than that, I desire you, once a purpose formed and a course set, to steer fearlessly to the goal.

"I know you to be brave and honest; I know you to be a very Mohawk in the forest; I believe you to be merciful and tender underneath that boy's thoughtless and cruel hide.

"As for learning, I can do no more for you than I have done and have offered to do. If it pleases you, you may go to England, and learn the arts, bearing, and deportment you can never acquire here with us. No? Well, then, stay with us. I want you, Micky. We Irish are fond of each other – and I am an old man now – I am nigh sixty years, Michael – sixty years of battle. I would be glad of rest – with those I love."

My heart was very soft now. I looked at Sir William with an affection I had never before understood.

"There is one last thing I wish to add," he said, gravely, almost sadly. "Perhaps I may again refer to it – but I pray that it may not be necessary."

I sat up and rubbed my eyes to clear them from the sickly faintness which stole upward from my throbbing hand.

"It is this," he continued, in a low voice. "If it ever comes to you to choose between his Majesty our King and – and your native land – which God forbid! – go to your closet and kneel down, and stay there on your knees, hours, days! – until you have learned your own heart. Then – then – God go with you, Michael Cardigan."

He rose, and his face was years older. Slowly the colour came back into his cheeks; he fumbled with the brass-work on his fish-rod, then smiled.

"That is all," he said; "let Pluto chase Proserpine to hell, lad; and a devilish good place they say it is for those who like it! Where is that ferret? What! Running about unmuzzled! Hey! Vix! Vix! Come here, little reptile!"

"I'll catch her, sir," said I, stumbling forward.

But as I laid my hand on Vix the floor rose and struck me, and there I lay sprawling and senseless, with the blood running over the floor; and Sir William, believing me bitten by the ferret, pouched the poor beast and lifted me to a bench.

He must have seen my hand, however, for, when a cup of cold water set me spluttering and blinking, I found my hand tied up in Sir William's handkerchief and Sir William himself eying me strangely.

"How came that wound?" he said, bluntly.

I could not reply – or would not.

He asked me again whether the ferret bit me, and I was tempted to say yes. Treachery was abhorrent to me; I hated Silver Heels, but could not betray her, and it was easy to clap the blame on Vix.

"Sir?" I stammered.

"I asked what bit you," he said, icily.

I tried to say Vix, but the lie, too, stuck in my throat.

"I cannot tell you," I muttered.

"Then," said Sir William, with a strange smile of relief, "I shall not force you, Michael. May I honourably ask you how you come by this jack-knife?"

I shook my head. My face was on fire.

"Very well," he said. "Only remember that you are a man, now – a man of sixteen, and that I have to-day treated you as a man, and shall continue. And remember that a man's first duty is to protect the weaker sex, and his second duty is to endure from them all taunts, caprice, and torments without revenge. It is a hard lesson to learn, Micky, and only the true and gallant gentleman can ever learn it."

He smiled, then said:

"Pray find our little Silver Heels and return to her the jack-knife, which was her wampum-belt of faith in the honour of a gentleman."

And so he walked away, smoothing the fur of the red-eyed ferret against his breast.

CHAPTER II

When Sir William left me in the school-room, he left a lad of sixteen puffed up in a glow of pride. To be treated no longer as a fractious child – to be received at last as a man among men!

And what would Esk say? And Silver Heels, poor little mouse harnessed in the stocks below?

I had entered the school-room that morning a lazy, sullen, defiant lad, heavy-hearted, with chronic resentment against the discipline of those who had sent me into a hateful trap from the windows of which I could see the young, thirsty year quaffing spring sunshine. Now I was free to leave the accursed trap forever, a man of discretion, responsible before men, exacting from other men the same courtesies, attentions, and considerations which I might render them.

What a change had come to me, all in one brief May morning! As I stood there, resting my bandaged hand in the palm of the other, looking about me to realize the fortune which set my veins tingling, a great tide of benevolent condescension for the others swept over me, a ripple of pity and good-will for the hapless children whose benches lay in a row before me.

I no longer detested Silver Heels. I walked on tiptoe to her bench. There lay her slate and slate-pen; upon it I read a portion of the longer catechism. There, too, lay her quill and inky horn and a foolscap book sewed neatly and marked:

Felicity Warren

1774

HER BOOKE

Poor child, doomed for years still to steep her little fingers in ink-powder while, with the powder I should require hereafter, I expected to write fiercer tales on living hides with plummets cast in bullet-moulds!

Cramped with importance, I cast a contemptuous eye upon my poem which embellished the great slate, and scoured it partly out with the buckskin.

"My books," said I, to myself, "I will bestow upon Silver Heels and Esk;" and I carried out my philanthropic impulse, piling speller, reader, and arithmetic on Esk's bench; my Cæsar, my pair of globes, my compass, and my algebra I laid with Silver Heels's copy-book, first writing in the books, with some malice:

SILVER HEELS HER GIFT BOOKE FROM

MICHAEL CARDIGAN

BE DILIGENT AND OF GOOD THRIFT

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

For fat Peter, because I allowed Vix to bite his tight breeches, I left a pile of jacks beside his horn-book, namely, a slate-pen, three mended quills, a birchen box of ink-powder, a screw to trade with, two tops and an alley, pumice, a rule, and some wax.

Peter, though duck-limbed and half Mohawk, wrote very well in the Boston style, and could even copy in the Lettre Frisée – a poor art in some repute, but smelling to my nose of French flummery and deceit.

Having bestowed these gifts with a light heart, I walked slowly around the room, and I fear my walk was somewhat a strut.

I knew my small head was all swelled with vain imaginings; I saw myself in a flapped coat and lace, fingering the hilt of a sword at my hip, saluted by the sentries and the militia; I saw myself riding with Sir William as his deputy; I heard him say, "Mr. Cardigan, the enemy are upon us! We must fly!" – and I: "Sir William, fear nothing. The day is our own!" And I saw a lad of sixteen, with sword pointing upward and one hand twisted into Pontiac's scalp-lock, smile benignly upon Sir William, who had cast himself upon my breast, protesting that I had saved the army, and that the King should hear of it.

Then, unbidden, the apparition of Mr. Butler rose into my vain dreaming, and, though I am no prophet, nor can I claim the gift of seeing behind the veil, yet I swear that Walter Butler appeared to me all aflame and bloody with scalps bunched at his girdle —*and the scalps were not of the red men!*

Now my imagination smoking into fire, I saw myself dogging Mr. Butler with firelock a-trail and knife loosened, on! on! through fathomless depths of forest and by the still deeps of shadowy lakes, fording the roaring tumble of rivers, swimming silent pools as otters swim, but tracking him, ever tracking Captain Butler by the scent of his reeking scalps.

There was a dew on my eyebrows as I waked into sense. Yet again I fell straightway to imagining the glories of my young future. Truly I painted life in cloying colours; and always, when I accomplished gallant deeds, there stood Silver Heels to observe me, and to marvel, and to stamp her little moccasins in vexation that I, the pride and envy of all men, applauded, courted, nay, worshipped – I, the playmate she had in her silly ignorance flouted, now stood so far beyond her that she dared not twitch the skirt of my coat nor whisper, "Sir Michael, pray condescend to notice one who passes her entire life in admiring your careless exploits."

Perhaps I would smile at her – yes, I certainly should speak to her – not with familiarity. But I would be magnanimous; she should receive gifts, spoils from wars, and I would select a suitable husband for her from the officers of my household who adored me! No, I would not be hasty concerning a husband. That would be foolish, for Silver Heels must remain heart-whole and fancy-free to concentrate her envious admiration upon me.

In a sort of ecstasy I paraded the school-room, the splendour of my visions dulling eyes and ears, and it was not until he had called me thrice that I observed Mr. Butler standing within the doorway.

The unwelcome sight cleared my brains like a dash of spring-water in the face.

"It is one o'clock," said Mr. Butler, "and time for your carving lesson. Did you not hear the bugles from the forts?"

"I heard nothing, sir," said I, giving him a surly look, which he returned with that blank stare of the eyes, noticeable in hawks and kites and foul night birds surprised by light.

"Sir William dines early," he said, as I followed him through the dim hallway, past the nursery, and down stairs. "If he has to wait your pleasure for his slice of roast, you will await his pleasure for the remainder of the day in the school-room."

"It is not true!" I said, stopping short in the lower hallway. "I am free of that ratty pit forever! And of the old ferret, too," I added, insolently.

"By your favour," said Mr. Butler, "may I ask whether your erudition is impairing your bodily health, that you leave school so early in life, Master Cardigan?"

"If you were a real schoolmaster," said I, hotly, "I would answer you with a kennel lash, but you are an officer and a gentleman." And in a low voice I bade him go to the devil at his convenience.

"One year more and I could call you out for this," he said, staring at me.

"You can do it now!" I retorted, angrily, raising myself a little on my toes.

Suddenly all the hatred and contempt I had so long choked back burst out in language I now blush for. I called him a coward, a Huron, a gentleman with the instincts of a pedagogue. I heaped abuse upon him; I dared him to meet me; nay, I challenged him to face me with rifle or sword, when and where he chose. And all the time he stood staring at me with that deathly laugh which never reached his eyes.

"Measure me!" I said, venomously; "I am as tall as you, lacking an inch. I am a man! This day Sir William freed me from that spider-web you tenant, and now in Heaven's name let us settle that score which every hour has added to since I first beheld you!"

"And my honour?" he asked, coldly.

"What?" I stammered. "I ask you to maintain it with rifle or rapier! Blood scours tarnished names!"

"Not your blood," he said, with a stealthy glance at the dining-room door; "not the blood of a boy. That would rust my honour. Wait, Master Cardigan, wait a bit. A year runs like a spotted fawn in cherry-time!"

"You will not meet me?" I blurted out, mortified.

"In a year, perhaps," he said, absently, scarcely looking at me as he spoke.

Then from within the dining-hall came Sir William's roar: "Body o' me! Am I to be kept here at twiddle-thumbs for lack of a carver!"

I stepped back in an instant, bowing to Mr. Butler.

"I will be patient for a year, sir," I said. And so opened the door while he passed me, and into the dining-hall.

"I am sorry, sir," said I, but Sir William cut me short with:

"Damnation, sir! I am asking a blessing!"

So I buried my nose in my hollowed hand and stood up, very still.

Having given thanks in a temper, Sir William's frown relaxed and he sat down and tucked his finger-cloth under his neck with an injured glance at me.

"Zounds!" he said, mildly; "hell hath no fury like a fisherman kept waiting. Captain Butler, bear me out."

"I am no angler," said Mr. Butler, in his deadened voice.

"That is true," observed Sir William, as though condoling with Mr. Butler for a misfortune not his fault. "Perhaps some day the fever may scorch you – like our young kinsman Micky – eh, lad?"

I said, "Perhaps, sir," with eyes on the smoking joint before me. It was Sir William's pleasure that I learn to carve; and, in truth, I found it easy, save for the carving of a goose or of those wild-ducks we shot on the great Vlaie.

We were but four to dine that day: Sir William, Mr. Butler, Silver Heels, and myself. Mistress Molly remained in the nursery, where were also Peter and Esk, inasmuch as they slobbered and fouled the cloth, and so fed in the play-room.

Colonel Guy Johnson remained at Detroit, Captain John Johnson was on a mission to Albany, Thayendanegea in Quebec, and Colonel Claus, with his lady, had gone to Castle Cumberland. There were no visiting officers or Indians at Johnson Hall that week, and our small company seemed lost in the great dining-hall.

Having carved the juicy joint, the gilly served Sir William, then Mr. Butler, then Silver Heels, whom I had scarcely noticed, so full was I of my quarrel with Mr. Butler. Now, as Saunders laid her plate, I gave her a look which meant, "I did not tell Sir William," whereupon she smiled at her plate and clipped a spoonful from a dish of potatoes.

"Good appetite and good health, sir," said I, raising my wine-glass to Sir William.

"Good health, my lad!" said Sir William, heartily.

Glasses were raised again and compliments said, though my face was sufficient to sour the Madeira in Mr. Butler's glass.

"Your good health, Michael," said Silver Heels, sweetly.

I pledged her with a patronizing amiability which made her hazel-gray eyes open wide.

Now, coxcomb that I was, I sat there, dizzied by my new dignity, yet carefully watching Sir William to imitate him, thinking that, as I was now a man, I must observe the carriage, deportment, and tastes of men.

When Sir William declined a dish of jelly, I also waved it away, though God knew I loved jellies.

When Sir William drank the last of the winter's ale, I shoved aside my small-beer and sent for a mug.

"It will make a humming-top of your head," said Sir William. "Stick to small-beer, Micky."

Mortified, I tossed off my portion, and was very careful not to look at Silver Heels, being hot in the face.

Mr. Butler and Sir William spoke gravely of the discontent now rampant in the town of Boston, and of Captain John Johnson's mission to Albany. I listened greedily, sniffing for news of war, but understood little of their discourse save what pertained to the Indians.

Some mention, indeed, was made of rangers, but, having always associated militia and rangers with war on the Indians, I thought little of what they discussed. I even forgot my new dignity, and secretly pinched a bread crumb into the shape of a little pig which I showed to Silver Heels. She thereupon pinched out a dog with hound's ears for me to admire.

I was roused by Sir William's voice in solemn tones to Mr. Butler: "Now, God forbid I should live to see that, Captain Butler!" and I pricked up my ears once more, but made nothing of what followed, save that there were certain disloyal men in Massachusetts and New York who might rise against our King and that our Governor Tryon meant to take some measures concerning tea.

"Well, well," burst out Sir William at length; "in evil days let us thank God that the fish still swim! Eh, Micky? I wish the ice were out."

"The anchor-ice is afloat, and the Kennyetto is free, sir," I said, quickly.

"How do you know?" asked Sir William, laughing.

I had, the day previous, run across to the Kennyetto to see, and I told him so.

He was pleased to praise my zeal and to say I ran like a Mohawk, which praise sounded sweet until I saw Silver Heels's sly smile, and I remembered the foot-race and the jack-knife.

But I was above foot-races now. Others might run to amuse me; I would look on – perhaps distribute prizes.

"Some day, Sir William, will you not make me one of your deputies?" I asked, eagerly.

"Hear the lad!" cried Sir William, pushing back his chair. "On my soul, Captain Butler, it is time for old weather-worn Indian commissioners like me to resign and make way for younger blood! And his Majesty might be worse served than by Micky here; eh, Captain Butler?"

"Perhaps," said Mr. Butler, in his dead voice.

Sir William rose and we all stood up. The Baronet, brushing Silver Heels on his way to the door, passed his arm around her and tilted her chin up.

"Now do you go to Mistress Mary and beg her to place you in the stocks for an hour; and stay there in patience for your body's grace. Will you promise me, Felicity?"

Silver Heels began to pout and tease, hooking her fingers in Sir William's belt, but the Baronet packed her off with his message to Mistress Molly, and went out to the portico where one of his damned Scotch gillies attended with gaff, spear, and net-sack.

"Oho," thought I, "so it's salmon in the Sacondaga!" And I fell to teasing that he might take me, too.

"No, Micky," he said, soberly; "it's less for sport than for quiet reflection that I go. Don't sulk, lad. To-morrow, perhaps."

"Is it a promise, sir?" I cried.

"Perhaps," he laughed, "if the cards turn up right."

That meant he had some Indian affair on hand, and I fell back, satisfied that his rod was a ruse, and that he was really bound for one of the council fires at the upper castle.

So he went away, the sentry at the south block-house presenting his firelock, and I back into the hall, whistling, enchanted with my new liberty, yet somewhat concerned as to the disposal of so vast an amount of time, now all my own.

I had now been enfranchised nearly three hours, and had already used these first moments of liberty in picking a mortal quarrel with Mr. Butler. I had begun rashly; I admitted that; yet I could not regret the defiance. Soon or late I felt that Mr. Butler and I would meet; I had believed it for years. Now that at last our tryst was in sight, it neither surprised nor disturbed me, nor, now that he was out of my sight, did I feel impatient to settle it, so accustomed had I become to waiting for the inevitable hour.

I strolled through the hallway, hands in pockets, whistling "Amaryllis," a tune that smacked on my lips; and so came to the south casement. Pressing my nose to the pane, I looked into the young orchard where the robins ran in the new grass; and I found it delicious to linger in-doors, knowing I was free to go out when I chose, and none to cry, "Come back!"

In the first flush of surprise and pleasure, I have noticed that the liberated seldom venture instantly into that freedom so dearly desired. Open the cage of a thrush that has sung all winter of freedom, and lo! the little thing, creeping out under the sky, runs back to the cage, fearing the sweet freedom of its heart's desire.

So I; and mounted the stairway, seeking my own little chamber. Here I found Esk and Peter at play, letting down a string from the open window, baited with corn, and the pullets jumping for it with great outcry and flapping of wings.

So I played with them for a while, then put them out, and bolted the door despite their cries and kicks.

Sitting there on my cot I surveyed my domain serenely, proud as though it had been a mansion and all mine.

There were my books, not much thumbed save *Roderick Random* and the prints of Le Brun's *Battles of Alexander*. Still I cherished the others because gifts of Sir William or relics of my honoured father – the two volumes called *An Introduction to Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy*; two volumes of *Chambers's Dictionary*; all the volumes of *The Gentleman's Magazine* from 1748; Titan's *Loves of the Gods*– an immodest print which I hated; my beloved "Amaryllis," called *A New Musical Design*,

and well bound; and last a manuscript much faded and eaten by mice, yet readable, and it was a most lovely song composed long since by a Mr. Pepys, the name of which was "Gaze not on Swans!"

My chamber was small, yet pleasing. Upon the walls I had placed, by favour of Sir William, pictures of the best running-horses at Newmarket, also four prints of a camp by Watteau, well executed, though French. Also, there hung above the door a fox's mask, my whip, my hunting-horn, my spurs, and two fish-rods made for me by Joseph Brant, who is called Thayendanegea, chief of the Mohawk and of the Six Nations, and brother to Aunt Molly, who is no kin of mine, though her children are Sir William's, and he is my kinsman.

In this room also I kept my black lead-pencil made by Faber, a ream of paper from England, and a lump of red sealing-wax.

I had written, in my life, but two letters: one three years since I wrote to Sir Peter Warren to thank him for a sum of money sent for my use; the other to a little girl named Marie Livingston, whom I knew in Albany when Sir William took me for the probating of papers which I do not yet understand.

She wrote me a letter, which was delivered by chance, the express having been scalped below Fonda's Bush, and signed "your cozzen Marie," Mr. Livingston being kin to Sir William. I had not yet written again to her, though I had meant to do so these twelve months past. She had yellow hair which was pleasing, and she did not resemble Silver Heels in complexion or manner, having never flouted me. Her father gave me two peaches, some Salem sweets called Black Jacks, and a Delaware basket to take home with me, heaped with macaroons, crisp almonds, rock-candy, caraways, and suckets. These I prudently finished before coming again to Johnson Hall, and I remember I forgot to save a sucket for Silver Heels; and her anger when I gave her the Delaware basket all sticky inside; and how Peter licked it and blubbered while still a-licking.

Thus, as I sat there on my cot, scenes of my life came jostling me like long-absent comrades, softening my mood until I fell to thinking of those honoured parents I had never seen save in the gray dreams which mazed my sleep. For the day that brought life to me had robbed my honoured mother of her life; and my father, Captain Cardigan, lying with Wolfe before Quebec, sent a runner to Sir William enjoining him to care for me should the chance of battle leave me orphaned.

So my father, with Wolfe's own song on his lips:

"Why, soldiers, why
Should we be melancholy boys?
Why, soldiers, why?
Whose business 'tis to die – "

fell into Colonel Burton's arms at the head of Webb's regiment, and his dying eyes saw the grenadiers wipe out the disgrace of Montmorency with dripping bayonets. So he died, with a smile, bidding Webb's regiment God-speed, and sending word to the dying Wolfe that he would meet him a minute hence at Peter's gate in heaven.

Thus came I naturally by my hatred for the French, nor was there in all France sufficient wampum to wipe away the feud or cover the dear phantom that stood in my path as I passed through life my way.

Now, as I sat a-thinking by the window, below me the robins in all the trees had begun their wild-wood vespers – hymns of the true thrush, though not rounded with a thrush's elegance.

The tree-shadows, too, had grown in length, and the afternoon sun wore a deeper blazonry through the hill haze in the west.

Fain to taste of the freedom which was now mine, I went out and down the stairs, passing my lady Silver Heels strapped to a back-board and in a temper with her sampler.

"Oh, Micky," she said, "my bones ache, and Mistress Molly is with the baby, and the key is there on that brass nail."

"It would be wrong if I released you," said I, piously, meaning to do it, nevertheless.

"Oh, Micky," she said, with a kind of pitiful sweetness which at times she used to obtain advantages from me.

So I took the key and unlocked the stocks, giving her feet a pinch to let her know I was not truly as soft-hearted as she might deem me, nor too easily won by woman's beseeching.

And now, mark! No sooner was she free than she gave me a slap for the pinch and away she flew like a tree-lynx with the pack in cry.

"This," thought I, "is a woman's gratitude," and I locked the stocks again, wishing Silver Heels's feet were in them.

"Best have it out at once with Mistress Molly," thought I, and went to the nursery. But before I could knock on the door, Mistress Molly heard me with her ears of a Mohawk, and came to the door with one finger on her lips.

Truly the sister of Thayendanegea was a stately and comely lady, and a beauty, too, being little darker than some French ladies I have seen, and of gracious and noble presence.

Bearing and mien were proud, yet winning; and, clothed always as befitted the lady of Sir William Johnson, none who came into her presence could think less of her because of her Mohawk blood or the relation she bore to Sir William – an honest one as she understood it.

She ruled the Hall with dignity and with an authority that none dreamed of opposing. At table she was silent, yet gracious; in the nursery she reigned a beloved and devoted mother; and if ever a man's wife remained his sweetheart to the end, Molly Brant was Sir William's true-love while his life endured.

"Why did you release Felicity from the stocks, Michael?" said she, in a whisper.

So her quick Indian ear had heard the click of that lock!

"I had come to tell you of it, Aunt Mary," said I.

She looked at me keenly, then smiled.

"A sin confessed is half redressed. I had meant to release Felicity some time since, but the baby had fretted herself to sleep in my arms and I feared to put her down. But, Michael, remember in future to ask permission when you desire to play with Felicity."

"Play with Felicity!" I said, scornfully. "I am past the playing age, Aunt Molly, and I only released her because I thought her back ached."

Mistress Molly looked at me again, long and keenly.

"Little savage," she said, gently, "mock at my people no more. I should chide you for misusing Peter, but – I will say nothing. You make my heart heavy sometimes."

"I do honour and love you, Aunt Molly!" I said; "it was not that I mocked at Peter, but his breeches were so tight that I wondered if Vix could bite him. I shall now go to the garden and allow Peter to kick my shins. Anyway, I gave him all my quills and a plummet and a screw."

She laughed silently, bidding me renounce my intention regarding Peter, and so dismissed me, with her finger on her lips conjuring silence.

So I pursued my interrupted way to the garden where the robins carolled in every young fruit-tree, and the blue shadows wove patterns on the grass.

Peter and Esk were on the ground playing at marbles, with Silver Heels to judge between them.

Esk, perceiving me, cried out: "Knuckle down at taws, Micky! Come on! Alleys up and fen dubs!"

"Fen dubs your granny!" I replied, scornfully, clean forgetting my new dignity. "Dubs all, and bull's-eyes up is what I play, unless you want to put in agates?" I added, covetously.

Esk shook his head in alarm, muttering that his agates were for shooters; but fat Peter, sprawling belly down at the ring, offered to put up an agate against four bull's-eyes, two agates, and twelve miggs, and play dubs and span in a round fat.

The proposition was impudent, unfair, and thoroughly Indian. I was about to spurn it when Silver Heels chirped up, "Micky doesn't dare."

"Put up your agate, Peter," said I, coolly, ignoring Silver Heels; and I fished the required marbles from my pocket and placed them in the ring.

"My shot," announced Peter, hurriedly, crowding down on the line, another outrage which, considering the presence of Silver Heels, I passed unnoticed.

Peter shot and clipped a migg out of the ring. He shot again and grazed an agate, shouting "Dubs!" to the derision of us all.

Then I squatted down and sent two bull's-eyes flying, but, forestalled by Peter's hysterical "Fen dubs!" was obliged to replace one. However, I shot again and it was dubs all, and I pocketed both of my agates and Peter's also.

This brought on a wrangle, which Silver Heels settled in my favour. Then I sat down and, with deadly accuracy, "spun," from which comfortable position, and without spanning, I skinned the ring, leaving Peter grief-stricken, with one migg in his grimy fist.

"You may have them," said I, condescendingly, dropping my spoils into Silver Heels's lap.

She coloured with surprise and pleasure, scarcely finding tongue to say, "Thank you, Micky."

Peter, being half Indian, demanded more play. But I was satiated and, already remembering my dignity, regretted the lapse into children's pastimes. I quieted Peter by giving him the remainder of my marbles, explaining that I had renounced such games for manlier sport, which statement, coupled with my lavish generosity, impressed Peter and Esk, if it had not effect upon Silver Heels.

I sat down on the stone bench near the bee-hives and drew from my pocket the jack-knife given me by Silver Heels as a bribe to silence.

"Come over here, Silver Heels," I said, with patronizing kindness.

"What for?" she demanded.

"Oh, don't come then," I retorted, whereat she rose from the grass with her skirt full of marbles and came over to the stone bench.

After a moment she seated herself, eying the knife askance. I had opened the blade. Lord, how I hated to give it back!

"Take it," said I, closing the blade, but not offering it to her.

"Truly?" she stammered, not reaching out her hand, for fear I should draw it away again to plague her.

I dropped the knife into her lap among the marbles, thrilling at the spectacle of my own generosity.

She seized it, repeating:

"King, King, double King!
Can't take back a given thing!"

"You needn't say 'King, King, double King,'" said I, offended; "for I was not going to take it back, silly!"

"Truly, Michael?" she asked, looking up at me. Then she added, sweetly, "I am sorry I bit you."

"Ho!" said I, "do you think you hurt me?"

She said nothing, playing with the marbles in her lap.

I sat and watched the bees fly to and fro like bullets; in the quiet even the hills, cloaked in purple mantles, smoked with the steam of hidden snow-drifts still lingering in ravines where arbutus scents the forest twilight.

The robins had already begun their rippling curfew call; crickets creaked from the planked walk. Behind me the voices of Peter and Esk rose in childish dispute or excited warning to "Knuckle down hard!" Already the delicate spring twilight stained the east with primrose and tints of green. A calm star rose in the south.

Presently Silver Heels pinched me, and I felt around to pinch back.

"Hush," she whispered, jogging my elbow a little, "there is a strange Indian between us and the block-house. He has a gun, but no blanket!"

For a moment a cold, tight feeling stopped my breath, not because a strange Indian stood between me and the block-house, but because of that instinct which stirs the fur on wild things when taken unawares, even by friends.

My roughened skin had not smoothed again before I was on my feet and advancing.

Instantly, too, I perceived that the Indian was a stranger to our country. Although an Iroquois, and possibly of the Cayuga tribe, yet he differed from our own Cayugas. He was stark naked save for the breech-clout. But his moccasins were foreign, so also was the pouch which swung like a Highlander's sporran from his braided clout-string, for it was made of the scarlet feathers of a bird which never flew in our country, and no osprey ever furnished the fine snow-white fringe which hung from it, falling half-way between knee and ankle.

Observing him at closer range, I saw he was in a plight: his flesh dusty and striped with dry blood where thorns had brushed him; his eyes burning with privation, and sunk deep behind the cheek-bones.

As I halted, he dropped the rifle into the hollow of his left arm and raised his right hand, palm towards me.

I raised my right hand, but remained motionless, bidding him lay his rifle at his feet.

He replied in the Cayuga language, yet with a foreign intonation, that the dew was heavy and would dampen the priming of his rifle; that he had no blanket on which to lay his arms, and further, that the sentinels at the block-houses were watching him with loaded muskets.

This was true. However, I permitted him to advance no closer until I hailed a soldier, who came clumping out of the stables, and who instantly cocked and primed his musket.

Then I asked the strange Cayuga what he wanted.

"Peace," he said, again raising his hand, palm out; and again I raised my hand, saying, "Peace!"

From the scarlet pouch he drew a little stick, six inches long, and painted red.

"Look out," said I to the soldier, "that is a war-stick! If he shifts his rifle, aim at his heart."

But the runner had now brought to light from his pouch other sticks, some blood-red, some black ringed with white. These he gravely sorted, dropping the red ones back into his pouch, and naïvely displaying the black and white rods in a bunch.

"War-ragh-i-ya-gey!" he said, gently, adding, "I bear belts!"

It was the title given by our Mohawks to Sir William, and signified, "One who unites two peoples together."

"You wish to see Chief Warragh," I repeated, "and you come with your pouch full of little red sticks?"

He darted a keen glance at me, then, with a dignified gesture, laid his rifle down in the dew.

A little ashamed, I turned and dismissed the soldier, then advanced and gave the silent runner my hand, telling him that although his moccasins and pouch were strange, nevertheless the kin of the Cayugas were welcome to Johnson Hall. I pointed at his rifle, bidding him resume it. He raised it in silence.

"He is a belt-bearer," I thought to myself; "but his message is not of peace."

I said, pleasantly:

"By the belts you bear, follow me!"

The dull fire that fever kindles flickered behind his shadowy eyes. I spoke to him kindly and conducted him to the north block-house.

"Bearer of belts," said I, passing the sentry, and so through the guard-room, with the soldiers all rising at attention, and into Sir William's Indian guest-room.

My Cayuga must have seen that he was fast in a trap, yet neither by word nor glance did he appear to observe it.

The sun had set. A chill from the west sent the shivers creeping up my legs as I called a soldier and bade him kindle a fire for us. Then on my own responsibility I went into the store-room and rummaged about until I discovered a thick red blanket. I knew I was taking what was not mine; I knew also I was transgressing Sir William's orders. Yet some instinct told me to act on my own discretion, and that Sir William would have done the same had he been here.

A noise at the guard door brought me running out of the store-room to find my Cayuga making to force his way out, and the soldiers shoving him into the guest-room again.

"Fall back!" I cried, my wits working like shuttles; and quickly added in the Cayuga tongue: "Cayugas are free people; free to stay, free to go. Open the door for my brother who fears his brother's fireside!"

There was a silence; the soldiers stood back respectfully; a sergeant opened the outer door. But the Indian, turning his hot eyes on me, swung on his heel and re-entered the guest-room, drawing the flint from his rifle as he walked.

I followed and laid the thick red blanket on his dusty shoulders.

"Sergeant," I called, "send McCloud for meat and drink, and notify Sir William as soon as he arrives that his brothers of the Cayuga would speak to him with belts!"

I was not sure of the etiquette required of me after this, not knowing whether to leave the Cayuga alone or bear him company. Tribes differ, so do nations in their observance of these forms. One thing more puzzled me: here was a belt-bearer with messages from some distant and strange branch of the Cayuga tribe, yet the etiquette of their allies, our Mohawks, decreed that belts should be delivered by sachems or chiefs, well escorted, and through the smoke of council fires never theoretically extinguished between allies and kindred people.

One thing I of course knew: that a guest, once admitted, should never be questioned until he had eaten and slept.

But whether or not I was committing a breach of etiquette by squatting there by the fire with my Cayuga, I did not know.

However, considering the circumstances, I called out for a soldier to bring two pipes and tobacco; and when they were fetched to me, I filled one and passed it to the Cayuga, then filled the other, picked a splinter from the fire, lighted mine, and passed the blazing splinter to my guest.

If his ideas on etiquette were disturbed, he did not show it. He puffed at his pipe and drew his blanket close about his naked body, staring into the fire with the grave, absent air of a cat on a wintry night.

Now, stealing a glance at his scalp-lock, I saw by the fire-light the stumps of two quills, with a few feather-fronds still clinging to them, fastened in the knot on his crown. The next covert glance told me that they were the ragged stubs of the white-headed eagle's feathers, and that my guest was a chief. This set me in a quandary. What was a strange Cayuga chief doing here without escort, without blanket, yet bearing belts? Etiquette absolutely forbade a single question. Was I, in my inexperience, treating him properly? Would my ignorance of what was due him bring trouble and difficulty to Sir William when he returned?

Suddenly resolved to clear Sir William of any suspicion of awkwardness, and at the risk of my being considered garrulous, I rose and said:

"My brother is a man and a chief; he will understand that in the absence of my honoured kinsman, Sir William Johnson, and in the absence of officers in authority, the hospitality of Johnson Hall falls upon me.

"Ignorant of my brother's customs, I bid him welcome, because he is naked, tired, and hungry. I kindle his fire; I bring him pipe and food; and now I bid him sleep in peace behind doors that open at his will."

Then the Cayuga rose to his full noble height, bending his burning eyes on mine. There was a silence; and so, angry or grateful, I knew not which, he resumed his seat by the fire, and I went out through the guard-room into the still, starry night.

But I did not tarry to sniff at the stars nor search the dewy herbage for those pale blossoms which open only on such a night, hiding elf-pearls in their fairy petals. Straightway I sought Mistress Molly in the nursery, and told her what I had done. She listened gravely and without comment or word of blame or praise, which was like all Indians. But she questioned me, and I described the strange belt-bearer from his scalp-lock to the sole of his moccasin.

"Cayuga," she said, softly; "what make was his rifle?"

"Not English, not French," I said. "The barrel near the breech bore figures like those on Sir William's duelling pistols."

"Spanish," she said, dreamily. "In his language did he pronounce *agh* like *ahh*?"

"Yes, Aunt Molly."

She remained silent a moment, thoughtful eyes on mine. Then she smiled and dismissed me, but I begged her to tell me from whence my Cayuga came.

"I will tell you this," she said. "He comes from very, very far away, and he follows some customs of the Tuscaroras, which they in turn borrow from a tribe which lives so far away that I should go to sleep in counting the miles for you."

With that she shut the nursery door, and I, no wiser than before, and understanding that Mistress Molly did not mean I should be wiser, sat down on the stairs to think and to wait for Sir William.

A moment later a man on horseback rode out of our stables at a gallop and clattered away down the hill. I listened for a moment, then thought of other things.

CHAPTER III

At late candle-light, Sir William still tarrying, I went to the north block-house, where Mr. Duncan, the lieutenant commanding the guard, received me with unusual courtesy, the reason of which I did not at the time suspect.

"An express from Sir William has at this moment come in," said he. "Sir William is aware that a belt-bearer from Virginia awaits him."

"How could Sir William, who is at Castle Cumberland, know that?" I began, then was silent, as it flashed into my mind that Mistress Molly had sent an express to Sir William as soon as I had told her about the strange Cayuga. That was the galloping horseman I had heard.

Pondering and perplexed, I looked up to find Mr. Duncan smiling at me.

"I understand," said he, "that Sir William is pleased to approve your conduct touching the strange Cayuga."

"How do you know?" I asked, quickly, my heart warming with pleasure.

"I know this," said Mr. Duncan, laughing, "that Sir William has left something for you with me, a present, in fact, which I am to deliver to you on the morrow."

"What is it, Mr. Duncan?" I teased; but the laughing officer shook his head, retiring into the guard-room and pretending to be afraid of me.

The soldiers, lounging around the settles, pipes between their teeth, looked on with respectful grins. Clearly, even they appeared to know what Sir William had sent to me from Castle Cumberland.

As I stood in the guard-room, eager, yet partly vexed, away below in the village the bell in the new stone church began to ring.

"What is that?" I asked, in surprise.

The soldiers had all risen, taking their muskets from the racks, straightening belts and bandoleers. In the stir and banging of gun-stocks on the stone floor, my question perhaps was not heard by Mr. Duncan, for he stood silent, untwisting his sword knots and eying the line which the sergeant, who carried the halberd, was forming in the room.

A drummer and a trumpeter took station, six paces to the right and front; the sergeant, at a carry, advanced and saluted with, "Parade is formed, sir."

"'Tention!" sang out Mr. Duncan. "Support arms! Carry arms! Trail arms! File by the left flank! March!" And with drawn claymore on his shoulder he passed out into the starlight.

I followed; and now, standing by the block-house gate, far away in the village I heard the rub-a-dub of a drum and a loud trumpet blowing.

Nearer and nearer came the drum; the trumpet ceased. And now I could hear the tramp, tramp, tramp of infantry on the hill's black crest.

"Present arms!" cried Mr. Duncan, sharply.

A dark mass which I had not supposed to be moving, suddenly loomed up close in front of us, taking the shape of a long column, which passed with the flicker of starlight on musket and belt, tramp, tramp, tramp to the ringing drum-beats.

Then our drum rattled and trumpet sang prettily, while Mr. Duncan rendered the officer's salute as a dark stand of colours passed, borne furled and high above the slanting muskets.

Baggage wains began to creak by, great shapeless hulks rolling in on the black ocean of the night, with soldiers half asleep on top, and teamsters afoot, heads hanging drowsily and looped raw-hides trailing.

The last yoke of oxen passed, dragging a brass cannon.

"'Tention!" said Mr. Duncan. "Support arms! Trail arms! 'Bout face! By the right flank, wheel! March!"

Back into the block-house filed the guard, the drummer bearing his drum flat on his hip, the trumpeter swinging his instrument to his shoulder-knots.

Mr. Duncan sent his claymore ringing into the scabbard, wrapped his plaid around his throat, and strolled off towards the new barracks, east of the Hall.

"What troops were those, sir?" I asked, respectfully.

"Three companies of Royal Americans from Albany," said he. Then, noticing my puzzled face, he added, "There is to be a big council fire held here, Master Cardigan. Did you not know it?"

"No," said I, slowly, reluctant to admit that I had not shared Sir William's confidence.

"Look yonder," said Mr. Duncan.

Far out in the pale starlight, south and west of the Hall, I saw fires kindled, one by one, until the twinkle of their lights ran for a mile across the uplands. On a hill in the north a signal fire sent long streamers of flame straight up into the sky; other beacons flashed out in the darkness, some so distant that I could not be certain they were more than sparks of my imagination.

"It is the Six Nations gathering," said Mr. Duncan. "We expect important guests."

"What for?" I asked.

"I don't know," said Mr. Duncan, gravely. "Good-night, Mr. Cardigan."

"Good-night, sir," I said, thoughtfully; then cried after him, "and my present, Mr. Duncan?"

"To-morrow," he answered, and passed on his way a-laughing.

I walked quickly back to the Hall, where I encountered Esk and Peter, well bibbed, cleaning the last crumb from their bowls of porridge.

"Did you see the soldiers?" cried Esk, tapping upon his bowl and marching up and down the hallway.

"Look out of the back windows," added Peter. "The Onondaga fires are burning on the hills."

"Oneidas," corrected Esk.

"Onondagas," persisted Peter, smearing his face with his spoon to lick it.

"Where is Silver Heels?" I asked.

Mistress Molly came into the hall from the pantry, keys jingling at her girdle, and took Peter by his sticky fingers, bidding Esk follow.

"Bed-time," she said, with her pretty smile. "Michael, Felicity is being dressed by Betty. If Sir William does not return, you will dine with Felicity alone; and I expect you to conduct exactly like Sir William, and refrain from kicking under the table."

"Yes, Aunt Molly," said I, delighted.

Esk and Peter, being instantly hustled bedward, left lamenting and asserting that they too were old enough to imitate Sir William.

Silver Heels, with her hair done by Betty, and a blue sash over her fresh-flowered cambric, passed them on the stairs coming down, pausing to wish Mistress Molly good-night, and to slyly pinch fat Peter.

"Felicity," said Mistress Molly, "will you conduct as befits your station?"

"Oh la, Aunt Molly!" she answered, with that innocent, affected lisp which I knew was ever the forerunner of mischief.

She made her reverence, waiting on the landing until she heard the nursery door close, then flung both legs astride the balustrade and slid down like a flash.

"Have you seen the soldiers, Micky? – and the fires on the hills?" she cried. "To-morrow all the officers will be here, and I am to wear my hair curled, and my pink dress and tucker, with separate sleeves of silver gauze!"

We sat down on the stairs together as friendly and polite as though we never quarrelled; and she chattered on, smoothing her bib-apron with those silky hands of hers: "Betty rolled up my hair till I feared she meant to scalp me, and so told her.

"She coaxed me to endure, and called me her little Miss Honey-bee, but would not promise me a comfit; so I ran away before my cap was tied on. Micky, go and put on your silk breeches and lace cuffs and we will be gay and grand to dine!"

I ran to my chamber, bathed and dressed in all my finery, meaning to lord it in the dining-hall should Sir William not return.

So that night Silver Heels and I supped alone together in the great hall, Mr. Butler having hurriedly ridden to his home, and Sir William not yet returned, though two hours past candle-light.

The hall was quiet and vast, and Silver Heels seemed exceedingly small, sitting in the big chair at the other end of the table. So I had the gillie lay her plate beside mine.

A single pair of candles lighted our supper, and those not of the best, for they smoked as the wind stirred the curtains.

"Do you not know what is due to quality?" said I, sternly, to the gillie – a raw yokel scented with whiffs of the stables.

The kilted oaf gaped at me.

"Do you not see it is dark here?" I said.

"'Tis far lichter than ye wud expeck for sae big a room, sir," said the gillie, with a foolish grin.

"Young Bareshanks," I retorted; "do you bring instantly a dozen wax candles and light them, idiot, in a seemly row! Also fetch Sir William's sherry and Madeira, and take away those pot-house pewters!"

The gillie made out to do as he was bidden, and I should have felt very grand and contented at being obeyed without questions had I not perceived him, through the buttery window, wink at the pantry-lad and put his mottled Scotch muzzle into my small-beer.

When the dozen waxen candles stood in a ring, all twinkling, and the decanters flanked me right and left, I bade the gillie leave us, mistrusting he might bear tales to Sir William touching our behaviour at table. But the dunce loitered, trimming wicks, and casting sidewise looks at me.

"Will you be gone?" said I, in a passion.

"Maister Michael," he whined; "ye'll no be soopin' till the blessing's said? Sir William gave us a grand discoorse this noon dinner, sir, verra suitable words, sir."

Mortified at my forgetfulness, I rose; so did Silver Heels, the candle-light sparkling under her half-closed lashes, for she ever kept one eye on duty.

In a rage I said grace before meat, then glared at the gillie.

"Aave heerd waur, sir," quoth he; "but aa never sleep the nicht without ma blessing, and aa'l no begin noo!"

"Get out, you Scotch loon," said I, "or I'll let this bottle fly with my blessing!"

He ran for it, at which Silver Heels and I laughed heartily until she spilled her wine on her knees, which spoiled her temper.

When the echoing of our laughter had died away in the dark corners of the room, an unaccustomed depression fell upon me. I peered up at the stags' shaggy heads, set around the wall; their dark glazed eyes reflected the little candle flames like fiery eyeballs of living bucks. The stillness in the familiar room troubled me.

Something of this Silver Heels also experienced, but the novelty of playing the grand lady with her sherry and her tea set her tongue a-swinging, clip-clap! She shrugged her shoulders and tossed her chin, pretending to trifle with a dish of cakes, vowing she had no appetite; but her hunger could not long withstand the pastry, and she ate all the suckets and cakes before I either perceived or prevented it.

Distressed at her greediness, I removed the caraways from the plate and pouched them to eat at my pleasure, whereupon she kicked my shins under the table.

But she would still play my Lady Languish, sighing and protesting she could not touch another morsel, and her cheeks full the while. Too, she drank of both sherry and Madeira, which was forbidden

by Sir William, and became over-loud in speech until her humour changed to a fit of upbraiding me, and ended in the sulks.

I remember we had a brandied syrup, of which she also took too much, it making her pettish and sleepy; and after supper, when we sat together on the stairs, she harped ever on the same string, reproaching me for playing the high and mighty, whereas all could plainly see I was nothing but a boy like Esk and Peter and need give myself no plumes.

"My legs," she said, drowsily, "can touch the floor from the third stair as well as yours;" and she stretched them down to prove it, falling short an inch.

"If you are no longer a child," said I, "why do they harness you to the back-board and make you wear pack-thread stays?"

This madded her.

"You shall see," she said, in a temper, "you shall see me in flowered caushets, silk stockings, and shoes of Paddington's make, which befit my station and rank! You shall see me in padusoy and ribbons and a hat of gauze! I shall wear pompadour gloves and shall take no notice of you, with your big hands and feet, pardieu!"

"Nor I of you," said I, "tricked out in your silly flummery." And I drew a caraway from my pocket and bit deep.

"Yes, you will," said Silver Heels; "give me a caraway, piggy."

Sitting there in the dark, nibbling in silence, I could hear the distant stir of the convoy at the barracks, and wondered why the soldiers had come. Surely not because of danger to us at the Hall, for we had our Mohawks, our militia, and yeoman tenantry at beck and call. Besides, who would dare threaten Sir William Johnson, the greatest man in the colonies, and very dearly esteemed by our King?

"They say," said Silver Heels, "that there are men in Boston who have even defied the King himself."

"Never fear," said I, "they'll all hang for it."

"Would you like to fight for the King?" she asked, civilly, and without a trace of that mockery which left a sting, much as I pretended to despise it.

I said I should like to very much; that my father had died for his King, and that I should one day avenge him.

I would have said more, perhaps boasted, for Silver Heels was inclined to listen; but black Betty came down-stairs, her double ear-rings a-jingle, calling her "li'l Miss Honey-bee" to come to bed.

Silver Heels stood up, rubbing her eyes and stretching. I could not help noticing that she seemed to be growing very tall.

"Good-night, Micky," she said, with her mechanical curtsey, and took Betty's black hand.

Although there was now nobody to bid me retire, I went to my chamber gladly, for, what with the excitement of the morning, the arrival of the Cayuga, and, later, the soldiers – and also, I think, Sir William's sherry – my head was tired and confused.

I slept none too soundly. Dreams came crowding around my pillow; visions of Mr. Butler chasing Silver Heels awoke me.

I sat up in my bed and parted the curtains. Through the window I could see the watchful eyes of Indian fires glimmering from hill and hollow, and over all the little stars, all awake, watching the sleeping world.

A cock began crowing somewhere down in the village, although no tint of dawn appeared. But the crickets had ceased, and the stars grew paler, and that silence which is the dawn's true herald warned me to sleep again ere the red sun should steal over the edge of the world and catch me waking.

Then I slept soundly, and the sly sun had painted many a figure on my walls ere I waked to hear the bugle playing at the barracks, and Sir William's hounds baying in their kennels.

Dub! dub! rub-a-dub-dub! Dub! dub! rub-a-dub-dub!

The guard was changing at the block-house, while I, all shivers, dashed cold water over me from head to foot and rubbed my limbs into a tingle.

How sweetly came the matins of the robins! A kennel-lad, standing in the sunshine by the stables, wound his hunting-horn till the deep-jowled hounds drowned all with their baying.

In breeches and shirt I leaned from the open window to smell the young year, and saw Silver Heels's head at the next window, her hair in her eyes, and bare arms propping her chin.

She put out her tongue at me, but I bade her good-morning so civilly that she smiled and asked me if I had slept well.

"No," said I; "dreams disturbed me."

"It was the cakes and sherry," she observed, with a grimace.

"I also dreamed, and screamed until Betty came and rocked me in her arms. Which proves," she added, "that we are both too young to dine and wine imprudently. I am coming in to tell you what I dreamed. Open the door."

She entered, bundled in a wool blanket, and sat cross-legged on the bed, chattering of her dreams, how, in her sleep, she saw me mammocked by savages, among them Peter, who had grown big and sly and fierce like a fat bear cub in December.

Meanwhile I made of my hair a neat queue and tied it; then put on my buckskin vest with flaps, and my short hunting-shirt over it.

"Are you going to fish?" asked Silver Heels, enviously.

"If Sir William does," said I. "He sent me a present from Castle Cumberland last night. I doubt not that it may be a new fish-rod for salmon."

Presently she went away to be dressed by Betty, and I hastened down the stairs, impatient to find Mr. Duncan and have my present; nay, so fast and blindly did I speed that, swinging around the balustrade, I plumped clean into Sir William, coming up.

"What's to do! What's to do!" he exclaimed, testily. "Is there no gout in the world, then, wooden feet!"

"Oh, Sir William! My present from Castle Cumberland!" I stammered. "Is it a salmon-rod?"

"Now the wraith of old Isaac pinch ye!" said Sir William, half laughing, half angry. "What the devil have I to do with your presents and your fish-rods? Presents! Gad! It's a new algebra you need!"

"You promised not to," said I, stoutly.

"Did I?" said Sir William, with a twinkle in his eyes. "So I did, lad; so I did! Well, perhaps it is not an algebra book after all."

"Then let us go to Mr. Duncan and get it now," I replied, promptly.

"You may not want my present when you see it," argued Sir William, who did ever enjoy to plague those whom he loved best.

But I pulled him by the hand, and he pretended to go with reluctance and many misgivings.

At the door of the north block-house, Mr. Duncan rendered Sir William the officer's salute, which Sir William returned.

"Mr. Duncan," said he, "have you knowledge hereabouts of a certain present sent in your care for Mr. Cardigan here?"

"Now that you mention it, sir," replied Mr. Duncan, gravely, "I do dimly recall something of the sort."

"Was it not a school-book?" inquired Sir William.

"It was a parcel," replied Mr. Duncan, dubiously; "belike it hid a dozen good stout Latin books, sir."

I endured their plaguing with rising excitement. What could my present be?

"Take him in, Mr. Duncan," said Sir William at last. "And," to me, "remember, sir, that you forget not your manners when you return to me, for I shall await you here at the door."

Cramping with curiosity, I followed Mr. Duncan into his own private chamber, which connected with the guard-room. But I saw no parcels anywhere; in fact, there was nothing to be noticed save an officer's valise at the foot of Mr. Duncan's bed.

"It is for you," he said; "open it."

At the same moment I perceived my own name painted on the leather side, and the next instant I had stripped the lid back. Buff and gold and scarlet swam the colours of the clothing before my amazed eyes; I put out a trembling hand and drew an officer's vest from the valise.

"Here are the boots, Mr. Cardigan," said the lieutenant, lifting a pair of dress boots from behind a curtain. "Here is the hat and sword, too, and a holster with pistols."

"Mine!" I gasped.

"By this commission of our Governor," said Mr. Duncan, solemnly, drawing from his breast a parchment with seal and tape. "Mr. Cardigan, let me be the first to welcome you as a brother officer."

I had gone so blind with happy tears that I scarce could find his kind, warm hand outstretched, nor could I decipher the commission as cornet of horse in the Royal Border Regiment of irregulars.

He mercifully left me then, and I stood with head pinched in my fingers, striving to realize what had arrived to me.

But I did not tarry long to gape and devour my uniform with my eyes. One after another my hunting-shirt, vest, leggings, shoon, flew from me. I pulled on the buff breeches, and laced them tight, drew on the boots, set the vest close and buttoned it, then put on coat and hat, and lastly tied my silver gorget.

What I could see of myself in Mr. Duncan's glass left me dazed with admiration. I set my sword belt, hung the sword with one glove in the hilt, and so, walking on air, I passed the guard-room with all the soldiers at stiff attention, and came to Sir William.

He looked up sharply, without the familiar smile. But my wits were at work and I stopped short at three paces, heels together, and gave the officer's salute.

Sir William's lips twitched as he rendered the salute, then, casting his ivory cane on the grass, he stepped forward with arms outstretched, and I fell into them like a blubbering schoolboy.

To those contented and peaceful people who have never known that gnawing desire for the noblest of all professions, the soldier's, I can only say that I was contented. To those who themselves have known the longing it is needless to describe my happiness and pride, my gratitude to those who had honoured me, my impetuous thirst for service, my resolve to set heart and soul towards high ideals and thoughts, my solemn boyish prayers that I might conduct nobly in the eyes of all men, for God and King and country.

Something of my thoughts may have disclosed themselves in my face as Sir William laid both hands on my shoulders, for he looked at me a long while with kindly, steady eyes. His countenance was serene and benign when he spoke in that clear voice whose harmony and perfect cadence has charmed a thousand council fires, and turned feverish spleen and hatred into forbearance and reconciliation.

"My boy," he said, "the key to it all is faith. Keep faith with all men; keep faith with thyself. This wins all battles, even the greatest and last!"

Very soberly we returned to the Hall, where a small company were assembled for breakfast – Mistress Molly, Major Wilkes of the battalion which arrived the night before, Captains Priestly, Borrow, and McNeil, of the same regiment, my friend Lieutenant Duncan of the militia, and Silver Heels.

When Sir William and I entered the Hall the officers came to pay their respects to the Baronet, and I, red as a Dutch pippin, crossed the room to where Mistress Molly stood with Silver Heels.

Bending to salute her hand, cocked hat crushed under one arm, I discharged my duties with what composure I could command; but Mistress Molly put both arms around me and kissed me on both cheeks.

"I knew all about it," she whispered. "We are very proud, Sir William and I. Be tender and faithful. It is all we ask."

Dear, dear Aunt Molly! While life lasts can I ever forget those sweet, grave words of love, spoken to a boy who stood alone on the threshold of life?

Slowly I turned to look at Silver Heels, all my vanity, conceit, and condescension vanished.

She had turned quite pale; her eyes seemed set and fascinated, and she wished me happiness in a low voice, as though uncertain of her own words.

Chilled by her lifeless greeting, I returned to Sir William, who presented me to the guests with unconcealed pride:

"My kinsman, Mr. Cardigan, gentlemen; Captain Cardigan's only son!"

The officers, all in full dress, brilliant with the red, green, and gold of the Royal Americans, greeted me most kindly, some claiming acquaintance with my honoured father, and all speaking of his noble death before Quebec.

Before we sat at table, they gave me a standing toast, all touching glasses with me, and Sir William, smiling, with one arm around my shoulder.

So we sat down to breakfast, a breakfast I, being excited, scarcely tasted; but I listened with all my ears to the discourse touching the late troubles in New York and Massachusetts, concerning the importation of tea by the East India Company. The discussion soon became a monologue, for the subject was one which Sir William understood from A to Zed, and his eloquence upon it had amazed and irritated people of more importance than our Governor Tryon himself.

"Look you," said Sir William, in his clear voice like a bell; "look you, gentlemen; I yield to no man in loyalty and love to my King; but this I know and dare maintain here or at St. James: that his Majesty whom I serve and honour is misled by his ministers, and neither he nor they suspect the truth concerning these colonies!"

The officers were all attention, some leaning forward to lose no word or inflection; Mistress Molly poured the roundly abused tea, and her gentle dark eyes ever stole proudly towards Sir William.

"Gentlemen," said Sir William, blandly, "you all are aware that since last December the Atlantic Ocean is become but a vast pot of cold tea."

The laughter which followed sounded to me a trifle strained, as well it might be, considering the insolence of the people who had flung this defiance into the King's ocean.

"Very well," said Sir William, with that tight crease running around his jaw which meant his mind was made up. "This is the true history of that trouble, gentlemen. Judge for yourselves where lies the blame." And, leaning back in his chair, one hand lifted, he began:

"That damned East India Company, floundering about with the non-importation pill in its gullet, found itself owing the government fourteen hundred thousand pounds, with seventeen million pounds of unsold tea on its hands.

"Nobody likes bankruptcy, so off go the East India gentlemen with their petition to Parliament for permission to export their tea to America, free of duty, and so put it in the power of the company to sell tea here cheaper than in England. And now I ask you, gentlemen, whether in all these broad colonies there are not some few men whose motives are other than sordid?

"Your answers must be 'yes!' – because the colonists themselves so answered when they burned the *Gaspee*! – when they gathered at Griffin's wharf and made tea enough for the world to drink! – when John Lamb set his back to the portcullis of the fort and the tea commissioners ran like rabbits!

"God forbid that I, a humble loyal subject of my King, should ever bear out the work of rebels or traitors. But I solemnly say to you that the rebels and traitors are not the counterfeit Indians of Griffin's wharf, not the men who fired the *Gaspee* aflame from sprit to topmast, not that man who set his back to the fort in New York! But they are those who whisper evil to my King at St. James – and may God have mercy on their souls!"

In the silence which followed, Sir William leaned forward, his heavy chin set on his fists, his eyes looking into the future which he alone saw so clearly.

None durst interrupt him. The officers watched him silently – this great man – this great Irishman who had been the sole architect of his own greatness; this great American who saw what we, even now, cannot see as clearly as did he.

There he sat, dumb, eyes on vacancy; a plain man, a Baronet of the British realm, a member of the King's Council, a major-general of militia, and the superintendent of the Indian Department in North America.

A plain man; but a vast land-holder, the one man in America trusted blindly by the Indians, a man whose influence was enormous; a man who was as simple as a maid, as truthful as a child, as kind as the Samaritan who passed not on the other side.

A plain man, but a prophet.

There was a step at the door; Mr. Duncan spoke in a low tone with the orderly, then returned to Sir William.

"The Indian belt-bearer is at the block-house, sir," he said.

Sir William rose. The officers made their adieux and left. Only Sir William, Mistress Molly, Silver Heels, and I remained in the dining-hall.

The Baronet looked across at Mistress Molly, and a sad smile touched his eyes.

She took Silver Heels by the hand and quietly left the room.

"Michael," said Sir William; "listen closely, but remain silent concerning what this belt-bearer has to say. My honour is at stake, my son. Promise!"

"I promise, sir," said I, under my breath.

The next moment the door behind me opened and the Indian stole into the room.

CHAPTER IV

I now for the first time obtained a distinct view of the stranger as he stepped forward, throwing the blanket from him, and stood revealed, stark naked save for clout and pouch, truly a superb figure, and perfect, in the Greek sense, barring that racial leanness below knee and calf, and the sinewy feet planted parallel instead of diverging, as in our race.

But so splendid was his presence that Sir William, standing to receive him, unconsciously raised his chin and squared his shoulders as though bracing for a trial of strength with this tall red forester from the West.

For a space they stood face to face in silence; then the belt-bearer, looking warily around at the empty room, asked why Chief Warragh received his brother alone.

"My brother comes alone," replied Sir William, with emphasis. "It is the custom of the Cayuga to send three with each belt. Does my brother bear but a fragment of one belt? Or does he think us of little consequence that he comes without attestants?"

"I bear three belts," said the Indian, haughtily. "Nine of my people started from the Ohio; I alone live."

Sir William bowed gravely; and, motioning me to be seated, drew up an arm-chair of velvet and sat down, folding his arms in silence.

Then, for the first time in my life, I sat at a figurative council fire and listened to an orator of those masters of oratory, the peoples of the Six Nations.

Dignified, chary of gesture, clean, yet somewhat sad and over-grave of speech, the Cayuga, facing the Baronet, related briefly his name, Quider, which in Iroquois means Peter; his tribe, which was the tribe of the Wolf, the totem being plain on his breast. He spoke of his journey from the Ohio, the loss of the eight who had started with him; all dying from the small-pox within a week. He spoke respectfully of Sir William as the one man who had protected the Six Nations from unjust laws, from incursions, from white men's violence and deception. He admitted that Sir William was the only man in America who to-day retained the absolute trust and confidence of the Indians, adding that it was for this reason that he had come.

And then he began his brief speech, drawing from his pouch a black belt of wampum:

"*Brother*: With this belt we breathe upon the embers which are asleep, and we cause the council fire to burn in this place and on the Ohio, which are our proper fireplaces. With this belt we sweep this fireplace clean, removing from it all that is impure, that we may sit around it as brothers."

(A belt of seven rows.)

"*Brother*: The unhappy oppression of our brethren by Colonel Cresap's men, near the Ohio carrying-place, is the occasion for our coming here. Our nation would not be at rest, nor easy, until they had spoken to you about it. They have now spoken – with this belt!"

(A black and white belt.)

"*Brother*: What are we to do? Lord Dunmore will not hear us. Colonel Cresap and his men, to whom we have done no harm, are coming to clear the forest and cross our free path which lies from Saint Sacrement to the Ohio, and which path our brother's belts, which we still possess, have long since swept clear. What shall we do? Instead of polishing our knives we have come to our brother Warragh. Instead of seeking our kin the Mohawk and the Oneida with painted war belts to throw

between us and them, we come to our brother and ask him, by this belt, what is left for us to do? Our brothers have taught us there is a God. Teach us He is a just God – by this belt!"

(A black belt of five rows.)

During this speech Sir William sat as still as death, neither by glance nor gesture nor change of colour betraying the surprise, indignation, and alarm which this exposure of Colonel Cresap's doings caused him.

As for me, I, of course, vaguely understood the breach of faith committed by Colonel Cresap in invading the land of our allies, and the danger we might run should this Cayuga chief go to our Mohawks and Oneidas with war-belts and inflammatory appeals for vengeance on Cresap and his men.

That he had instead come to us, braving all dangers, losing indeed all his comrades, on this mission of peace, most splendidly attested to the power and influence of Sir William among these savages whose first instinct is to draw the hatchet and begin the horrid vengeance which they consider their right when unjustly molested.

It is seldom the custom to reply to a speech before the following day. Custom and tradition rule among the Six Nations. Deliberation and profound reflection they give to all spokesmen who petition them, and they require it in turn, regarding with suspicion and contempt a hasty reply, which, they consider, indicates either premeditated treachery, or a shallow mind incapable of weighty and mature reflection.

I was prepared, therefore, when Sir William, holding in his right hand the three belts of wampum, rose and thanked the Cayuga for his talk, praising him and his tribe for resorting to arbitration instead of the hatchet, and promising an answer on the morrow.

The Cayuga listened in silence, then resuming his blanket turned on his heel and passed slowly and noiselessly from the room, leaving Sir William standing beside the arm-chair, and me erect in the embrasure of the casement.

Now, for the first time in my life, I saw a trace of physical decline in my guardian. His hand, holding the belts, had fallen a-trembling; he made a feeble gesture for me to be seated, and sank back into his arm-chair, listless eyes on the floor, absently running his fingers over the polished belts.

"At sixty," he said, as though to himself, "strong men should be in that mellow prime to which a sober life conducts."

After a moment he went on: "My life has been sober and without excess – but hard! very hard! I am an old man; a tired old man."

Looking up to meet my eyes, he smiled, watching the sympathy which twitched my face.

"All these wars! All these wars! Thirty years of war!" he murmured, caressing the belts and letting them slip through his fingers like smooth shining serpents. "War with the French, war with the Maquas, the Hurons, the Shawanese, the Ojibways! War in the Canadas, war in the Carolinas, war east and west and north and south! And – I am tired."

He flung the slippery belts to the floor, where they twisted and coiled up in a heap.

"I have worked with my hands," he said. "This land has drunk the sweat of my body. I have not spared myself in sickness or in health. My eyes are dim; I have used them by day, by starlight, by the glimmer of moons long dead, by candle-wood, by torch, by the flicker of smoke from green fires.

"My arms are tired; I have hewn forests away; my limbs ache; I have journeyed far through snow, through heat, from the Canadas to the Gulf – all my life I have journeyed on business for other men – for men I have never seen, and shall never see – men yet to be born!"

There came a flush of earnest colour into his face. He leaned forward towards me, elbow resting on the table, hand outstretched.

"Why, look you, Michael," he said, with childlike eagerness; "I found a wilderness and I leave a garden! Look at the valley! Can England grow such grain? Look at Tryon County! Look at this Province of New York? Ay – look farther – wherever my Indians have set their boundaries! There are roads, lad, roads where I found runways; turnpikes where I followed Mohawk trails; mills turning where the wild-cat squatted, fishing with big flat paws! Lad, you cannot recall it, yet this village was but a carrying-place when I came. Look at it; look from the window, lad! Is it not fair and pretty to the eye? One hundred and eighty families! Three churches, counting my new stone church; a free school, a court-house, a jail, barracks – all built by me; stores with red and blue swinging signs, bravely painted, inns with the good green bush a-swing! Listen to the cock-crows; listen to the barking! Might it not be a Devonshire town? Ah – I forgot; you have never seen old England."

Smiling still, kind eyes dreaming, his head sank a little, and he clasped his hands in his lap.

"Lad," he said, softly, "the English hay smells sweet, but not so sweet as the Mohawk Valley hay to me. This is my country – my country first, last, and all the time. I am too old to change where in my youth I took root among these hills. To transplant me means my end."

The sunlight stole into the room through leaded diamond-panes and fell across his knees like a golden robe. The music from the robins in the orchard filled my ears; soft winds stirred the lace on Sir William's cuffs and collarette.

Presently he roused, shaking the dream from his eyes; and, watching him, it seemed to me I could see the very tide of life swelling flesh and muscle into new vigour. The colour came back into his face and hands; the light grew in his eyes.

"Come!" he said, in a voice that had lost its tremour. "Life has but one meaning – to go on, ever on, lad! 'Tis a long doze awaits us at the journey's end." And he fumbled for his snuff-box and lace hanker, blowing a vigorous blast and exclaiming, "Aha! Ho!" in deep tones which, when very young, awed me.

I bent and picked up the three belts, placing them on the table near him.

"Thank you, Michael," he said, heartily; "and I must say that in this matter of the Cayuga, you have conducted admirably. Mr. Duncan has told me all; it was wisely done. Had you received the Cayuga with less welcome or more suspicion, or had you met him haughtily, I do not doubt that he would have made mischief for me among my Mohawks."

"He had war-sticks painted red, in his pouch, sir," I replied.

"No doubt! No doubt! And a red war-belt, too, belike! They were meant for my Mohawks had he met with a rebuff here. Oh, I know them, Michael, I know them. A painted war-belt flung between that Cayuga and the sachems of my Mohawks would have set the whole Six Nations – save, perhaps, the Oneidas – a-shining up rifle and hatchet for Cresap and his men!"

Sir William struck the mahogany table with clinched fist.

"Damn Cresap!" he bawled, in one of his familiar fits of fury – fits which were never witnessed outside his family circle. "Damn the fatuous fool to go a-meddling with the Cayugas in their own lands, held by them in solemn covenant forever inviolate! What does the sorry ass want? A border war, with all this trouble betwixt King and colonies hatching? Does Colonel Cresap not know that a single scalp taken from the Cayugas will set the Six Nations on fire – ay, the Lenape, too?"

Sir William slapped the table again with the flat of his hand.

"Look, Michael; should war come betwixt King and colonies, neither King nor colonies should forget that our frontiers are crowded with thousands of savages who, if adroitly treated, will remain neutral and inoffensive. Yet here is this madman Cresap, on the very eve of a struggle with the greatest power in the world, turning the savages against the colonies by his crazy pranks on the Ohio!"

"But," said I, "in his blindness and folly, Colonel Cresap is throwing into our arms these very savages as allies!"

Sir William stopped short and stared at me with cold, steady eyes.

"Michael," said he, presently, "when this war comes – as surely it will come – choose which cause you will embrace, and then stand by it to the end. As for me, I cannot believe that God would let me live to see such a war; that He would leave me to choose between the King who has honoured me and mine own people in this dear land of mine!"

He raised his head and passed one hand over his eyes.

"But should He in His wisdom demand that I choose – and if the sorrow kills me not – then, when the time comes, I shall choose."

"Which way, sir?" I said, in a sort of gasp.

But he only answered, "Wait!"

Stupefied, I watched him. It had never entered my head that there could be any course save unquestioned loyalty to the King in all things; that there could be any doubt or hesitation or pondering or praying for light when it came time to choose between King and rebel.

I now recalled what Sir William had said to me in the school-room. Putting this with what he now said, or left unsaid, together with his anger at Colonel Cresap for endangering the peace betwixt the Indians and the colonies, I came to the frightened conclusion that Sir William's loyalty might be questioned. But by whom? Who in America was great enough to call Sir William to account? Not Governor Tryon; not Lord Dunmore; not General Gage.

Feeling as though the bottom had fallen out of something, I sat there, my fascinated eyes never leaving Sir William's sombre face.

What then were these tea-hating rebels that Sir William should defend them at breakfast and in the faces of half a dozen of his Majesty's officers? I knew nothing of the troubles in Massachusetts save from soldiers' talk or the gossip of the townsmen, most of them being tenants of Sir William. I had heard vaguely about one turbulent fellow named Hancock, and a mischief-making jack-at-all-trades called Franklin. I knew that the trouble concerned taxes, but as all this bother appeared to be about a few pennies, and as I myself never wanted for money, I had little sympathy for people who made such an ado about a shilling or two. Moreover, if the King needed money, the idea of not placing one's all at his Majesty's disposal seemed contemptible to me. It is true that I had never earned a farthing in all my life, and so had nothing to offer my sovereign, save what fortune my father had left in trust for me. It is also true that I knew nothing of the value of money, having neither earned it nor wanted for it.

Something of these thoughts may have been easily read in my face, for Sir William said, with some abruptness:

"It is not money; it is principle that men fight for."

I was startled, although Sir William sometimes had a way of rounding out my groping thoughts with sudden spoken words which made me fear him.

"Well, well," he said, laughing and rising to stretch his cramped limbs; "this is enough for one day, Michael. Let the morrow fret for itself, lad. Come, smile a bit! Shall we have a holiday, perhaps the last for many a month? Nay, do not look so sober, Micky. Who knows what will come? Who knows; who knows?"

"I shall stand by you, sir, whatever comes," said I.

But Sir William only smiled, drawing me to him, one arm about me.

"Suppose," said he, "that you and I and Mr. Duncan and Felicity and Peter and Esk take rods and bait and go a-fishing in the Kennyetto by Fonda's Bush!"

"A peg-down fishing match!" cried I, enchanted.

"Ay, a peg-down match, and the prize whatever the victor wills – in reason. What say you, Michael?"

I was about to assent with enthusiasm when something occurred to me and I stopped.

"May I wear my uniform, sir?" I asked.

"Gad!" cried Sir William, in a fit of laughter. "'Tis a bolder man than I who dare separate you from your uniform!"

"Then I'll carry my pistols and go a-horse!" said I, delighted.

The Baronet, hands clasped behind him, nodded absently. That old gray colour came into his face again, and he lifted a belt from the table and studied it dreamily, picking at the wampum which glowed like a snake's skin in the sunshine.

CHAPTER V

To Fonda's Bush it is a good ten miles. I rode Sir William's great horse, Warlock, who plunged and danced at the slap of my sword-scabbard on his flanks, and wellnigh shook me from my boots.

"Spare spur, lad! Let him sniff the pistols!" called Sir William, standing up in the broad hay-wagon to observe me. "He will quiet when he smells the priming, Michael."

I drew one of my pistols from the holster and allowed Warlock to sniff it, which he did, arching his neck and pricking forward two wise ears. After this the horse and I understood each other, he being satisfied that it was a real officer he bore and no lout pranked out to shame him before other horses.

The broad flat hay-wagon, well bedded and deep in rye-straw, was filled with the company on fishing bent; Peter and Esk already disputing over their lines, red quills, and bob-floats; Silver Heels, in flowered cotton damask and hair rolled up under a small hat of straw, always observing me with lowered, uncertain eyes; Mr. Duncan, in fustian coat and leggings, counting out fish-hooks; Sir William, in yellow-and-brown buckskin and scarlet-flowered waistcoat, singing lustily:

"A-Maying!
A-Maying!
Oh, the blackthorn and the broom
And the primrose are in bloom!"

Behind the wagon, with punch-jugs swinging on his saddle-bags, like John Gilpin rode young Bareshanks the Scot, all a-grin; while upon either side of the wagon two mounted soldiers trotted, rifles slung and hangers sheathed.

Thus we set out for Fonda's Bush, which is a vast woods, cut into a hundred arabesques by the Kennyetto, a stream well named, for in the Indian language it means "Snake-with-its-tail-in-its-mouth," and, although it flows for forty miles, the source of it is scarce half a mile from the mouth, where it empties into the great Vlaie near to Sir William's hunting-lodge.

In the wagon Sir William turned to the windows and waved his hat at Mistress Molly, who stood behind the nursery curtains and kissed her fingers to him. And, as the wagon with its escort rolled off with slow wheels creaking, Mr. Duncan struck up:

"Who hunts, doth oft in danger ride;
Who hawks, lures oft both far and wide;
Who uses games, may often prove
A loser; but who falls in love,
Is fettered in fond Cupid's snare;
My angle breeds me no such care."

And Sir William and Mr. Duncan ended the song:

"The first men that our Saviour dear
Did choose to wait upon him here,
Blest Fishers were, – "

The shrill voices of Esk and Peter joined in, then were hushed as Silver Heels's dainty song grew from the silence like a fresh breeze:

"For Courts are full of flattery
As hath too oft been tried;
The City full of wantonness,
And both be full of Pride:
Then care away,
And wend along with me!"

So singing on their rye-straw couches, the swaying wagon bore them over the hilly road, now up, now rattling down-hill among the stones to ford some ice-clear brook, and away again across the rolling country, followed by Gillie Bareshanks, stone bottles flopping, and the trotting soldiers holding their three-cornered hats on with one hand, bridle-rein in t'other.

I galloped ahead, pistol poised, frowning at woodlands where I pretended to myself danger might hide, examining all wayfarers with impartial severity; and I doubt not that, seeing me in full uniform and armed, my countenance filled them with misgivings; indeed, some called out to know if the news from Boston was bad, if the Indians meant mischief hereabouts, or if the highwayman, Jack Mount, was abroad.

"Plague on your pistols!" shouted Sir William, as I waited at a ford for the wagon. "Gad! Michael, your desperate deportment is scaring my tenants along the way! Smile as you gallop, in Heaven's name! else they'll take you for Jack Mount himself!"

Somewhat mortified by Sir William's roar of laughter, I trotted on in silence, returning my pistol to its holster, and buckling the flap.

We now entered the slashings of the forest which is called Fonda's Bush, "bush" meaning land not yet cleared of woods. The sweet, moist shadow of the forest cooled me; I made Warlock stop, for I love to listen and linger in a woodland's quiet.

Here the field-birds which had sung everywhere by the roadside were silent, as they always are on the borders of deep forests. Slow hawks sailed along the edge of the woods; out in the clearing a few finches twittered timidly in the sunshine, but here among the hushed ranks of giant trees nothing stirred save green leaves.

But the solitude of forest depths is no solitude to those who know when and where to watch and listen. Faint sounds came to savant ears: the velvet rustle of a snake brushing its belly over soft mosses; the padded patter of the fox-hare; the husky quhit! quhit! of that ashy partridge whose eye is surmounted by a scarlet patch, and whose flesh is bitter as hemlock. Solitude! Nay, for the quick furry creatures that haunt water-ways live here, slipping among bowlders, creeping through crevices; here a mink with eyes like jet beads; here a whiskered otter peering from a cleft; now a musk-rat squatting to wash his face; now a red martin thrashing about in the thick tree-top like a mammoth squirrel at frolic.

If this be solitude, with the stream softly talking in that silly babble which is a language, too; if this be solitude, with the shy deer staring and the tiny wood-mouse in the windfall scraping busily; if this be solitude, then imprison me here, and not in the cities, where solitude is in men's hearts!

Five miles still lay before us over the moist, springy forest road, an excellent and carefully constructed thoroughfare which had been begun by Sir William and designed for a short and direct route to those healing springs of Saratoga which he loved, twenty-eight miles northeast of us. But this route had never been continued east of Fonda's Bush, partly because the winding Kennyetto interfered too often, demanding to be bridged a dozen times in a mile, partly because an easier though longer route had been surveyed by the engineer officers from Albany, and was already roughly marked as far as the Diamond Hill, from which, in clear weather, the Saratoga lake may be seen.

The road we travelled, therefore, came to an abrupt end on the banks of the Kennyetto; and here, in a sunny clearing which was a sugar-bush lately in use, the wagon and its passengers halted, and I dismounted, flinging my bridle to one of the soldiers.

"Souse the stone jugs in the stream!" called out Sir William to young Bareshanks, who came bumping up with his bottles a-knocking and his hat crammed on his ears.

Peter and Esk wriggled out of the straw, fighting over a red and blue bob-float, and fell with a thump upon the moss, locked in conflict. Whereupon Sir William fetched them a clip with his ivory cane across their buttocks, which brought them up snivelling, but reconciled.

Meanwhile Mr. Duncan had gone to the bank of the stream with six sharp pegs, all numbered; and presently Sir William joined him, where they consulted seriously concerning the proper ground, and took snuff and hummed and hawed with much wagging of heads and many eye-squints at the sky and water.

At last, the question being settled, Mr. Duncan set the six pegs ten yards apart and pushed them noiselessly down into the bank, while Sir William removed his hat and placed in the crown six bits of birch-bark with numbers written on each.

"Now, then, young wild-cats," he said, frowning at Esk and Peter, "and you, Felicity, you, too, Mr. Duncan, and Michael, also, come and draw lots for pegs. Zounds! Peter! Ladies first, sir! Now, Felicity!"

Silver Heels placed one hand over her eyes and groped in the hat until her fingers clutched a square of bark. Then she drew it out.

"Number six!" she said, shyly.

"Last peg to the left," announced Sir William. "Who next? Draw, Mr. Duncan!"

"Me! Me!" shouted Peter and Esk, charging at the hat and tearing their numbers from it.

Then Mr. Duncan drew, and then I drew number five.

"Get ready!" commanded Sir William, fumbling with his fish-rod. "Michael, take care of Felicity!"

Now the rules for a peg-down fishing match are few and simple. Each contestant must fish from the position which his peg indicates, and he must not leave his peg to fish elsewhere until the match is ended. Furthermore, he must fish courteously and with due regard for his neighbour's rights, employing no unfair means to attract fish to his own bait or to drive them from his neighbour's. The contestant securing the largest number of fish is the winner; he who bags the largest single fish is adjudged worthy of a second prize; he who secures the choicest individual fish receives a crown of young oak leaves.

At the words, "Take your stations!" we trooped to our pegs. Silver Heels was on the extreme left, I next, then Sir William, then Mr. Duncan, then Peter, and, last of all, Esk.

"Fish!" cried Sir William, and swung his rod from the wrist, sending a green and gray and scarlet feather-fly out into the water.

Silver Heels held her hook out to me and I garnished it with a bit of eel's skin and red flannel. My own line I baited with angle-worm, and together we cast out into the slow, deep current.

Farther along I heard Esk and Peter cast out with some heedless splashing, which was the occasion of mutual recrimination until Sir William silenced them.

Yet almost immediately fat Peter caught a fish, which is like all Indians. However, it was but a spiny sun-fish with blue and scarlet and yellow gills. Still it made Peter's score one.

"Does that count?" asked Silver Heels, turning up her nose. "See! Peter hath another one – a sun-fish, too! Pooh! Anybody can catch sun-fish."

"Better catch 'em then," said Sir William, laughing, and drawing his fly over the water to recover it for another cast.

Splash! – and Peter had a third sun-fish; and in another moment Esk jerked a fourth from the water, secured his prize with a scowl at Peter, and hurriedly rebaited, muttering and breathing thickly.

Then Mr. Duncan's yellow float bobbed under, once, twice, then bobbed so fast that the water dimpled all around and the little rings, spreading, succeeded each other so quickly that the wavelets covered the yellow float.

"A barbel-pout," quoth Mr. Duncan, coolly, and sure enough up came the bluish-black fish and flapped and squeaked, now on its white belly, now on its back, grinning with its gummy, whiskered maw agape and its three dagger fins ready to stab and poison him who rashly grasped it.

"Silver Heels," said I, politely; "you are having a nibble."

"Oh, so I am!" she cried, and drew a lovely blue and silver frost-fish to the surface, only to lose it by over-haste, and cry out in her vexation.

I explained to her how to strike the hook before pulling in, and she thanked me very modestly. There was a new and humble tone in her voice, delicate and grateful flattery to me, due, as I knew perfectly well, to my uniform. Nor did the tribute savour of any after-sting of jealousy or resentment for my new honours.

She recognized that I had climbed high in a single day, leaving the rounds of childhood behind forever; and she knew, too, which I did not, that she also was climbing the ladder very swiftly, a little behind me now, yet confident, and meaning to rejoin and pass me ere I dreamed of such a thing.

About this time Sir William hooked and landed a great pink and white Mohawk chub, which had risen silently from a black pool and had sucked in his feather-fly.

"Tush!" said Sir William. "I'll not count that!" And with a slack and a snip! he unhooked the fish, which at once slowly sank back into the black channel. Whereupon Sir William smoothed out his fly, and took snuff, singing merrily:

"A-Maying!
A-Maying!"

"You bade *us* make no noise, sir," spoke up Esk, reproachfully.

"So I did, lad! So I did! But not with thy mouth. Shout all day, and never a trout budges. Stamp thy feet – ay, brush but a stone in passing, and it's farewell, master troutling! Ho! What was that?"

A spattering and splashing arose from Peter's peg, and all turned to see the fat little Mohawk dragging a trout from the water and up the bank, where he fell upon the bouncing fish, whooping like the savage he was.

"Clearly," mused Sir William, "my eye has lost its cunning, and my arm its strength. So passes the generation that was born with me! Heigh-ho! Well done, Peter boy!"

Silver Heels was doomed to ill-fortune. She lost a second frost-fish, and was ready to weep. So I laid my rod on the bank, leaving the baited hook in the water, and went over to her, for she seemed discouraged, having broken her hook and quill.

"Fen dubs!" shouted Peter, from the other end of the line. "You can't do that, Michael! I'm ahead of you all, and it is not fair!"

"Mind your business," said I, sitting down beside Silver Heels; and truly enough he did, for, before I was seated, Peter jumped up, struggling with a fat white perch, which he landed, yelling and dancing in his vanity.

"Never you mind, Silver Heels," said I, tying a plated hook on her line, and covering it with a long silvery strip of skin and pin-feathers from a pullet's neck. "Now do as I say; toss the bait down stream, so! Now draw it slowly till it spins like a top."

Ere I could end my instructions I saw the nose of a great gold-green pike close after her bait.

"Slack!" I whispered. "He has it!"

She held the rod still. There came a twitch, more twitches, but so gentle you would have vowed 'twas a tender-mouthed minnow lipping the line.

"He gorged it," I muttered; "strike hard!"

"A log!" wailed Silver Heels, as she felt the rod stagger when the hook, deeply struck, embedded barb and shank.

But it was no log, for instantly the great fish shot into the air, and lay a-wallowing and thrashing in mid-stream.

"A chain-pike!" cried Sir William, briskly. "Do you net him, Michael, else Felicity will take a swim she has not bargained for!"

I ran to Sir William, who thrust the net at me, and back again as fast as my legs could move to Silver Heels, who had dropped the rod and now, sprawling on the moss, lay a-pulling at the line which was cutting her tender fingers.

"No fair!" bellowed fat Peter, jealously. "Let her bag her own game as I do! Hi-yi! Another trout!"

But spite of Peter's clamour and Esk's injured howls, I netted the floundering pike and flung it among the bushes, where young Bareshanks gaffed it and held it aloft.

There it hung, all spray and green and gold, marked with the devil's chain pattern; and its wolf-jaws gaping, lined with teeth.

"Oh, Michael," quavered Silver Heels, staring at her captive. She moved a little nearer to the fish, plucking up her skirts with her fingers, and bending forward, alarmed, amazed at the fierce, dripping creature.

"Ugh! There's blood on it!" she whispered, taking fast hold of my arm.

"Is it not a noble prize!" I urged, eagerly. But she shook her head and turned away, holding me tightly by the sleeve.

"Are you not proud?" I persisted, irritably. "It is the biggest fish any have yet caught. You will gain second prize, silly! What's the matter with you, anyhow!" I added, in a temper.

"I can't help it," she said, tremulously; "I'm not a man, and it frightens me to kill. I shall fish no more. Ugh – the blood! – and how it quivered when the gillie gaffed it! I could cry my eyes out for the life I took so lightly!"

I was disgusted and hurt, too, for I had thought to please her. I drew my sleeve from her fingers, but she only stood there like a simpleton harping on one string:

"Oh, the brave fish! Oh, the poor brave fish! I hurt it! – I saw blood on it, Michael."

"Ninny," said I; "there is blood on your fingers, too, where the line cut, and you've wiped it on my sleeve!"

She looked at her bleeding fingers in a silly, startled fashion, then held them out to me so pitifully that I could do no less than wipe them clean and bind them in my handkerchief, though it was my best, and flowered and laced at that.

"I don't care," she said, a-pouting at the water; "you told me that when you shot wild things it saddened you, too."

I pretended not to hear, yet it was true. And in sooth, to this day I never draw trigger on beast or bird that I do not thrill with pity.

I know not what fierce, resistless passion it may be that sets my nostrils quivering like a pointer's when I chase wild things – what savage craving drives me on, on, on! till the flash of the gun and the innocent death leave me standing sad and staring.

Could I but keep from the woods – but I cannot. And it were vainer to argue with a hound on a runway, or with the west wind in October, than with me.

I went to my rod, which I saw nodding its tip in the water, and found an eel fast to the bait, yet not hooked, so summoned Bareshanks to rid me of the snaky thing and strolled sulkily over to Sir William.

The Baronet had enticed and prettily netted a plump lake salmon, by far the choicest fish taken; so, the match being ended, and luncheon served under the pines, Silver Heels plaited a wreath of red-oak, and crowned Sir William for his third prize.

Peter with his motley string of fish, some two dozen brace in all, and mostly trout at that, clamoured for the first prize, which was a Barlow-knife like the one Silver Heels had gained in

the foot-race a year ago; and he clutched his prize and straightway fell a-hacking the wagon till Sir William collared him.

Silver Heels received the other reward, a gold guinea; and she placed it in her bosom, and kissed Sir William heartily.

"Faith," said the Baronet, "you had best kiss your cousin yonder, who saved you from a bath in the brook with your pike!"

Silver Heels came up to me, laying both hands on my shoulders, and held up her lips. I kissed her maliciously and praised her skill, vowing that she was a very Huron for slaughter, which boorish jest set her face a sorrowful red.

Meanwhile young Bareshanks had laid a clean cloth upon the moss, and there was pot-pie and roast capon, and a dish of apples and gingerbread. Ale, too, and punch chilled in the brook, and small-beer for the children, with a few drops of wine to drink Sir William's health.

With a cup of ale in one hand and a slice of cold capon on a trencher of bread, I munched and drank and rallied Silver Heels because of her pity for the pike; but she did not like it, yet ventured no retort, such as was formerly her custom.

Presently, Sir William having done scant justice to pot-pie and ale, called for his rod and flies, and he and Mr. Duncan lighted their pipes and strolled off along the stream to lure those small plump salmon which abound in the Kennyetto's swiftest reaches.

Peter lay on the moss, a-stuffing himself Indian fashion until it hurt him to eat more, and he howled and licked his gingercake, lamenting because he could not contain it. So I grasped his heels and dragged him to the wagon, tossing him up in the straw to lie like a sucking pig and squeal his fill.

Bareshanks and the soldiers now fell upon the feast, and Silver Heels and I withdrew to play at stick-knife and watch Esk that he tumbled not into the water while turning flat rocks for cray-fish.

Seated there on the deep moss at stick-knife with the cold song of the stream in our ears, we conducted politely as became our quality, I asking pardon for plaguing her concerning the pike, she granting pardon and praising my skill in taking such a monster fish. That glow of amiability which suffuses man when he has fed, warmed me into a most friendly state of mind, and I permitted Silver Heels to win at stick-knife, and I drew the peg without protest.

Fat Peter had fallen asleep; Esk, nipped by a cray-fish, waddled to the wagon, and rolling himself into a ball like a raccoon, joined Peter in dreams of surfeit.

In a distant glade the soldiers and young Bareshanks played at cards; the horses, tethered near, snorted in their feed-bags, and whisked their tails at the gnats and forest flies.

A hush fell upon the woods, stiller for the gossip of the stream. Ringed pigeons in the trees overhead made low, melodious love; far in the forest dusk the hermit-bird sang, but so faint, so distant, that the whisper of leaves stirring effaced the hymn of the gray recluse.

"I had not thought that you were so nearly a man to be appointed cornet of horse," said Silver Heels, digging into the moss with her knife.

"And you," said I, magnanimously, "are almost a woman." But I said it from courtesy, not because I believed it.

"Yes," she replied, indifferently, "maids may wed at sixteen years."

"Wed!" I repeated, laughing outright.

"Ay. Mother was a bride at sixteen."

I was silent in my effort to digest such an absurd idea. Silver Heels marry in another year! I looked at the frail yet full arm, half bared, the slender neck, the round, clear hazel eyes, the faintly smiling mouth, which was the mouth of a child. Silver Heels wed? The idea was grotesque. It was also displeasing.

Not to rebuff her with scorn, I said: "Indeed, you are quite a woman. Perhaps in a year you will be one! Who knows? – for a year is such a long, long time, Silver Heels."

"It is a very long time," she admitted.

"And to love, one must be quite old," said I.

"Yes, that is true," she conceded, reluctantly; "but not always."

After a silence she said, "Michael, I have a secret."

The mere idea that Silver Heels possessed a secret which she had not at once revealed to me produced a complicated sensation in my breast. I was conscious of a sudden and wholly involuntary respect for Silver Heels, a hearty resentment, and a gnawing curiosity to learn the secret.

"Will you promise never, never to tell?" she asked, raising her eager eyes to me.

Again resentment and hurt pride stung me, but curiosity prevailed, and I promised, with pretended indifference, to soothe my weak loss of self-respect.

"Well, then," she said, lowering her voice, "I am sure that Mr. Butler is in love with me."

"Mr. Butler!" I cried out, in angry derision. "Why, he's an old man! Why, he's nearly thirty!"

Angry incredulity choked me, and I sat scowling at Silver Heels and striving to reconcile her serious mien with such a tomfool speech.

"If you shout my secret aloud," she said, "I shall tell you no more, Micky."

Again, troubled and astonished at her sincerity, I expressed my disbelief in a growl.

"He keeps me after school hours," she said; "once he would caress my hand, but I will have none of it. He sometimes speaks of the future, and certainly does conduct in most romantic manners, vowing he will wait for me, declaring that I must love him one day, that I am no longer a child, that he has adored me since I was but twelve."

"How long has this gone on?" I said, my face cold and twitching with rage.

"These three months," said Silver Heels, without embarrassment.

"And – and you never told me!"

She shook her head frankly.

"No, you were but a lad, and you could not understand such things."

For a moment I felt so small that I could have yelled aloud my vexation. What! I too young to be told the secrets of this chit of a child with her ridiculous airs and pretensions!

"But now that you are become a man," she continued, serenely, "I thought to tell you of this, because it tries my patience, yet pleases me, too, sometimes."

Boiling with fury and humiliation, I gave her a piece of my mind. I said that Mr. Butler was a sneak, a bully, and an old fool in his dotage to make love to a baby. I told her it did sicken me to hear of it; that there was no truth in it but vain imaginings, and that she had best confess to Sir William how this gentleman school-teacher did teach her his knowledge withal!

She listened, frowning and digging up moss with her knife.

"He is not old," she said, firmly; "thirty years is but a youth's prime, which you will one day comprehend."

Such condescension wellnigh finished me. I could find neither tongue nor words to speak my passion.

"He is a gentleman of rank and station," she said, primly. "If he chooses to protest his solicitous regard for me, I can but courteously discourage him."

"You little prig!" I exclaimed, grinding my teeth. "I will teach this fellow Butler to abuse Sir William's confidence!"

"I have your promise not to reveal this," said Silver Heels, coolly.

I groaned, then remembering that Mr. Butler had partly promised me a meeting, I caught Silver Heels by both hands and looked at her earnestly.

"I also have a secret," said I. "Promise me silence, and you shall share it."

"Truly?" she asked, a little pale.

"Truly, a secret. Promise. Silver Heels."

"I promise," she whispered.

Then I told her of my defiance, of the meeting which Mr. Butler had half pledged me, and I swore to her that I would kill him, eye to eye and hilt to hilt; not alone for his contempt and insults to me, but for Sir William's honour and for the honour of my kinswoman. Felicity Warren.

"The beast!" I snarled. "That he should come a-suing you without a word to Sir William! Do gentlemen conduct in such a manner towards gentlewomen? Now hear me! Do you swear to me upon your oath and honour never to stay again after school, never to listen to another word from this sneaking fellow until you are sixteen, never to receive his addresses until Sir William speaks to you of him? Swear it! Or I will go straight to Mr. Butler and strike him in the face!"

"Micky, what are you saying? Sir William knows all this."

Taken aback, I dropped her hands, but in a moment seized them again.

"Swear!" I repeated, crushing her hands. "I don't care what Sir William says! Swear it!"

"I swear," she said, faintly. "You are hurting my fingers!"

She drew her hands from mine. Where the fishing-line had cut a single drop of blood had been squeezed out again.

"First you bind my hand, then you tear it," she said, without resentment. "It is like all men – to hurt, to heal, then wound again."

I scarcely heard her, being occupied with my anger and my designs against Mr. Butler. Such hatred as I now felt for him I never had conceived could be cherished towards any living thing. My right hand itched for a sword-hilt; I longed to see him facing me as I never had craved for anything in this world or the next. And to think that Sir William approved it!

Unconsciously we had both risen, and now, side by side, we were moving slowly along the stream, saying nothing, yet in closer communion than we had ever been.

Little by little the hot anger cooled in my veins, leaving a refreshing confidence that all would come right. Such passions are too powerful for young hearts. Anger and grief heal their own wounds quickly when life is yet new.

With my sudden, astonished respect for Silver Heels came another sentiment, a recognition of her rights as an equal, and a strangely solicitous desire to control and direct her enjoyment of these rights. It is the instinct of chivalry, latent in the roughest of us, and which, in extreme youth, first manifests as patronage. Thus, walking with Silver Heels I unburdened my heart, telling her that I too had been in love, that the object of my respectful passion was one Marie Livingston, who would undoubtedly be mine at some distant date. I revealed my desire to see Silver Heels suitably plighted, drawing a pleasing portrait of an imaginary suitor who should fill all requirements.

To this she replied that she, too, had desired a suitor resembling the highly attractive portrait I had painted for her; that she found a likeness between that portrait and her secret ideal, and that she should be very glad to encounter the portrait in the flesh.

It hurt me a little that she had not recognized in me many of the traits I had painted for her so carefully, and presently I disclosed myself as the mysterious original of the portrait.

"You!" she exclaimed, in amazement. Then, not to hurt me, she said it was quite true that I did resemble her ideal, and only lacked years and titles and wealth and reputation to make me desirable for her.

"I believe, also," she said, "that Aunt Molly means that we marry. Betty says so, and she is wiser than a black cat."

"Well," said I, "we can't marry, can we, Silver Heels?"

"Why, no," she said, simply; "there's all those things you lack."

"And all those things which you lack," said I, sharply. "Now, Marie Livingston – "

"She is older than I!" cried Silver Heels.

"And those things I lack come with years!" I retorted.

"That is true," she answered; "you are suitable for me excepting your years, which includes all you ought to be."

"Suppose you wait for me?" I proposed. "If I wed not Marie Livingston, I will wed you, Silver Heels."

I meant to be generous, but she grew very angry and vowed she would rather wed young Bareshanks than me.

"I don't care a fig," said I; "I only meant you to be suitably wed one day, and was even willing to do so myself to save you from Captain Butler. Anyway I'll kill him next year, so I don't care whether you marry me or not."

"A sorry match, pardieu!" she snapped, and fell a-laughing. "Michael, I will warn you now that I mean to wed a gentleman of rank and wealth, and wear jewels which will blind you! And I shall wed a gallant gentleman of years, Michael, and scarred with battles – not so to disfigure a pleasing countenance, but under his clothes where none can see – and I shall be 'my lady!' – mark me! Michael, and shall be well patched and powdered as befits my rank! I shall strive to be very kind to you, Michael."

Her cheeks were aflame, her eyes daring and bright. She picked up her skirt and mocked me in a curtsey, then marched off, nose in the wind, to join Sir William and Mr. Duncan, who were returning along the bank with a few brace of fish.

The sun had dropped low behind the trees ere we were prepared to depart. Bareshanks brought around my horse, and I mounted without difficulty this time.

As the wagon moved off Mr. Duncan started a hymn of Watts, which all joined, the soldiers and young Bareshanks also singing lustily, it being permitted for servants to aid in holy song.

So among the woods and out into the still country, with the sun a red ball sinking through saffron mist and the new moon aslant and dim overhead.

As I rode, the whippoorwill called after me from the darkening woods; the crickets began from every tuft, and far away I heard the solitary hermit at vespers in the still pines.

It was night ere the lights of Johnstown glimmered out against the hill-side where, on the hillock called Mount Johnson, the candles in our windows spun little rings of fire in the evening haze.

As we passed through the village, the good people turned to smile and to doff their hats to Sir William, thinking not less of him for riding with his flock in the straw-lined wagon, and on they went; I pulling rein at the blacksmith's, as Warlock had cast a shoe on the stony way below.

While the smith was at his forge I dismounted and stood in the fire-glow, stroking Warlock's velvet nose, and watching the fiery flakes falling from the beaten metal.

And as I stood, musing now on Silver Heels, now on Mr. Butler, came one a-swaggering by the shop, and bawling loudly a most foolish lilt:

"Diddle diddle dumpling,
My son John
Went to bed with one shoe on;
One shoe off and one shoe on;
Diddle diddle dumpling,
My son John!"

Perceiving me in full uniform the songster halted and saluted so cheerfully that I rendered his salute with a smile. He was drunk but polite; a great fellow, six feet two at least, all buckskin and swagger and raccoon cap, with tail bobbing to his neck, a true coureur-de-bois, which is the term for those roaming free-rifles whose business and conduct will not always bear investigation, and who live by their wits as well as by their rifles.

"A fine horse, captain," quoth he, with good-natured, drunken freedom, which is not possible for gentlemen to either ignore or resent. "A fine horse, sir, and, by your leave, worthy of his master!"

And he stood swaying there heel and toe, with such a jolly laugh that I laughed too, and asked the news from Canada.

"Canada!" he roared, in his voice of a giant. "I've not sniffed priest or Jesuit these six months! Do you take me for a Frenchy, captain?"

At that moment another man who had been pushing his nose against the window of a bake-shop crossed the street and joined the giant in buckskin, saluting me carelessly as he came up.

He was short and meagre and weasel-eyed, sharp-muzzled, and dingy as a summer fox. He was also drunk, yet his mouth was honest, and I judge not from such things, nor yet by the eye, but by men's lips and how they rest one upon the other, and how they laugh.

Waiting there for my horse, I paced up and down the doorway, sometimes glancing at the motley pair in their fringed buckskins, who were fondly embracing one another, sometimes watching the towns-people, passing before the lighted windows. There were soldiers strolling, two by two, lingering at bake-shops to sniff the ovens; there were traders, come to town to solicit permits from Sir William for the Canadas. At times the tall, blanketed form of a Mohawk passed like a spectre with the red forge light running along his rifle barrel, followed by his squaw, loaded with bags of flour, or a haunch of salted beef, or a bale of pelts crackling on her back.

My pair of buckskin birds, loitering before the tavern, had been observed and mistaken for French trappers by half a dozen soldiers of the Royal Americans, who were squatting in a row on the tavern porch, and a volley of chaff was fired at short range.

"Mossoo! Oh, Mossoo! I say, Mossoo! How's Mrs. Parleyvoo and the little Parleyvoos? What's the price of cat-stew in Canada? Take that cat-tail off your cap, Mossoo!"

The big ranger gave them a drunken stare, then burst into a laugh.

"Why, it's some of those lobster-backs. Hello! Old red-bellies! They're going to give another tea-party in Boston, I hear. Didn't they invite you?"

"Come across the street and we'll give you a tea-party, you damned Yankee!" cried the soldiers, unbuckling their leather belts and swinging them.

"Come over here and we'll drum the rogue's march on you!" shouted the little ranger, planting his legs wide apart and drawing the ramrod from his long rifle.

A watchman with rattle, pike, and lanthorn came hobbling up, threatening to sound his call. A group of towns-people gathered behind him, protesting against the disturbance.

But the two rangers flourished their ramrods and taunted the soldiers with inquiries which I did not understand at the time, such as: "How's Bully Tryon and his blood-pudding?" "I learn that Tommy Gage has the gout; too much Port-Bill; he needs bleeding, does Tommy Gage!"

Then the big ranger, addressing soldiers, watchman, and towns-people as "bloody-backs," "cow-rumps," and "scratch-wigs," advised them all to pickle their heads and sell them in Albany, where cabbage was much esteemed among the Dutchmen.

"Come up to the barracks and we'll show you what pickling is," shouted the soldiers, wrathfully.

"Come out in the woods and I'll show you something to beat pickled pig!" replied the little ranger, cheerfully.

Behind me I heard the trample of hoofs; the smith was backing Warlock out into the street. I paid him; he held my stirrup, and I mounted, walking my horse out between the soldiers, the people, and the two rangers.

"Come, boys," said I, pleasantly, "this town is no place for brawls. Let it end here – do you understand? – or Sir William shall learn of it!"

The soldiers had stepped forward to salute, the two rangers laughed scornfully, flung their rifles over their shoulders, and passed on into the darkness with noiseless, moccasined stride.

Waiting to see that the crowd dispersed without disorder, far down the dim street I heard the two rangers break out into a foolish catch:

"Who comes here?
A grenadier!
What d'ye lack?
A pot o' beer!
Where's your penny?
I forgot —
Get you gone, you red-coat sot!"

A most uncomfortable sensation came over me, although I did not fully understand that "red-coat" was a reproach. But the loose laughter, the disrespectful tone, the devil-may-care swagger of these fellows disturbed me. What had they meant by "lobster-back" and "Tommy Gage" and "Bully Tryon?" Surely they could not have referred to General Gage of Boston or to our Governor! Did they mean Sir William's son, John, by their "diddle dumpling?" What quarrel had they with the King's soldiers? They had been courteous enough to me, unless they intended their song as an insult.

The blood stung my face; I put Warlock to a gallop and overtook the pair. They were arm in arm, swaggering along, ogling the towns-people, jostling the crowd, sometimes mocking the bare shanks of a Highlander, sometimes hustling an Indian, or tweaking the beard of a Jew peddler, now doffing their caps to some pretty maid, now digging the ribs of a sober Quaker, and ever singing of "diddle diddle dumpling" or of the grenadier and his pot of beer.

Such license and freedom displeased me. I had never before observed it in our town or among those who came to the Hall. However, I now saw that I could not with dignity notice either their boorish gallantry, their mischief, or the songs they were pleased to bawl out in the street.

I therefore passed them in silence, and, loosening bridle, set Warlock at a gallop for home.

I did not comprehend it at the time; indeed, the whole matter passed from my mind ere the lights of the Hall broke out in the blue night. Yet the scene I had witnessed was my first view of the unrest which tormented the whole land, the first symptom of that new fever for which no remedy had yet been found.

CHAPTER VI

It was not yet dawn, though a few birds sang in the darkness around us, as Sir William and I set off for the Cayuga's lodge, which stood beyond the town on a rocky knoll, partly cleared of trees.

The air was cold and without fragrance, for in our country it is the sun that draws the earth's sweetness in early spring.

The stars lighted us through the streets of Johnstown, empty of life save for the muffled watchman dozing in his own lanthorn glow, who roused as he heard us, and shook his damp cloak. And far behind us we heard his sing-song:

"Four o'clock! A cold, fair morn, and all well!"

One inn there was, where the dim bush swung wet and sleek as a clinging bat, and where stale embers of the night's revelry still flickered; for, behind the lighted windows, men were singing, and we heard them as we passed:

"Oh, we're all dry
Wi' drinking on't —
We're all dry
Wi' drinking on't.
The piper kissed
The fiddler's wife;
And I can't sleep
For thinking on't!"

"Starbuck's Inn," muttered Sir William, grimly. "He's a Boston man; they drink no tea there."

And, as we strode on in the darkness, behind us, from the lighted hostelry, came a husky echo of that foolish catch:

"Diddle diddle dumpling,
My son John – "

So I knew that my buckskin birds were still chirping among us.

But now we were on the stony way and the town sank below us as we climbed towards Quider's lodge, knee-deep in dewy thistles.

The spark of a tiny council fire guided us. Coming nearer we smelled black birch burning, and we saw the long thread of aromatic smoke mounting steadily to the paling stars.

We passed a young basswood-tree from which hung a flint, symbol of the Mohawks. From another chestnut-sapling dangled the symbol of the Cayugas, a pipe. All at once we saw Quider, standing motionless before his lodge.

Sir William drew flint and tinder from his pouch, and sent a spark flying into the dry tobacco of his pipe. He drew it to a long glow, twice, and passed it, through the smoke of the fire, to Quider.

I saw the Cayuga's face then. It was a strange red, yet it was not painted. He seemed ill; his eyes glittered like the eyes of a lynx.

And now, as the Indian sank down into his blanket before the fire, Sir William produced a belt from the folds of his cloak and held it out. The belt was black with two figures woven in white on it. The hands of the figures were clasped together. It was a chain-belt.

"*Brother*," he said, slowly: "The clouds which hang over us prevent us from seeing the sun. It is, therefore, our business, with this belt, to clear the sky. And we also, with this belt, set the sun in its proper course, so that we may be enabled to see the narrow path of peace."

(Gives the belt.)

"*Brother*: We have heard what you have said about Colonel Cresap; we believe he has been misled, and we have rekindled the council fire at Johnstown with embers from Onondaga, with embers from the Ohio, with coals from our proper fireplace at Mount Johnson.

"We uncover these fires to summon our wisest men so that they shall judge what word shall be sent to Colonel Cresap, to secure you in your treaty rights which I have sworn to protect by these strings!"

(A bunch of strings.)

"*Brother*: By this third and last belt I send peace and love to my brethren of the Cayuga; and by this belt I bid them be patient, and remember that I have never broken my word to those within the Long House, nor yet to those who dwell without the doors."

(A large black belt of seven rows.)

Then Sir William drew from his girdle a belt of wampum, so white that, in the starlight, it shimmered like virgin silver.

"Who mourns?" asked Sir William, gently, and the Indian rose and answered: "We mourn – we of the Cayuga – we of three clans."

"What clans shall be raised up?" asked Sir William.

"Three clans lie stricken: the Wolf, the Plover, the Eel. Who shall raise them?"

"*Brother*," said Sir William, gravely. "With this belt I raise three clans; I cleanse their eyes, their ears, their mouths, their bodies with clean water. With this belt I clear their path so that no longer shall the dead stand in your way or in ours."

(The belt.)

"*Brother*: With these strings I raise up your head and beg you will no longer sorrow."

(Three strings.)

"*Brother*: With this belt I cover the graves."

(A great white belt.)

In the dead stillness that followed the northern hill-tops slowly turned to pink and ashes. The day had dawned.

When again we reached the village cocks were crowing in every yard; the painted weather-vanes glowed in the sun; legions of birds sang.

From Starbuck's Inn stumbled forth a blinking, soiled, and tipsy company, linking arms, sidling, shoving, lurching, and bawling:

"Oh, we're all dry
Wi' drinkin' on't!"

And I plainly saw my two coureurs-de-bois, boozy as owls, a-bussing the landlord's greasy wench while mine host pummelled them lustily, foot and fist.

So on through the cold shadowy street and out into the sun-warmed road again, and at last to the Hall where, on the sunny porch, stood Silver Heels, hair in her eyes, her naked white feet in moccasins, washing her cheeks in the dew.

"Tut! tut!" cried Sir William, sharply. "What foolishness is this, Felicity? Off to bed! with your bare legs!"

"Betty said that beauty grew with dew-baths at dawn," said Silver Heels, coolly. "I have bathed my limbs and my body in the grass and I'm all over leaves."

"Betty's a fool! Be off to bed! – you little baggage!" cried Sir William. And away up-stairs scampered Silver Heels, dropping both moccasins in her flight.

"Betty! Betty!" fumed Sir William. "I'll Betty her, the black witch!" And he stamped off to the nursery, muttering threats which I knew would never be fulfilled.

That day Sir William sat in his library writing with Mr. Butler, so there was no school, and Peter, Esk, Silver Heels, and I went a-fishing in the river. And I did not wear my uniform, for fear of soiling.

All day long, as we sat in the grass to watch our poles a-quiver, horsemen from our stables passed us, galloping east and south, doubtless bearing letters from Sir William to Albany and New York – and farther south, perchance – for there came one rider with six soldiers in escort, and two led horses well packed, all trotting and clattering away towards the Fort Pitt trail.

That day was the last of the old days for us; but how could we suspect that, as we waded in the shallows there, laughing, chattering, splashing each other, and quarrelling to our hearts' content. The familiar river, which every freshet changed just enough to sharpen our eyes for new pools, slipped over its smooth golden stones, inviting our dusty feet. Up to our knees we moved in the ice-cold stream, climbing out on the banks at times to warm our legs in the sun, and lie deep in the daisies, winking at the swallows in the sky.

We played all our old games again – but that we played them for the last time, none of us suspected. I held a buttercup under Silver Heels's snowy chin to prove her love for cheese; I played buzzing bee-songs on grass-blades; I whittled whistles for Peter and Esk; I skipped flat stones; I coloured Silver Heels's toes yellow with dandelion juice so she should ever afterwards wade in gold – this at her own desire.

Twice those tiny spotted lady-beetles perched on my hand, and Silver Heels, to ward off threatening evil, took them on the pink tip of her little finger, repeating:

"Lady-bird, Lady-bird, fly away home!
Thy lodge is afire! thy babies will burn!"

Which she said would save me from torture at the stake some day.

The late sun settled in the blue ashes of the western forests as we pulled on our stockings and moccasins and gathered up our strings of silvery fish.

For a whole day I had carefully forgotten that I was anything but a comrade to these children; but I did not know how wise I had been to lay by, in my memory, one more perfect day ere the evil days came and the years drew nigh wherein, God wot! I found no pleasure.

Silver Heels and I walked back together through the evening glow, and I remember that the windows of our house were all on fire from the sun as we climbed the hill under the splendour of the western sky.

As we came through the orchard I saw Sir William sitting on the stone seat near the bee-hives. His chin had fallen on his chest, both hands rested on his cane, and over his body fell the glory of the red sky.

He heard us as we came through the orchard, and he raised his head to smile a welcome. But there was that in his eyes which told me to stay there with him after the others had trooped in to be fed, and I waited.

Presently he said: "Quider is sick. Did you discover anything in his face that might betoken – a – a fever?"

"His eyes," I said.

"Was he blotched? My sight is dim these years."

"His face was over-red," I answered, wondering.

Sir William said nothing more. After a little while he rose, leaning on his cane, and passed heavily under the fruit-trees towards the house.

That night came our doctor, Pierson, galloping from the village with an urgent message for Sir William. Later I saw soldiers set out with bayonets on their muskets, and, with them, the doctor, leading his horse.

In the morning we knew that the small-pox had seized the Cayuga, and that our soldiers patrolled Quider's lodge to warn all men of the black pest.

The days which followed were busy days for us all – days fraught with bustle and perplexity – hours which hurried on, crowding one on another like pages turning in a book – turning too swiftly for me to cipher the ominous text.

All Sir William's hopes of averting war were now centred in the stricken Cayuga. He and I haunted the neighbourhood of Quider's lodge, staring for hours at the silent hut in the clearing, or, rambling by starlight, we watched the candle burning in the lodge door as though it were the flame of life, now flaring, now sinking in its socket.

On such rambles he seldom spoke, but sometimes he leaned on my shoulder as we walked, and his very hand seemed burdened with the weight of his cares.

Once, however, when from the sentinels we learned that Quider might live, Sir William appeared almost gay, and we walked to a little hill, all silvery in the light of the young moon, and rested on a rock.

"Black Care rides behind the horseman, but – I have dismounted," he said, lightly. "Quider will live, I warrant you, barring those arrows of outrageous fortune of which you have doubtless heard, Michael."

"What may those same arrows be marked with?" I asked, innocently.

"With the totem of Kismet, my boy."

I did not know that totem, and said so, whereupon he fell a-laughing and pinched my cheek, saying, "Are there no people in the world but the Six Nations of the Long House?"

I answered cautiously: "Oe-yen-de-hit Sar-a-ta-ke," meaning, "there are favourable signs (of people) where the tracks of (their) heels may be seen. I have not travelled; there may be other tracks in the world."

"Ten-ca-re Ne-go-ni," replied Sir William, gravely. "He scatters His people everywhere, Michael. The world lies outside of the Long House!"

"I shall say to the world I come from Ko-lan-e-ka, and that I am kin to you, sir," said I, dropping easily into that intimate dialect we children often used together, or in the family circle.

"The world will say: 'He comes from Da-o-sa-no-geh, the place without a name; let him return to The-ya-o-guin, the Gray-Haired, who sent him out so ignorant.'"

"Do you say that, sir, because I am ignorant of the poets?" I asked.

"Even women know the poets in these days," he said, smiling. "You would not wish to know less than your own wife, would you?"

"My wife!" I exclaimed, scornfully.

"Why, yes," said Sir William, much amused; "you will marry one day, I suppose."

After a moment I said:

"Is Silver Heels going to marry Mr. Butler?"

"I hope so," replied Sir William, a little surprised. "Mr. Butler is a gentleman of culture and wealth. Felicity has no large dower, and I can leave but little if I provide for all my children. I deem it most fortunate that Captain Butler has spoken to me."

"If," said I, slowly, "Silver Heels and I are obliged to marry somebody, why can we not marry each other?"

Sir William stared at me.

"Are you in love with Felicity?" he asked.

"Oh no, sir!" I cried, resentfully.

"Is she – does she fancy she is in love with you?" insisted Sir William, in growing astonishment.

"No! no!" I said, hastily, for his question annoyed and irritated me. "But I only don't want her to marry Mr. Butler; I'd even be willing to marry her myself, though I once saw a maid in Albany – "

"What the devil is all this damned nonsense?" cried Sir William, testily. "What d'ye mean by this idiot's babble? Eh?"

The expression of my face at this outburst first disconcerted, then sent him into a roar of laughter. Such startled and injured innocence softened his impatience; he carefully explained to me that, as Felicity had no fortune, and I barely sufficient to sustain me, such a match could but prove a sorry and foolish one for Silver Heels and for me.

"If you were older," he said, "and if you loved each other, I should, perhaps, be weak enough not to interfere, though wisdom prompted. But it is best that Felicity should wed Mr. Butler, and that as soon as may be, for I am growing old very fast, older than I care to confess, older than I dare believe. This I say to you, for I have come to trust you and to lean on you, Michael; but you must never hint to others that I complain of age or feebleness. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," I answered, soberly.

"Besides," said Sir William, with a forced smile, "I have much to do yet; I mean to accomplish a deal of labour before I – well, before many weeks. Come, lad; we must not grope out here seeking unhappiness under these pretty stars. We are much to each other; we shall be much more – eh? Come, then; Quider will live, spite of those same slings and arrows of which you know not the totem marks."

As we descended the hill through shadowy drifts of spice-fern, Sir William looked long and hopefully at the candle burning in Quider's hut.

"Ho-no-we-eh-to," he murmured; "I have given him white belts – ho-way-ha-tah-koo! – they shall disinter him, though he lie dead. He came, bearing wampum; shall his spirit go out bearing a quiver – o-tat-sheh-te? – hoo-sah-ha-ho?"

"So-yone-wes; sa-tea-na-wat; he has a long wampum belt; he holds it fast, sir," I said, cheerfully mixing the tongues of the Six Nations to piece out my symbol.

So we went home, comforted and hopeful; but the morrow brought gravest tidings from Quider's lodge, for the Cayuga had fallen a-raving in his fever, and it was necessary to tie him down lest he break away.

Weighed down with anxiety concerning what Colonel Cresap might be doing on the Ohio, dreading an outbreak which must surely come if the Cayuga belts remained unanswered, Sir William, in his sore perplexity, turned once more to me and opened his brave heart.

"I know not what intrigues may be afoot, what double intrigues revolve within, what triple motives urge the men who have despatched Colonel Cresap on this adventure. But I know this, that should Cresap's colonials in their blindness attack my Cayugas, a thousand hatchets will sparkle in these hills, and the people of the Long House will never sit idle when these colonies and England draw the sword!"

Again that cold, despairing amazement crept into my heart, for I could no longer misunderstand Sir William that his sympathies were not with our King, but with the provinces.

He appeared to divine my troubled thoughts; I knew it by the painful smile which passed like a pale light from his eyes, fading in the shadowy hollows which care and grief had dug in his good, kind face.

"Learn from others, not from me, what acid chemistry is changing the heart of this broad land to stone," he said.

"I cannot understand, sir," I broke out, "why we should warn Colonel Cresap. Is it loyalty for us to do so?"

Sir William turned his sunken eyes on me.

"It is loyalty to God," he said.

The solemn peace in his eyes awed me; the ravage which care had left in his visage frightened me.

He spoke again:

"I may have to answer to Him soon, my boy. I have searched my heart; there is no dishonour in it."

We had been sitting on the bed in my little chamber. The window was open, the breeze fluttered the cotton curtains, a spicy breeze, laden with essence of the fern which covers our fields, and smells like bay-leaves crushed in one's palm.

The peace of Sabbath brooded over all, a cow-bell tinkled from the pasture, birds chirped. Sir William rose to stand by the window, and his gaze softened towards the sunlit meadows where buttercups swayed with daisies, and blue flower-de-luce quivered in the wind.

"God!" he muttered, under his breath. "That this sweet peace on earth should be assailed by men!"

Again into my breast came that strange uneasiness which this month of May had brought to us along with the robins and the new leaves, and which I began to breathe in with the summer wind itself – a vague unrest, a breathless waiting – for what? – I did not know.

And so it went on, Sir William and I walking sometimes alone together on the hill-sides, speaking soberly of that future which concerned our land and kin, I listening in silence with apprehension ever growing.

Often during that week came Mohawk sachems and chiefs of the Senecas and Onondagas to the Hall, pestering Sir William with petty disputes to judge between them. Sometimes it was complaint against drunken soldiers who annoyed them, sometimes a demand for justice, touching the old matters of the moonlight survey, in which one, Collins, did shamefully wrong the Mohawks by stealing land; and William Alexander, who is now Lord Sterling, and William Livingston did profit thereby – guiltily or innocently, I know not.

But these troubles Sir William settled impartially and with that simple justice which made fraud loathsome, even to frauds.

I do remember how he scourged and scored that villain German, Klock, for making the Mohawks drunk to rob them of their lands by cunning; and I recall how he summoned Counsellor John Chambers to witness justice between Mr. Livingston and the Mohawks:

"Billy Livingston," said Sir William, "bear this message to Billy Alexander, that the land belongs not to him or to you, but to my Mohawks! It is enough that I say this to you, for you are my old comrades and honoured friends, and I am assured you will relinquish all title to what is not your own. But, by God! Billy, if you do not, I shall spend every penny of my own on lawyers to drive you out – every farthing, though it beggars me!"

This was but one of many scenes at which I was present. Why Sir William always called me to bear him company in such private matters, I could not at once comprehend. Little by little, however, I saw that it was because of his trust in me, and his desire that I should know of such affairs; and his

love and confidence made me proud. Was I not the only person in the world who knew his sentiments and his desire to stop Colonel Cresap on the Ohio, lest, in ignorance, he should turn the entire Six Nations against the colonies?

Had he not told me, sadly, that he could not speak of this plan even to his own son, Sir John Johnson, lest his son, placing loyalty to the King before obedience to his father, should thwart Sir William, and even aid Colonel Cresap to anger the Cayugas, and so injure the cause of the colonies?

He told me, too, that he could not confide in Mr. Butler or in his father, Colonel John Butler; neither dared he trust his sons-in-law, Colonel Claus or Colonel Guy Johnson, although they served as his deputies in Indian affairs.

All of these gentlemen were, first of all, loyal to our King, and all of them, clearly foreseeing a struggle between King and colonies, would not raise a finger to prevent Colonel Cresap from driving the Six Nations as allies into the King's arms.

"What I am striving for," said Sir William to me, again and again, "is to so conduct that these Indians on our frontiers shall take neither one side nor the other, but remain passive while the storm rages. To work openly for this is not possible. If it were possible to work openly, and if Quider should die, I would send such a message to my Lord Dunmore of Virginia as would make his bloodless ears burn! And they may burn yet!"

At my expression of horrified surprise Sir William hesitated, then struck his fist into the open palm of his left hand.

"Why should you not know it?" he cried. "You are the only one of all I can trust!"

He paused, eying me intently.

"Can I not trust you, dear lad?" he said, gently.

"Yes, sir," I cried, in an overwhelming rush of pity and love. "You are first in my heart, sir – and then the King."

Sir William smiled and thought awhile. Then he continued:

"You are to know, Michael, that Lord Dunmore, Governor of Virginia, is, in my opinion, at the bottom of this. He it is who, foreseeing the future, as do all thinking men, has sent the deluded Cresap to pick a quarrel with my Cayugas, knowing that he is making future allies for England. It is vile! It is a monstrous thing! It is not loyalty, it is treason!"

He struck his pinched forehead and strode up and down.

"Can Dunmore know what he is doing? God! The horror of it! – the horror of border war! Has Dunmore ever seen how savages fight? Has he seen raw scalps ripped from babies? Has he seen naked prisoners writhing at the stake, drenched in blood, eyeless sockets raised to the skies?"

He stood still in the middle of the room. There was a sweat on his cheek-bones.

"If we must fight, let us fight like men," he muttered, "without fear or favour, without treachery! But, Michael, woe to the side that calls on these savages for aid! Woe to them! Woe! Woe! For the first scalp taken will turn this border into such a hell of blood and flame as the devil himself in his old hell never dreamed of!"

This outburst left me stunned. Save for Sir William, I knew not where now to anchor my faith. Our King already in these few days had become to my youthful mind a distant wavering shadow, no longer the rock to which loyal hearts must cling – unquestioning. And it is ever so; old faiths fall when hearts question, and I know not whether hearts be right or wrong to strive so hard for the answer which is their own undoing.

Still, however, in that distant England which I had never seen, the King, though fading to a phantom in my heart, yet loomed up still a vast and mighty shape, awful as the threatening majesty of a dim cloud on the world's edge, behind which lightning glimmers.

CHAPTER VII

Now the dark pages turning in the book of fate were flying faster than young eyes could mark. First to the Hall came Thayendanegea, brother to Mistress Molly, and embraced us all, eagerly admiring my uniform with an Indian's frank naïveté, caressing Silver Heels's curly pate and praising her beauty, and fondling Esk and Peter with Albany sweets till I forbade them to approach, for their stickiness did disgust me.

I had always been greatly attached to Thayendanegea, for he was a frank, affectionate youth, though a blooded Mohawk, and possessing the courtesy, gentleness, and graces of true quality.

Clothed like an English gentleman, bearing himself like a baronet, he conducted to the admiration and respect of all, and this though he was the great war-chief of the Mohawks, and already an honoured leader in the council of the Six Nations.

He never became a sachem, but remained always the most respected and powerful leader in the Long House. Even Huron and Delaware listened when he spoke. He never treated the Lenni-Lenape as women, and for this reason they listened always willingly to the voice of Joseph Brant, called Thayendanegea.

Now, though Sir William had hitherto trusted Brant in all things, I noticed he spoke not to Brant of Quider's mission, though Mr. Butler had already scented a mystery in the Cayuga's visit, and often asked why Quider had never spoken his message; for he was not aware that both message and answer had been delivered long ago.

That week there were three council fires at the Lower Castle, which Brant and Mr. Butler attended in company with a certain thin little Seneca chief called Red Jacket, a filthy, sly, and sullen creature, who was, perhaps, a great orator, but all the world knew him for a glutton and a coward.

Brant despised him, and it was Brant, too, who had given to Red Jacket that insulting title, "The Cow-Killer," which even the Mohawk children shouted when Red Jacket came to Johnson Hall after the council fires had been covered at the Lower Castle.

Our house had now been thronged with Indians for a week. Eleven hundred Mohawks, Cayugas, Senecas, Onondagas, and a few Tuscaroras lay encamped around us, holding long talks with Red Jacket, Mr. Butler, and Brant; but Sir William attended no fires, and very soon I discovered the reason. For suddenly Sir John Johnson arrived at the Hall, and with him Colonel Daniel Claus and his lady from Albany, which abrupt advents began a stir and bustle among us that increased as, day by day, new guests arrived at our house. Johnson Hall, Colonel Guy Johnson's house, and the house of Colonel John Butler were now crowded to overflow with guests. Sachems and chiefs of the Oneidas arrived, officers from the Royal Americans and from the three regiments of militia which Tryon County maintained, officers from my own troop of irregular horse quartered at Albany, and whom I now met for the first time; and finally, in prodigious state, came our Governor Tryon from New York, with a troop of horse which, for beauty of clothing and impudence of deportment, I had never seen equalled.

The house rang with laughter and the tinkle of glasses from morning until night; on the stairs there swept a continuous rush and rustle of ladies' petticoats like the wind blowing through corn. Ladies filled the house; there were maids and lackeys and footmen and chair-bearers and slaves thronging porch and hallway, new faces everywhere, new uniforms, new gowns, new phrases, new dishes at table, new airs at the spinet, new songs.

"Tiddle tinkle" went our spinet all day and night, with some French ladies from Saint Sacrement a-singing la-la-la.

As by a magic touch the old homely life had vanished, old faces disappeared, old voices were silent. I looked in vain for Silver Heels, for Peter, for Esk. They were drowned in this silken sea.

And now, piling confusion on confusion, comes from the south my Lord Dunmore from Virginia, satin-coated, foppish, all powder and frill, and scented like a French lady. But oh, the gallant company he brought to Johnson Hall – those courtly Virginians with their graces and velvet voices, with their low bows and noiseless movements, elegant as panthers, suave as Jesuits, and proud as heirs to kingdoms all.

Some lodged at the inns in town, some with us, some with Sir John Johnson, and others with Colonel Butler. But they all thronged our house, day and night, till I was like to stifle with the perfumes and scented clothes of our white guests and the wild-animal aroma of the Indians.

For two days, indeed, I saw little of the company, for I lodged at the block-house with Mr. Duncan, keeping an eye on the pest-hut where lay the stricken Cayuga; this by Sir William's orders, though warning me to approach the hut no nearer than the sentries, and that with my hanker to my nose and a lump of sulphur in my mouth.

As for Silver Heels, I saw her but twice, and then she disappeared entirely. I was sorry for her, believing she had been cooped within the limits of nursery and play-room; but I had my pity for my pains, as it turned out.

It came about in this way: I had been relieved of duties at the block-house to receive reports of Quider's sickness, as it was now believed certain that the Cayuga must die; and I had been ordered to dress in my new uniform, to accompany Sir William to a review of our honest Tryon County militia, now assembling at Johnstown and Schenectady.

It was early morning, with the fields all dewy and a west wind blowing the daisies into furrows, when I left my chamber, booted, hair powdered in a club and tied with black, and my new silver gorget shining like the sun on my breast. I was in dress uniform, scarlet coat, buff smalls, sash and sword glittering, and I meant to cut a figure that day which people might remember. But Lord! Even on the staircase I found myself in a crowd of officers all laces and sashes and gold brocade, and buttons like yellow stars dancing on cuff and collar. My uniform was but a spark in the fire; I was obscured, nay snuffed out in the midst of the Virginians with their flame-colored scarfs and cockades, and the New York officers of the Governor's dragoon guard, gorgeous as the drummers of the French grenadiers.

Smothered by the hot air, the perfumes and pomatum on stock and queue, the warm cloying odour of dressed leather and new gloves of kid-skin, I made my way into the hall, but found it packed with ladies, all a-fanning and rustling, with maids tying on sun-masks and pinning plumes to rolls of hair that towered like the Adirondacks, all vegetation and birds.

Hat under arm, hand on hilt, I did bow and smile and beseech for a free passage to the fresh air, and it made me think of edging through the barn-yard with the feathered flock crowding and ruffling a thousand feathers. And as I threaded my way, minding my steps as well I might, it was: "Oh, la! My lady's skirt!" and "Lud! The lad's spur's in the lace!" "My mantua!" "Ah! my scarf's a-trail on the creature's sword!" "Grand dieu! et ma robe, monsieur!"

Standing at last in the portico with the fresh wind in my face, I perceived Sir William, attended by Sir John and Colonel Claus, inspecting the guard at the north block-house, and I made haste to join them, running fast, to the danger of my powdered hair, which scattered a small snowy cloud in the wind.

"Gad! The lad's powdered like a Virginian!" said Sir William, laughing and drawing me to him, pinching my ears and chin. Then he dusted the powder from my shoulders and turned me around, muttering to himself, "A proper officer, damme! a well-groomed lad; eh, Jack?"

"Yes," said Sir John, with his slow, reserved eyes shifting from my hat to my spurs. He gave me a damp finger to press, then his indifferent gaze wandered to the meadows below, where the brown and yellow uniforms of Colonel Butler's militia regiment spread out like furrows of autumn leaves.

I paid my respects to Colonel Claus, who honoured me with a careless nod, and passed before me to greet Colonel John Butler and his son, Captain Walter Butler.

The Butlers were of a stripe; there was the blank fixed eye of the night-bird in father and son, the deathly grimace to do duty as a smile, the mechanical observances of polite company, the compliments, the bows, the carriage of gentlemen, but back of it something lifeless, something slow and terrifying in voice and step – God knows what I mean! Yet often and often it came to me that inside their bodies something was lying dead – their souls, perhaps.

I stood behind Sir William, drawing on my gloves of kid-skin, observing the officers as they came up to join the staff, and stand and watch the two remaining regiments marching into the meadow below. These regiments were clothed in brown, green, and scarlet, one wearing green coats, t'other bright red with yellow facings, an over-gaudy effect and disturbing to my senses like the sounds of a spinet when Peter pounded on the keys.

They had built a gayly painted wooden pavilion in the meadow for the ladies and Governor Tryon and my Lord Dunmore, and now came the coaches and calashes burdened with beauty and tickled and tricked out in ribbons, and the Virginians all a-horse, caracoling beside the vehicles, a brave, bright company, by Heaven! – for they rode perfectly and with a gracious carelessness which contrasted favourably with the stiff, solid gallop of our Governor Tryon's dragoon guard.

Behind us the grooms were bringing up our mounts, and I slyly looked for Warlock, doubting lest he be 'portioned to some horseless guest. But there the dear fellow stood, ears pointed straight at me, and snorting for the caress of my hand on his muzzle.

"Mount, gentlemen!" said Sir William, briskly, setting toe to the stirrup held by young Bareshanks; and up into our saddles we popped, while the trumpet blew from the block-house, and down in the meadow the long painted drums boomed out the salute.

As we entered the meadow at a trot I caught a good, quick picture of the pavilion with its flags, its restless rows of ladies unmasking, fluttering kerchiefs and fans and scarfs; and my Lord Dunmore all over gold and blue, blinking like a cat in the sun, and the crimson of the Governor's mantle, clasped with gilt, falling from his solid epaulets. This I saw clearly, but as we broke into a gallop across the clover, the colours ran like tinted fires; the dull reds and blues of the Indians, the shimmer on gorgets and buckles, the rippling flags; yet it seemed as I flew past that I had seen a face up there which I knew well yet did not know, like those familiar eyes that look at us in dreams. Surely it was not Silver Heels. But there was no time for speculation now. Rub-a-dub-dub! Bang! Bang! Our brigade band was marching past with our head groom playing a French horn very badly, and old Norman McLeod a-fifing it, wrong foot foremost, which caused Sir William to mutter "damn!" and rub his nose in mortification.

"Hay-foot! Straw-foot!" simpered a cornet of dragoons behind me, and I turned on him, and gave him a look.

"Did you say you were hungry?" I whispered, backing my horse gently against the horse of the insolent cornet.

"Hungry?" he stammered.

"You mentioned hay, sir," I said, fiercely.

He turned red as a pippin but did not reply.

Swallowing my anger and my shame for our militia yokels, I glared at the head of Colonel Butler's regiment, now passing, and was comforted, for the clod-hoppers marched like regulars with a solid double rank of fifers shrilling out "Down, Derry, down!" as smart as you please.

After them came the green-coated varlets, with a good round stench of the stables from their ranks, yet footing it proudly, and their fifes ringing a barbarous tune which is lately somewhat in vogue among us, the same being called "Yankee Doodle."

Followed our three companies of Royal Americans, drums beating "The Huron," a most warming march and loudly applauded by the long lines of country folk and Indians, sitting on the stone walls; and after them the inharmonious regiment in yellow and red, with two men drunk and

a dog-fight in the rear, soberly observed by my Lord Dunmore, who laid a bet with our Governor, and lost on the spotted dog, they say.

There was a sham battle of the troops, too; half a gill to every fifth man, and fifty pounds for the cannon on the hill, which cost Sir William a pretty penny, our Governor refusing to allow for the powder burned. However, it was a fine pageant, and pleased all; and I was sorry when the last cartridge was spent and the brigade band played, "God Save the King."

We followed Sir William to the pavilion, dismounting there to ascend the stairs and pay our respects to the Governor and to Lord Dunmore.

"Come with me, Michael," said Sir William, wiping his face with his hanker till it glistened; and I followed the Baronet into the enclosure.

Lord Dunmore was tricked out like a painted actor, neither old nor young, but too white and pink and without any red blood in him, as far as I could see. He wore a wig – it was said he possessed twenty and valued at six thousand pounds – and his fingers, which I could see through the lace on his cuffs, were like white bird's claws loaded with jewels.

When Lord Dunmore saw Sir William he fell a-tapping his snuff-box and bobbing and smiling, nor did he rise until we had made our way to him.

"Lud! Lud!" he said, and fell a-simpering, with hands raised in feigned amazement at the magnificence of the review. "Lud! Lud! Sir William! A gallant fête! A brave defilé! Militia, not regulars, you say! Vive Dieu, Sir William, a most creditable entraining! Permettez – mes compliments le plus distinguée!"

"My aide-de-camp, Lord Dunmore," said Sir William, bluntly; "your Lordship will remember Captain Cardigan who died before Quebec? His son, my Lord! – and my dear kinsman, Michael Cardigan, cornet in the Borderers."

"Strike me!" simpered Lord Dunmore. "Strike me, now, Sir William! He has his father's eyes – Vrai Dieu! Curse me, if he has not his father's eyes, Sir William!"

At this remarkable discovery I bowed and said it was an honour to be considered like my father in any particular.

"Burn me!" murmured his Lordship, in an ecstasy at my natural response. "Burn me, Sir William, what a wit he has, now!" And he peeped at me, squeezing his eyes into two weak slits, and laid his snuff-box against his nose. Lord! What a false face he pulled at me!

Apparently surfeited with admiration, he invited Sir William to take snuff with him, then turning to Governor Tryon, who had just come into the stall, he fell to smirking and exclaiming and vapouring about God knows what, until I, weary and cloyed, glanced around me at the crowd on the seats above us.

There were a hundred pair of bright eyes fixed on us, and without vanity I perceived a few to meet mine, but the faces were not distinct, and I found it disconcerting.

Then a deep, pleasant voice sounded close beside me, and looking around, I saw our Governor Tryon smiling at me.

"I knew your father," he said; "it was a privilege, Mr. Cardigan, and one I take advantage of to address the son of so gallant a gentleman."

I replied warmly and gratefully, yet with military deference, and I saw Sir William observing me, well pleased at my bearing.

"In these times," said the Governor, clasping his cloak over his epaulets, "it is a pleasure to meet with modest loyalty in the younger generation. Loyal to parent, loyal to King! I predict we shall hear from you, Mr. Cardigan."

"Please God, sir," I replied, blushing scarlet; for into my mind crept that wavering doubt which, since Sir William had talked with me, haunted me like a shadow.

The Governor passed by with his clanking dragoons, among them the young jackanapes who had presumed to sneer at our yeomanry, and we delivered a pair of scornful glances at each other which crossed like broadswords.

And now my Lord Dunmore's boudoir on wheels drove up, and his purring Lordship minced off in the midst of his flame-coloured Virginians, for all the world like a white cat dancing through hell fire.

The ladies were rising, tying on sun-masks, standing in rows between the seats, and the officers loitered and whispered and played with their snuff-boxes, while the silent Mohawk chiefs looked on, standing like statues till the crowd gave them their liberty.

One lady there was, in a mask and silvery cloak, who looked at me so long through the eye-holes that I felt my heart begin a-beating; and another, too, in mask and rose mantle, who lifted the linen a trifle, displaying a fresh, sweet, smiling mouth. This one in rose turned twice to look at me, and it amused me to feel my heart go a-bumping at my ribs so loud, for she did truly resemble Marie Livingston.

Sir William and Colonel Claus had joined Lord Dunmore in his coach; Sir John and Colonel Butler attached themselves to our Governor Tryon. I, abandoned, rode back to the Hall with a company of Virginians and dragoons, wondering if ever I might acquire such horsemanship as the Southerners displayed.

Coming to the Hall, I met Sir William, whose smiling face grew haggard at sight of me, and he drew me apart, asking of news from Quider.

"He is not yet dead, sir," I replied, my heart aching for Sir William.

For a moment he stood staring at the ground, then bidding me report to Mr. Duncan at the block-house, walked away to disguise his anxious visage again with the oldest mask in the world – a smile.

That night Sir William provided two great banquets for our guests, one at the court-house in Johnstown, the other at Johnson Hall.

The splendid banquet at the court-house was given to all the visiting officers except Lord Dunmore, Governor Tryon, and their particular aides. To it were invited the Virginians, the New-Yorkers, the important Mohawk, Seneca, and Onondaga sachems, and chiefs of the Long House. Also were bidden the officers of our Royal Americans, such officers of the Border House as had come with Governor Tryon, and all gentlemen of distinction who had brought their ladies.

Colonel Claus and his lady presided as host and hostess, representing Sir William and Mistress Molly, and our brigade band played in the gallery during the banquet, and later on the portico of the court-house, where a great crowd of people had collected to cheer.

The other banquet was given at the same hour in our house, to honour Lord Dunmore and Governor Tryon.

There were gathered in the hallway and on the stairs a vast company of ladies and gentlemen when I came down from my little chamber to wait on Sir William. Here was the great Earl of Dunmore in a ring of fluttering ladies, peering, bobbing, tapping his snuff-box, preening the lace on his cuffs – and I thought he resembled one of those irksome restless birds from the Canaries in a painted cage.

There was our Governor Tryon in purple silk from head to foot, with the broad sash and star on his breast, leaning over, hands clasped behind his back, to whisper jest or flattery to a young girl who tapped at him with her fan. There was my kinsman, Sir John Johnson, with his indifferent eyes and ungracious carriage, and old Colonel Butler watching the gay company as hawks, from sheer habit, watch peacocks, meaning no attack. There also strolled my impudent dragoon lad who had offended at the pavilion, and I will not deny he appeared to be an elegant and handsome officer, possessing those marked characteristics of fashion and assurance which one observes in all gentlemen from the city of New York.

Making my way carefully amid rustling petticoats and a forest of painted fans all waving like the wings of a swarm of moths drawn by the candle-light, I passed Mistress Molly on the arm of Sir William, touching my lips to her pretty fingers, which she held out to me behind her back.

Next I encountered Mr. Butler and honoured him with a scowl, which displayed my country breeding, it being the fashion among quality to greet one's enemy with more elaborate courtesy than one accords to friends.

People passed and repassed with laughter and whisper, and the scented wind from their fans swept my cheek.

Suddenly it seemed as though the voice of Silver Heels sounded in my ears, and for a moment I stared about me, astonished that she should be here. But I could not find her. Then her voice sounded again, clear as a pebbled spring in all that chatter, and turning, I saw it came from a young girl standing behind me. She was very delicate and pretty in her powder and patches, truly somewhat pale and lacking in plumpness, but with a pair of great hazel eyes like Silver Heels's, and the child's full lips. Certainly she had Silver Heels's voice, and her trick of widening her eyes, too, for now she perceived me, and —

"Why, Micky!" she cried.

"Silver Heels!" I stammered, striving to believe my eyes. What miracle of miracles had set her to grow tall and turn into a woman in a single week?

I stared almost piteously at her, trying to find my own familiar comrade in this whispering shower of silk and ribbon, this delicate stranger, smiling breathlessly at me with sparkling teeth set on the edge of her painted fan.

In her triumph she laughed that laugh of silver which sounded ever of woodlands and birds, the same laugh, the same gray eyes, and the same satin fingers laid on my wrist.

"Silly," she whispered, "I told you so. And it has come true; my gown is silk, my stockings silk, my shoes are Paddington's make and silken to the soles!"

"How did you grow?" I gasped.

"Have I grown? Oh, my gown and shoes count, too, and my hair rolled by Betty till I vowed she meant to scalp me! See my egrettes! Are they straight, Micky?"

Ere I could attempt to compose my thoughts, comes mincing my impudent dragoon, who seemed to know her, for he brought her a ribbon to tie above her elbow, explaining it was a new conceit from New York.

"It's this way," he explained, utterly ignoring my presence; "I tie this bow of blue above your elbow, so! – with your gracious consent. Now for a partner to lead you to the table I seek some gentleman and tie a blue bow to his sword-hilt."

"Pray tie it to Mr. Cardigan's," said Silver Heels, mischievously. "I have much to say to him for his peace of mind."

The dragoon and I, face to face, regarded each other with menacing composure.

"To deprive you of such an honour, sir," said he, coolly, "I protest reduces me to despair; but the light blue bows have already been awarded, Mr. Cardigan."

Instinctively I glanced at his own sword-hilt, and there fluttered a light blue ribbon. At the same moment I perceived that Silver Heels had been perfectly aware of this.

Mortified as I was, and stinging under the dragoon's impudence, I controlled myself sufficiently to congratulate him and courteously deplore my own ill fortune, without a grimace, though it stuck in my throat to say it.

"Let not your lady hear that!" said Silver Heels, with her fan hiding her lips. "How do you know, sir, which partner fate and Mr. Bevan may allot you?"

Mr. Bevan and I regarded each other in solemn hostility.

"May I have the honour of attaching this ribbon to your hilt, sir?" he asked, stiffly.

"You may, sir," said I, still more stiffly, "if it is necessary."

He tied a red bow-knot to my hilt; we bowed to each other, then with a smile and a word to Silver Heels which I did not catch, he saluted us again and strolled off with his nose in the air and his hands full of ribbons of every hue – the fop!

"Who is that pitiful ass?" I said, turning to Silver Heels.

"Why, Michael!" she protested, reproachfully, yet smiling, too.

"Oh, if he's one of your friends, I ask indulgence," said I, mad enough to pluck the blue knot from her arm.

"Truly, Michael," she sniffed, "you are still very young."

She seated herself by the big clock; I sat beside her, sullenly, and for a time I peered at her sideways. Verily, the impossible had overtaken us; she appeared to be fully as tall as half the ladies gathered around us; her self-possession and obvious indifference to me completed my growing discomfort. I looked at her small, silk-covered toes pushing out under her petticoat.

"Is the dandelion juice on them yet?" I asked, with piteous playfulness.

"Don't talk like that!" she said, sharply, drawing her feet in. And with that petulant movement the playmate I had so often bullied, slipped away from me forever, leaving in her place a dainty thing of airs and laces to flout me, whom I knew not, but whom I meant to be avenged on; for at moments, as I sat there, I could have yelled aloud in my vexation.

Lord! how they all ogled her, and came a-mincing, gentlemen and ladies, old and young, and I heard whispers around me that she was a beauty and would be rich one day. My Lord Dunmore, too, came a-dancing pit-pat! till I thought to hear his bones creak inside his white silk; and the dragoon jackanapes was there, having tied up everything with his ribbons save his own long ears, and it infuriated me to see him standing guard protector over Silver Heels, with jealous smiles for all who approached.

Now what the devil had seized all these gentlemen to set them smirking and vapouring over Silver Heels, I did not know, or rather, I knew perfectly well, because it was as plain as a Mohawk moccasin on a spotted trail that Silver Heels had suddenly become a beauty. Even I could see that. Granted her bosom lacked somewhat in fulness, granted a childish leanness of arm and neck, granted even a pallor which adorned her not, and which, to tell the truth, I knew came from fright, there was something in the frail moulding of her that drew eyes, something in the arm's slim contours that touched even me.

I might have taken a pride in her, had not all these bobbing pigeons come crowding about to share openly my unconfessed admiration. But they bowed and strutted and posed and flattered, pressing closer until she was shut from my sight by a circle of coat-skirts, tilted swords, and muscular calves in silken stockings.

Presently our fiddlers and bassoons started the "Huron;" there was a flutter to find ribbons that matched, and a world of bustle and laughter, with gentlemen and ladies comparing colours and bowing and curtseying without regard to neighbors' toes and petticoats – the tittering popinjays!

Truly, if this mode of choosing one's lady prevailed in New York, I at least found it smacked something of silliness and French frivolity.

I had now been crowded up against our tall clock in the hall, and stood there striving to get a glimpse of Silver Heels, completely forgetting that somewhere in the crush a lady with a scarlet ribbon on her arm might be waiting for me. And doubtless I should have remained there, gnawing my lip, till doomsday, had not Silver Heels espied me and come fluttering through the crowd with:

"Oh, Micky! Have you seen your lady? Your old friend Marie Livingston! But she is wedded now; she is that pretty Mrs. Hamilton from Saint Sacrement. Oh, you lucky boy! All the officers are raving over her! But I asked her if she remembered you, and she said she didn't, so there!"

"Silver Heels," I began, with the first appealing glance I had ever bestowed on a woman; "Silver Heels, I want to tell you something."

I do not believe she was listening, or perhaps the chatter around us drowned my voice, which was husky and over-fond, for she cried: "You must not detain me, Michael. Mr. Bevan is waiting for me."

And with that she was gone into the whirl, leaving me high and dry against my clock, and furious over I knew not what. For truly I myself did not know what it was I had been about to say to Silver Heels. As for this Mrs. Hamilton, it madded me to hear of her. I had long forgotten Marie Livingston – save as a name to goad Silver Heels withal.

Mrs. Hamilton, forsooth! What the foul fiend had I to do with another man's wife, whether Hamilton or Smith or Jones I cared not, while that ape of a New-Yorker had set himself in my rightful place beside Silver Heels! And what stabbed deepest was that Silver Heels found pleasure in his foolish company – ay, plainly preferred him to me – the ungrateful minx! I prayed fervently she might live to repent it. I pictured her remorse when she came to her senses. And in a moment more I had slipped into one of my waking dreams wherein justice was dealt out by the jugful all around, and I emerged from some scenes of carnage, calm, triumphant, gently forgiving Silver Heels the accumulated sins of her misspent life.

Sullenly dreaming there under the tall clock, and happening to lift my eyes towards heaven for some of its spare vengeance, I perceived on the stairs that same lady who had half raised her sun-mask at the review – I mean the one in the rose mantle, not the other in the silvery cloak, whom I now knew had been Silver Heels.

Down the stairs rustled my lady of the rose mantle, finger-tips playing a tattoo over the mahogany balustrade, and on her lips a smile, as I fancied, though later I came to know that it was only the natural expression of her mouth. Something in my memory stirred at that smiling face.

Now she was looking straight at me, with that delicate curve of her lips which sets men thinking, and at the same moment I perceived that she wore my colours. Marie Livingston! I should never have known her; so we were quits, the affected minx! This was Mrs. Hamilton! – this bright-eyed girl with her smooth rose-petal skin and her snowy hand on the balustrade. Could I be mistaken? Surely she wore my colours! I glanced at the knot on my sword-hilt, then pressed through the throng to the stairway. Now at last I could pay Silver Heels in her own wampum, and I meant to do it under her very nose.

I met Mrs. Hamilton at the foot of the stairs, but she did not appear to see me. Truly she was a miracle of innocence not to have perceived her colours on my hilt, or perhaps she was over-timid. So I addressed her reassuringly and made her a bow that I knew must be impressive. However, I found her less confused than I, for she insisted on matching ribbons very carefully, which hurt my pride somewhat. But when she could no longer doubt that our ribbons matched, she made me a whimsical reverence, and took my arm with a smile, and a cool: "Oh, I faintly recall you now, Mr. Cardigan. How you have grown!"

Out into the wilderness of silver and candle-light we passed, fiddle and bassoon a-playing with might and main, and we stood behind our chairs while my Lord Dunmore chattered a blessing, then seated ourselves amid a gale of whispers.

Through the flare of the candles I saw Brant and Sir John Johnson near us, and also that filthy Indian, Red Jacket, both hands already in a dish of jelly, a-gobbling and grunting to himself, which sent Lord Dunmore into peals of shrill laughter, though Sir William took no notice. Presently I perceived Silver Heels and Mr. Bevan, nearly opposite to us, and strove to catch her eye. But Silver Heels took small notice of me; her cheeks had gone red with her first sip of wine, and she sat there rosy and silent, head a little lowered, while that insufferable coxcomb whispered into her ear, and smirked, and played with his wine-glass till the very sight of the man sickened me.

Stung to the quick by her indifference to my presence, smarting in my fancied isolation, I resolved to show her that I cared not a whit for her or her dragoon. So I loosened my tongue and set it wagging so smartly that I think I astonished Mrs. Hamilton, who had been observing Mr. Bevan

with her fixed smile. At any rate, she gave me a long, pleasant stare, and presently her fixed smile became very sweet and pretty, although I thought a trifle mocking.

"Is it not amusing?" she said, coolly; "here you sit with me, when you would give your tow-head to be prattling into Mistress Warren's ears; and here sit I at twiddle-thumbs, devising vengeance on Mr. Bevan, who belongs to me!"

Perplexed and disconcerted, I found no words to answer such an amazing sally. It shamed me, too. Perhaps my countenance had betrayed me, but her confession concerning Mr. Bevan was a bold one, and not at all to my taste.

"I thought you had a husband," said I, with boyish bluntness.

She coloured up like fire for a moment, and I was sorry I spoke, but I had my pity for my pains, for the next instant she was laughing at me as though I were a ninny, and I could discover no reason for her mirth.

"Please tell me your Christian name," she said, sweetly. "I really do desire to recall it."

"My name is Michael," said I, suspiciously.

"Was it not Saint Michael who so soundly spanked the devil?" she asked, with her innocent smile. "Truly, Mr. Cardigan, you were well named to chastise the wicked with such sturdy innocence!"

I fumed inwardly, for I had no mind to be considered a gaby among women.

"I am perfectly aware, madam, that it is the fashion for charming women to turn boys' heads," said I, "and I wish you might turn Mr. Bevan's head till you twisted it off his neck!"

"I'd rather twist yours," she said, looking up from her plate of broiled troutlings.

"Twist it off?" I asked, curiously.

"I – I don't know. Look at me, Mr. Cardigan."

I met her pretty eyes.

"No, not quite off," she said, thoughtfully. "You are a nice boy, but not very bright. If you were you would pay me compliments instead of admonition. Perhaps you will after the Madeira. Perhaps you will even make love to me."

"I will do it before the Madeira," said I. "You are certainly the prettiest woman in Johnson Hall to-night, and if you've a mind for vengeance on your faithless dragoon yonder, pray take me for the instrument, Mrs. Hamilton."

"Hush!" she said, with a startled smile. "I may take you at your word."

"I am taking you at yours," said I, recklessly, and loud enough for Silver Heels to hear.

In the dull din of voices around us I heard Silver Heels's laugh, but the laugh was strained, and I knew she was looking at me and listening.

"I don't know what you mean," said Mrs. Hamilton, reddening, "but I know you to be a somewhat indiscreet young man who handles a woman as he would a club to beat his rival to the earth withal."

"I mean," said I, in a low voice, "to make love to you and so serve us both. Look at me, Mrs. Hamilton."

"I will not," she said, between her teeth.

"Tell me," I pleaded, "what is your Christian name. I do really wish to know, Mrs. Hamilton."

Spite of the angry red in her cheeks she laughed outright, glanced sideways at me, and laughed again, so blithely that I thought I had truly never seen such careless ripened healthy beauty in any woman.

"My name is Marie Hamilton, of Saint Sacrement, please you, kind sir," she lisped, with an affected simper which set us both a-laughing again.

"If you ever had your heart stormed you had best prepare for no quarter now!" I said, coolly.

"Insolent!" she murmured, covering her bright cheeks with her hands, and giving me a glance in which amusement, contempt, curiosity, and invitation were not inharmoniously blended.

The Madeira had now turned my blood to little rivers of fire, I being but lately enfranchised from the children's pewters and small-beer; but yet I am so made that never then nor since have the delicate vapours of wines stifled such wits as I possess. It is my conscience only that wine dulls.

So amid the low tumult, the breezy gush of whispers, the laughter, and the crystal tinkle of silver and glass, I made indiscreet, clear-headed love to Mistress Marie Hamilton, retreating under her cruel satire, rallying in the bright battery of her eyes, charging the citadel of her heart with that insincere and gay abandon which harasses, disconcerts, and piques a woman who understands better how to repel true passion.

"In what school have you been taught to make love, sir?" she said, at last, breathless, amused, yet exasperated.

"In the school of necessity, madam," I replied.

"I pray you teach something of your art to Mr. Bevan," said she, spitefully, over her fan's silk edge.

"I am teaching him now," said I.

It was true. The dragoon was staring at Mrs. Hamilton in undisguised displeasure. As for Silver Heels, she observed us with a scornful amazement which roused all the cruelty in me, though I knew I was losing her innocent belief in me and tearing my respectability to shreds under her clear gray eyes.

For a bud from Mrs. Hamilton's caushet I threw away the pure faith of my little comrade; for a touch of her hand I blighted her trust; and laughed as I did it.

Only once was Mrs. Hamilton off her guard, when my earnest acting had suddenly become real to me – a danger, I have since found, that no actors are too clever to escape sometimes.

"If for one moment you could be in earnest," she ventured, with a smile.

I was on guard again before she finished, and she saw it, but was too wise to betray regret or anger for her mistake.

"Pray, cease," she said; "you weary me, Mr. Cardigan. The coldest among us reflect fire, even though it be as false as the dead fires of the moon. You are prettily revenged; let us have peace."

Now the healths flew thick and fast from Sir William and Lord Dunmore, the titled toast-masters, and we drank his Majesty George the Third in bumpers which set the Indians a-howling like timber wolves at Candlemas.

Indeed, our forest of lights might have served for the Romish feast itself.

Toast followed toast in a tempest of cheers, through which the yelps of the Indians sounded faintly. I saw Brant take a silver plate and a solid candle-stick from under Red Jacket's shirt, while that great orator, very drunk, sat a-hacking the cloth with a table-knife. I saw my Lord Dunmore, all in white silk and blazing with stars, rise to pledge the ladies, and stand swaying and leering and gumming his glass till it upset on his chin, and the jewels in his lace front dripped wine.

Mistress Molly we pledged with a shout, and she returned our courtesy with gentle gravity, but her eyes were for Sir William alone.

Then Lord Dunmore gave:

"Our lovely heiress, Mistress Warren!" ending in a hiccough, and poor Silver Heels, pale as a white blossom, half rose from her seat as though to fly to Mistress Molly.

Red Jacket was on his feet now, slavering and mouthing and hacking at the air, and Brant and I dragged him out into the garden where his squaw took charge, leading him lurching and howling down the hill. Before I returned, the ladies were in the hallway and the card-room, the gentlemen following in groups from the table, some shamefully unsteady of leg, and feebly scattering snuff in amiable invitation to their neighbours.

But Sir William had disappeared, and I hunted vainly for him until I encountered Mrs. Hamilton, who directed me to the library, whither, she averred, Sir William, Governor Tryon, and Lord Dunmore had retired.

"State secrets, Master Michael," she added, saucily. "You had best find Mr. Bevan and start those same lessons we have discussed."

"Let me instruct him by proxy," said I, drawing her under the stairs, and ere she could protest or escape, I kissed her lips three separate times.

She was in tears in an instant, which I had not counted on, and it needed my most earnest acting to subdue her indignation.

I had my arm around her, and my coat was all powder and rouge, when something made me look around. There was Silver Heels going towards the pantry with Betty, doubtless to pouch some sweets for her black nurse. Her head was steadily lowered, her lashes rested on her cheeks, but face and neck and bosom were glowing in a deep colour, and I knew she had perceived us, and that she despised us with all the strength of her innocent soul.

Stunned with the conviction that I had gone too far, I made out to play my miserable farce to an end and led Mrs. Hamilton out where Mr. Bevan could pounce upon her, which he did with an insolence that I had little spirit to notice or resent.

Then I hastened to the pantry where Silver Heels stood before the rifled dishes, hands to her face, and black Betty a-petting her. But at sight of me she turned scarlet and shrank back, nor would she listen to one word.

"What yoh done to mah li'l Miss Honey-bee?" exclaimed Betty, wrathfully, shaking her turban till the rings in her big ears jingled like sledge-bells in December. "I done 'spec' yoh, Mars Ca'digan, suh! Yaas, I 'spec' yoh is lak all de young gemmen!"

Then the old witch began a-crooning over Silver Heels with deadly glances at me:

"Doan yoh cyah, li'l Miss Honey-bee, doan yoh mind nuff'n! Huh! Had mah s'picions 'bout dat young Mars Ca'digan. Doan yoh mind him no moh'n a blue-tail fly!"

"Very well," said I, angrily, "you can do as you choose, and think what you like. As for your fool of a dragoon, Mrs. Hamilton will settle him, and if she doesn't I will."

My foolish outburst seemed to rouse a panther in Silver Heels, and for a moment I believed she meant to strike me. But the storm swept over, leaving her with limbs a-quiver and eyes wet.

"You have spoiled my first pleasure," she said, in a low, trembling voice. "You have conducted like a clown and a libertine where all beheld you making shameful love to a wedded woman! Oh, Betty, Betty, send him away!" she sobbed, burying her head in the black woman's breast.

"Silver Heels," I said, choking, "can you not understand that it is I who wish to wed you?"

Again the panther blazed in her gray eyes, but her lips were bloodless as she gasped: "Oh, the insult! Betty – do you hear? He would marry me out of pity! That is twice he has said it!"

"I said it before because I would not have you marry Mr. Butler," said I, wincing at her scorn. "But I say it now because – because – I love you, Silver Heels."

All her horror of me was in her eyes. I saw it and set my teeth hard, hopeless now forever, even of her careless affection.

And so I left her there, with Betty's arms around her, and the hot scorn in her eyes. But as I went away, chilled with self-contempt and mortification, heedless, utterly careless what I did to further degrade myself in her eyes, came black Betty a-waddling to pluck me by the sleeve and whisper:

"Doan yoh go to wed wif nobody, Mars Ca'digan, suh! Doan yoh go foh to co't nobody. Mah li'l chile – mah li'l Miss Honey-bee ain't done growed up yet, suh. Bime-by she'll know moh'n she 'specs 'bout gemmens, suh."

But my evil nature was uppermost, and I laughed and bade Betty mind her own affairs, leaving her there grumbling and mumbling about "fool boys" and "li'l fool Honey-bees," till the clatter and din from the card-room shut her voice from my ears.

CHAPTER VIII

When I came to the library the door stood partly open, and I could see a party of gentlemen lounging within, and somewhat boisterous over their wine and filberts; so thinking no harm to enter, I walked in and sat down on the arm of a leather chair by the window.

Nobody had observed me, however, and I was on the point of respectfully making known my presence to Sir William, when I saw Walter Butler rise and shut the door, taking the additional precaution to lock it. Turning to rejoin the company around the table, his dark golden eyes fell upon me, and he stood still, one hand tightening on the back of his chair.

"Well?" inquired Sir William, testily, looking up at Mr. Butler. "When you are seated, sir, I will continue, unless I weary the company."

"If Mr. Cardigan has been here all this time, I, for one, was not aware of it," observed Mr. Butler, coldly, never taking his unblinking eyes off me.

I began to explain to Sir William that I had but that moment came in, when he interrupted querulously, and motioned Mr. Butler to be seated.

"Tush! tush! Let be, let be, Captain Butler! My young kinsman has my confidence, and it is time he should know something of what passes in his own country."

"At sixteen," observed my Lord Dunmore, with a maudlin chuckle, "I knew a thing or two, I'll warrant you – curse me if I didn't, Sir William!"

Sir John Johnson regarded me without interest; Colonel Claus never even troubled to give me a glance, but I saw the hawk's eyes of Walter Butler watching me steadily.

"To resume," began Sir William, but Lord Dunmore broke out:

"At sixteen I had outlived you all – pierce me if I hadn't, now, Sir William! Scratch me raw! if I hadn't put a finger in the world's pudding, a-stirring the plums at sixteen, by God!"

"Doubtless, my Lord," said Sir William, dryly. "And now, gentlemen, concerning our show of force here, I have only to say – and I say it with all respect and submission to Governor Tryon – that I do not believe it will produce that salutary effect on the discontented in New York and Boston which Governor Tryon expects."

"Gad! I *do* expect it!" said Tryon, briskly. "Look you, Sir William, you and your militia dominate the county, and these rascals must be brought to understand it. Trust me, messires, the damned Yankees will know of this militia display before the post rides into Boston!"

"Add our Mohawks to the militia," observed Walter Butler, in a colourless voice.

Sir William's jaw was set hard, but he said nothing.

"Add the whole Six Nations," suggested Lord Dunmore, leering at Sir William; "come, now! curse me blind! but we shall have the whole Six Nations, and that filthy little Red Jacket to boot."

"My Lord," replied Sir William, "if it lay with your Lordship you would have Red Jacket against you."

This blunt rebuke almost sobered Lord Dunmore for a moment, and he asked Sir William what he meant.

"I mean," said the Baronet, "that you mocked this powerful chief, Red Jacket, at my table to-night, and he knew it. That is not the way to gain allies, my Lord."

"The drunken, guzzling son of a slut!" bawled Lord Dunmore, "d'ye think I care what the bandy-legged little beast thinks?"

"I only know," replied Sir William, curtly, "that if your Lordship has so conducted in Virginia, the King cannot look for any Indian support in that colony."

"Oh, choke me, Sir William, but that's too bad now! – pinch me blue if it isn't!" protested Lord Dunmore in a pet. Then a subtle smirk settled on his waxen cast of a face and he winked his weak eyes at Walter Butler, a proceeding observed by me and by Sir William.

Not for a moment now did I doubt that Lord Dunmore had set Colonel Cresap to drive the Cayugas into a hatred for the colonies, nor did I doubt but that Walter Butler knew of this plan, perhaps had even connived at it.

Sir William, too, had come to some quick conclusion, for I saw the crease deepen around his jaws, and his steady eyes strike fire. But he said nothing to interrupt Lord Dunmore, who had now launched into a gust of incoherent words and protestations and hiccoughs, to which all listened sneeringly until his voice ended with a hollow buzz inside his wine-glass.

There came a silence, broken by the clear sarcastic tones of Sir William.

"I beg permission to submit to Governor Tryon the opinion of a country Baronet – for what that opinion may be worth."

"With pleasure," said Governor Tryon, cordially, looking up from the plate of nuts he was picking.

"And this is my opinion," continued Sir William, "that, firstly, the disaffected classes in Boston and New York will not care a fig for our conference here, nor for our show of militia; that, secondly, if they should once entertain a suspicion that England, in the event of war, proposes to employ savages as allies to subdue rebellion, we would have to-morrow the thirteen colonies swarming like thirteen hives to sting us all to death – ay – and there would not be an Indian left twixt here and the Ohio!"

"What would become of them?" piped up Lord Dunmore, so innocently that I saw Governor Tryon pass his hand over his mouth to conceal a smile. But Walter Butler's passionless voice was sounding now, and I saw Sir William turn his head to lose no gesture or shade of meaning.

"It is come to the point where either the rebels are to win over the Indians, or where we must take measures to secure their services. I am not in a position to inform you, gentlemen, as to the actual existing conditions in the Indian Department. That, Sir William can do better than any one in America. Therefore, I beg Sir William to kindly make it clear to us what chances we have to win the support of the Six Nations – in the event of a rebel rising against the King's authority."

The tangled knot was cut, the cat had sprung from the bag. Yet nobody by glance or word or gesture appeared to be aware of it.

Sir William's manner was perfectly composed, though that deep crease binding his chin deepened, and his brows bent in towards his nose as he rested his chin on his hand and spoke, eyes fixed on his wine-glass:

"Captain Butler believes that it has come to this: that either those in authority or the disaffected must seek allies among these savage hordes which hang like thunder-clouds along our frontiers. Gentlemen, I am not of that opinion. I have said openly, and I care not who knows it, that if war must come between England and these colonies, let it be a white man's war; in mercy, let it be a war between two civilized peoples, and not a butchery of demons!

"I do believe – and I say so solemnly and before God – that it is possible to so conduct that these savages will remain neutral if war must come. Ay, more! *I* will answer for them!"

He lifted his eyes and looked straight at Lord Dunmore, raising his voice slightly, but betraying no passion.

"And, gentlemen, as I am his Majesty's intendant of Indian affairs in North America, I shall now do all that I can to pacify my wards, to keep them calm and orderly in the event of a war which I, for one, regard with horror. Were I to do otherwise, I must account to my King for a trust betrayed, and I must answer also to Him whom King and subject alike account to."

On Walter Butler's lips a sneer twitched; my Lord Dunmore wiped his bleared eyes with a rag of lace and stared at everybody with drunken gravity.

"I know not," said Sir William, slowly, "what true loyalty may be if it be not to save the honour of our King, and rebuke those who seek to tarnish it. And if there are now those among his counsellors or deputies who urge him to seek these savages as allies, I say it is a monstrous thing and an inspiration from hell itself."

He swung on his elbow and fixed his eyes on Walter Butler.

"You, sir, know something of border war. How then can you propose to let loose these Indians on the people of our colonies?"

"Lest they let loose these same savages on us," replied Mr. Butler, calmly.

Sir William frowned.

"You do not know the colonists, Mr. Butler," he said. "What marvel then that my Lord North should misunderstand them, and think to buy their loyalty with tuppence worth o' tea?"

"Come, come, Sir William!" cried Governor Tryon, laughing, and plainly anxious to break the tension ere sharp words flew. "Did I not know you to the bone, sir, I should deem it my duty to catechise you concerning the six articles of loyalty!"

"I, too, i' faith!" squeaked Lord Dunmore. "Skewer me! Sir William, but you talk like a Boston preacher – ay – that you do, and – "

"Have done, sir!" cut in Sir William, with such bitter contempt that the faces of all present sobered quickly. Even Governor Tryon glanced uneasily at Lord Dunmore to see how he might swallow such a pill, but that nobleman only blinked stupidly and sucked his thin lips, too drunk to understand how like a lackey he had been silenced.

Sir John Johnson and Colonel Claus, deputies to Sir William in the Indian Department, exchanged puzzled glances. But I noticed that Mr. Butler never took his eyes from Sir William's darkening visage.

"There is one more matter," said the Baronet, "that I may be pardoned for introducing here amid all the perplexities of the times; but it is a matter touching on my own stewardship, and as that concerns my King, I deem it necessary to broach it."

He turned again deliberately on Lord Dunmore.

"It has come to my knowledge that certain unauthorized people are tampering with a distant tribe of my Cayuga Indians. I know not, nor do I care, what the motives of these men may be, but I protest against it, and I shall do all in my power – without infringing on the rights or laws of a sister colony – to protect my Cayugas from unlawful aggression!"

"Damme!" gurgled Lord Dunmore, passing his jewelled hand over his befuddled head. "Damme, Sir William, d'ye mean to accuse me? Curse me! Skewer me! Claw me raw! but it is not fair," he snivelled. "No, it is not fair! Take your hands off my sleeve and be done a-twitching it, Captain Butler! Damme! I never set Cresap on. Will ye have done a-pinching my arm, Captain Butler?"

The ghastly humour of the exposure, the ludicrous self-conviction of his tipsy Lordship – for nobody had mentioned Cresap – the startling disclosure, too, of Walter Butler's interest in the plot – for that it was a plot no longer could anybody doubt – cast a gloom over the company.

Every man present understood what Cresap's aggression meant; no man there dared acknowledge a desire for Cresap's success.

Then Sir William's sarcastic voice pierced the silence.

"I trust your Lordship would not believe that any gentleman present could harbour suspicions of a foul conspiracy between your Lordship and Captain Butler, to incite my Cayugas to attack white men!"

Walter Butler's slow eye rested on Lord Dunmore, on Sir William, and then on me. But his bloodless visage never changed.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, let us have harmony here at any cost," protested Governor Tryon, half in jest, half in earnest. "God knows I have discord enough in New York town without seeking it among the loyalists of this county. Nobody believes that my Lord Dunmore is seeking trouble with your tame Indians, Sir William. If this fellow Cresap, who is a notorious malcontent, too, be imposing on the Cayugas, I doubt not that my Lord Dunmore will recall him and deal with him severely."

"No, I won't! Claw my vitals if I do!" snapped his Lordship, in the drunken sulks, and straightway fell a-squabbling with Walter Butler, who had again laid a hand on his arm.

For Captain Butler knew his treachery had been discovered, and his shameless impudence in openly attempting to muzzle his noble partner in conspiracy passed all bounds of decency.

I saw the angry light glimmer in Sir William's eyes, and I knew it boded no good to Walter Butler, as far as his hope of Silver Heels was concerned. A fierce happiness filled me. So now, at last, Sir William was discovering the fangs in his pet snake!

Lord Dunmore had succeeded in reversing a decanter of port over himself and Colonel Claus, and the latter, mad as a wet cat, left the room swearing audibly, while his playful Lordship threw a few glasses after him and then collapsed in a soiled heap of silk and jewels, feebly calling on "Billy Tryon" to try and "conduc like er – er – gen'l-m'n, b' God!"

Sir William was steadily staring at Walter Butler; I, too, had my eye on him; and, when he left the table to saunter towards the door, Sir William rose immediately to follow him, and I after Sir William.

He saw us coming as he opened the door, and surveyed us with cool effrontery as we joined him in the hallway.

"I shall not require your services hereafter as my secretary, Captain Butler," said Sir William. "Will you kindly hand your keys to me?"

"At your command, Sir William," replied Mr. Butler, drawing the keys from his pocket and presenting them with an ironical inclination.

The man's careless self-possession was marvellous considering he was facing the man he had so vilely betrayed.

"Mr. Butler," said Sir William, with reddening face, "I consider myself released from my consent to your union with my kinswoman, Miss Warren!"

"As to that, sir," observed Captain Butler, cynically, "I shall take my chances."

I heard what he said, but Sir William misunderstood him.

"It is your mischance, sir, to put no harsher interpretation on it. But my decision is irrevocable, Mr. Butler, for I have destined Miss Warren to a loyal man, my kinsman, Michael Cardigan!"

The spasm that jerked Mr. Butler's mouth into that ghastly grimace I knew so well, was not lost on Sir William.

"I'll take that chance, too," said Mr. Butler, bowing.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded Sir William, steadying his voice with an effort.

But Walter Butler only replied with such glare at me that Sir William involuntarily turned to find me, rigid, behind him. The next moment Captain Butler passed noiselessly out into the starlight, wrapping his black cloak around him.

Sir William followed him mechanically to the door, and I at his heels, burning for a quarrel with Walter Butler, and awaiting only for Sir William to return to the library, and leave me free to follow and insult Mr. Butler for the treacherous villain he had proved himself.

But Sir William, seeing me slinking out, laid a hand on my shoulder and spun me sharply round on my heels to look into my eyes.

"Now what the devil are *you* up to?" he broke out, half divining the truth. "Michael! Michael! Don't be a fool! Are there not fools enough here to-night?"

"No, sir," I answered, sheepishly.

"That is not the way to serve me, lad," said Sir William, roughly. "Have I not sorrow enough without seeing you carried in here with a hole in your breast, you meddlesome ass?"

"I have a certain score to clean off," I muttered.

"Oh," observed Sir William, coldly, "a selfish quarrel – eh? I was a fond old fool to think I might count on you."

Tears started to my eyes; I could have bitten my tongue off.

"You can count on me, sir," I said, choking out the words. "I meant no harm; I am not selfish, sir; I care only for you."

"I know it, lad," he said, kindly. "And mind, I do not rebuke your spirit; I only ask you to learn discretion. This is no time to settle private matters. No man in America has that right now, because every man's life belongs to the country!"

"On which side, sir?" I faltered.

Sir William was silent for a while. Presently he took my arm and we walked out under the stars.

"My boy," he said, sadly, "I cannot answer you, but I can place matters in a clear light for you. The decision must remain with yourself."

Then he told me how the Boston people had been taxed without their consent, but I could not see why they should not cheerfully give their all to their King, and I said so.

"Very well," replied Sir William, gravely. "Let us approach the matter from your personal view. Here are you, young, vigorous, of good lineage, and sure to succeed to your uncle's title and estate some day. You are, at sixteen, an officer of his Majesty's border cavalry; you have every prospect of promotion; the King remembers your father, Governor Tryon is your friend. And I, Michael, have decided to leave you, in my testament, sufficient to maintain you handsomely should you desire to marry Felicity before your uncle's death. *That*, my boy, is the *King's side*.

"Now suppose, from a high motive of duty, you should suddenly resolve to embrace the cause of the plain people. Could you renounce your commission in the King's army to shoulder a firelock, perhaps a stable-fork, in the ranks of your countrymen? Could you give up ease, hopes, position? Could you give up your friends and kinsmen? Could you give up what sum I may leave you in my will? For Sir John would never let a penny of my money go to a rebel. Could you give up, if need be, the woman you loved? Think, and be not in haste to answer. For *that* is the *other* side to embrace, with perhaps a hangman's rope at the end."

"Am I to answer you to-night, sir?" I asked.

"God forbid!" he said, solemnly.

"I will say this," said I; "that where my heart is, I would follow in rags. And my heart is with you, sir."

He stood still, drawing me closer, but said nothing more, for there came running out of the darkness an officer with naked claymore shining in the starlight, and when he drew near we saw it was Mr. Duncan.

"The Indian is gone!" he panted. "Gone away crazed with fever! The doctor lies in the hut with a broken shoulder; Quider crushed it in his madness!"

Sir William swayed as though struck.

"The sentries chased him to the woods," continued poor Duncan, out of breath; "but he ran like a panther and – we had your orders not to fire. He will die, anyhow; the doctor says he will seek some creek or pond and die in the water like a poisoned rat. They are bringing the doctor now."

Up out of the shadow loomed two soldiers, forming a litter with their muskets, on which sat our doctor, Pierson, head hanging. And when Sir William came to him he looked up with a sick grimace and shook his head feebly.

"He broke those ropes as though they had been worsted," he said. "I tried to hold him down, but he had the strength of delirium, Sir William. I want that fat surgeon of the Royal Americans to set this bone," he added, weakly, and fell a-groaning.

Mr. Duncan started on a run for the barracks; the soldiers and the injured man passed on towards the guard-house, and Sir William stood staring after them.

Presently he said, aloud, "God's will be done on my poor country!"

We walked back to the house together. Some of the guests were leaving, but the card-room was still crowded, and in the library my Lord Dunmore lay on the carpet cursing and vomiting and shrieking that no man should put him to bed, and that he meant to crack another bottle or a dozen heads.

Here and there, out through the orchard, drunken Indians lurched lodgeward, followed by their patient squaws; here and there sedan-chairs passed, the grunting bearers stepping lively in the brisk night wind.

Below the hill, in Johnstown, the court-house windows were still twinkling with lights, and when the wind set our way, we could hear the distant strains of the brigade band playing for the dancers.

Sir William entered the hallway of his house and looked around. In a corner of one window sat Mrs. Hamilton and Mr. Bevan, somewhat close together; in another window were gathered Colonel Claus and his lady and Sir John Johnson, whispering. Brant, surrounded by a bevy of fine ladies, was turning over the pages of a book and answering questions in polite monosyllables, for he had a quiet contempt for those who regarded him as a curiosity, though susceptible enough to real homage.

"And out of all my house," murmured Sir William, in a bitter voice, "not one whom I can trust – not one! – not one!"

After a moment I plucked at his sleeve, reproachfully.

"Yes – I know – I know, my boy. But I need a man now – a man of experience, a man in bodily vigour, a man in devotion."

"You need a man to go to Colonel Cresap," I whispered. For the first and only time in my life I saw that I had startled Sir William.

"Let me go, sir?" I entreated, eagerly. "If I am keen enough to read your purpose, I am not too stupid to carry it out. I know what you wish. I know you cannot trust your message to paper, nor to a living soul except me. I know what to say to Colonel Cresap. Let me serve you, sir, for I do long so to help you?"

We had fallen back to the porch again while I was speaking, Sir William holding me so tightly by the elbow that his clutch numbed my arm.

"I cannot," he muttered, under his breath. "To-morrow Dunmore will set his spies to see that Cresap remains undisturbed. The Ohio trails will be watched for a messenger from me. Who knows what Dunmore's and Butler's men might do to carry out their designs on my Cayugas?"

"Dare they attack an officer in uniform?" I asked, astonished.

"What is there to prevent a shot in ambush? And are there no renegades in Johnstown to hire?" replied Sir William, bitterly. "Why, the town's full of them, lad; men as desperate as Jack Mount himself."

"But I know the woods! You, yourself, sir, say I am a very Mohawk in the woods!" I pleaded. "I fear no ambush, though the highwayman Jack Mount himself were after me. Have I not been twice to the Virginia line with Brant? Do you think I could fail to reach Cresap with the whole forest as plain to me as the Stony Way below this hill? And remember I carry no papers to be stolen. I could first go with belts to the Cayugas, and tell the truth about Quider and his party. Then I would deliver the belts as you delivered them to Quider. Then I would find Cresap and show him what a fool he is."

"And so serve the enemies of the King?" said Sir William, looking keenly at me.

"And so serve you, sir," I retorted, in a flash. "Are you an enemy to the King?"

"But, my boy," said Sir William, huskily, "do you understand that you must go alone on this mission?"

I sprang forward and threw my arms around him with a hug like a young bear.

"Then I'm going! I'm going!" I whispered, enchanted, while he murmured brokenly that he could not spare me and that I was all he had on earth.

But I would not be denied; I coaxed him to my little bedroom, lighted the candle, and made him sit down on my cot. Then I explained excitedly my purpose, and to prove that I knew the trails, I sharpened my treasured Faber pencil and made a drawing for him, noting every ford and carrying-place – which latter I proposed to avoid – and finally hazarded a guess as to the exact spot where Colonel Cresap might be found.

Also, in pantomime and whispers, I rehearsed the part I meant to play before the Cayugas, making the speeches that Sir William had made to Quider, as nearly as I could remember, and delivering each belt in dumb show and with all the dignity I could command, till I came to the last, which, by mistake, I spoke of as a *red* instead of *black* belt.

"Wait," interrupted Sir William, who had become deeply interested; "what is 'black' in the Mohawk tongue?"

"Kahonji," I replied, promptly.

"And in Onondaga?"

"Osuntah, sir."

"And in Cayuga?"

I hesitated, then blushed, for I did not know.

"Sweandaea," said Sir William, gravely; "how are you to bear my peace-belts if you know not the red of war from the black of good intent?"

"I should have said 'Hot-Kwah-Weyo' —*good*-red, not *war*-red," I replied, so naïvely that Sir William laughed outright.

"With such resourceful impudence," he said, "you cannot be misunderstood among the Six Nations. It eases my mind to find you quick and ingenious in a tight place, lad. But, Michael, have a care to use no Delaware words, for that would render my Cayugas suspicious."

I promised eagerly, and we sat down together to go over the trail, mile by mile, computing the circles I should be obliged to take to avoid the carrying-places where spies were most to be feared.

"Dunmore rides South in a week," said Sir William. "But he will not wait till he reaches Virginia before he sends out his emissaries to urge Cresap on. You must beat them, lad, and go afoot at that."

"I can go the faster," said I. "Horses are useless in the Pennsylvania bush until you reach Crown Gap. I take it that Lord Dunmore's men, being Virginians, will go mounted, and that gives me double time to reach Cresap."

And so we sat there together on the bed, planning, suggesting precautions, counting the dangers and mischances only to discount them with confidence in my knowledge of woodcraft, and the night wore on till my candle sank into a lake of wax, trailing a long, flaring flame.

"There is one thing I have thought of," said I, soberly. "It is this: if I am going out as an enemy to the King, I cannot for shame aid me by wearing the King's uniform. Therefore, with your approval, sir, I will go in my buckskins, unless you believe that, by this journey of mine, I will benefit our King."

"Then," said Sir William, slowly, "you must go in your buckskins, lad."

The moment had come; I was face to face with it now.

"Am – am I to resign my commission in the Border Horse, sir?" I faltered. The prospect of the sacrifice choked my speech, and my heart swelled with a grief that sent the water to my eyes in spite of me.

Sir William considered me in silence, then broke out: "No, no! Not yet. Who knows but what this war may never break over us! No, no, my boy! Your errand is an errand of justice and mercy. I send you as my own messenger. It is my duty to protect my Cayugas, and it is yours to obey me. You may, for the present at least, retain your commission and your sword with honour. It is Dunmore and Butler we are fighting now, not our King."

"I shall go in my buckskins, anyhow," I said, cheerfully, and thankful that the evil moment had been put off – that evil moment which I now understood was surely coming for us both. He knew it, too; his face was loose and seamed and gray and haggard; the light of the candle's smoky wick, swimming in wax, threw ghastly shadows over brow and cheeks.

As we sat there, my hand in his, staring at the phantoms of that ominous future, I heard Silver Heels come running up the stairs and stop at my door, calling out to Sir William.

When I opened the door she drew back scornfully, but, catching a glimpse of Sir William within, she marched past me and perched herself on Sir William's knees, both arms around his neck.

What she whispered to him I could not hear, but he promptly shook his head in refusal, and presently it came out that she was teasing to be allowed to go with a certain fat dame, Lady Shelton, and make a month's stay with her at Pittsburg.

"I do so long to go," pleaded Silver Heels. "I have never been anywhere, you know. And we are to have such rare pleasures at the June running races, and there will be horses from Virginia and Maryland and New York, and we are to have dancing every evening and a dinner given for me! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I want to go so much! I truly do, sir, and I should be so happy and so thankful to you – "

"In Heaven's name, stop your chatter, Felicity!" cried Sir William, striving to undo her arms from his neck, but she only kissed him and clung so tightly and reproachfully that he gave up in sheer fatigue.

"Oh, go, then! Go, you little witch! And mind you take Betty with you! And mind that Aunt Mary provides for you ere you go!"

Silver Heels embraced him rapturously with a little shout of delight, and sped away to the nursery without a glance at me. What did I care? I had begun to dislike her cordially; I could afford to, now that she in her turn disliked Mr. Bevan.

I had also the savage satisfaction of remembering that she was free of Walter Butler forever, and I observed her departure grimly. As for Sir William's new desire to see us wedded, I had not at all made up my mind. Besides, Silver Heels despised me, and I would not endure that.

Presently Sir William rose and walked out into the hallway, saying, with affected carelessness: "Then you will start before dawn, Michael?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.