

**CHAMBERS**

**ROBERT**

**WILLIAM**

THE MAID-AT-ARMS

Robert Chambers  
**The Maid-At-Arms**

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# Robert W. Chambers

## The Maid-At-Arms: A Novel

### I

#### THE ROAD TO VARICKS'

We drew bridle at the cross-roads; he stretched his legs in his stirrups, raised his arms, yawned, and dropped his huge hands upon either thigh with a resounding slap.

"Well, good-bye," he said, gravely, but made no movement to leave me.

"Do we part here?" I asked, sorry to quit my chance acquaintance of the Johnstown highway. He nodded, yawned again, and removed his round cap of silver-fox fur to scratch his curly head.

"We certainly do part at these cross-roads, if you are bound for Varicks'," he said.

I waited a moment, then thanked him for the pleasant entertainment his company had afforded me, and wished him a safe journey.

"A safe journey?" he repeated, carelessly. "Oh yes, of course; safe journeys are rare enough in these parts. I'm obliged to you for the thought. You are very civil, sir. Good-bye."

Yet neither he nor I gathered bridle to wheel our horses, but sat there in mid-road, looking at each other.

"My name is Mount," he said at length; "let me guess yours. No, sir! don't tell me. Give me three sportsman's guesses; my hunting-knife against the wheat straw you are chewing!"

"With pleasure," I said, amused, "but you could scarcely guess it."

"Your name is Varick?"

I shook my head.

"Butler?"

"No. Look sharp to your knife, friend."

"Oh, then I have guessed it," he said, coolly; "your name is Ormond—and I'm glad of it."

"Why are you glad of it?" I asked, curiously, wondering, too, at his knowledge of me, a stranger.

"You will answer that question for yourself when you meet your kin, the Varicks and Butlers," he said; and the reply had an insolent ring that did not please me, yet I was loath to quarrel with this boyish giant whose amiable company I had found agreeable on my long journey through a land so new to me.

"My friend," I said, "you are blunt."

"Only in speech, sir," he replied, lazily swinging one huge leg over the pommel of his saddle. Sitting at ease in the sunshine, he opened his fringed hunting-shirt to the breeze blowing.

"So you go to the Varicks?" he mused aloud, eyes slowly closing in the sunshine like the brilliant eyes of a basking lynx.

"Do you know the lord of the manor?" I asked.

"Who? The patroon?"

"I mean Sir Lupus Varick."

"Yes; I know him—I know Sir Lupus. We call him the patroon, though he's not of the same litter as the Livingstons, the Cosbys, the Phillipses, Van Rensselaers, and those feudal gentlemen who juggle with the high justice, the middle, and the low—and who will juggle no more."

"Am I mistaken," said I, "in taking you for a Boston man?"

"In one sense you are," he said, opening his eyes. "I was born in Vermont."

"Then you are a rebel?"

"Lord!" he said, laughing, "how you twist our English tongue! 'Tis his Majesty across the waters who rebels at our home-made Congress."

"Is it not dangerous to confess such things to a stranger?" I asked, smiling.

His bright eyes reassured me. "Not to all strangers," he drawled, swinging his free foot over his horse's neck and settling his bulk on the saddle. One big hand fell, as by accident, over the pan of his long rifle. Watching, without seeming to, I saw his forefinger touch the priming, stealthily, and find it dry.

"You are no King's man," he said, calmly.

"Oh, do you take me for a rebel, too?" I demanded.

"No, sir; you are neither the one nor the other—like a tadpole with legs, neither frog nor pollywog. But you will be."

"Which?" I asked, laughing.

"My wisdom cannot draw that veil for you, sir," he said. "You may take your chameleon color from your friends the Varicks and remain gray, or from the Butlers and turn red, or from the Schuylers and turn blue and buff."

"You credit me with little strength of character," I said.

"I credit you with some twenty-odd years and no experience."

"With nothing more?"

"Yes, sir; with sincerity and a Spanish rifle—which you may have need of ere this month of May has melted into June."

I glanced at the beautiful Spanish weapon resting across my pommel.

"What do you know of the Varicks?" I asked, smiling.

"More than do you," he said, "for all that they are your kin. Look at me, sir! Like myself, you wear deer-skin from throat to ankle, and your nose is ever sniffing to windward. But this is a strange wind to you. You see, you smell, but your eyes ask, 'What is it?' You are a woodsman, but a stranger among your own kin. You have never seen a living Varick; you have never even seen a partridge."

"Your wisdom is at fault there," I said, maliciously.

"Have you seen a Varick?"

"No; but the partridge—"

"Pooh! a little creature, like a gray meadow-lark remoulded! You call it partridge, I call it quail. But I speak of the crested thunder-drumming cock that struts all ruffed like a Spanish grandee of ancient times. Wait, sir!" and he pointed to a string of birds' footprints in the dust just ahead. "Tell me what manner of creature left its mark there?"

I leaned from my saddle, scanning the sign carefully, but the bird that made it was a strange bird to me. Still bending from my saddle, I heard his mocking laugh, but did not look up.

"You wear a lynx-skin for a saddle-cloth," he said, "yet that lynx never squalled within a thousand miles of these hills."

"Do you mean to say there are no lynxes here?" I asked.

"Plenty, sir, but their ears bear no black-and-white marks. Pardon, I do not mean to vex you; I read as I run, sir; it is my habit."

"So you have traced me on a back trail for a thousand miles—from habit," I said, not exactly pleased.

"A thousand miles—by your leave."

"Or without it."

"Or without it—a thousand miles, sir, on a back trail, through forests that blossom like gigantic gardens in May with flowers sweeter than our white water-lilies abloom on trees that bear glossy leaves the year round; through thickets that spread great, green, many-fingered hands at you, all adrip with golden jasmine; where pine wood is fat as bacon; where the two oaks shed their leaves, yet are ever in foliage; where the thick, blunt snakes lie in the mud and give no warning when they deal death.

So far, sir, I trail you, back to the soil where your baby fingers first dug—soil as white as the snow which you are yet to see for the first time in your life of twenty-three years. A land where there are no hills; a land where the vultures sail all day without flapping their tip-curved wings; where slimy dragon things watch from the water's edge; where Greek slaves sweat at indigo-vats that draw vultures like carrion; where black men, toiling, sing all day on the sea-islands, plucking cotton-blossoms; where monstrous horrors, hornless and legless, wallow out to the sedge and graze like cattle—

"Man! You picture a hell!" I said, angrily, "while I come from paradise!"

"The outer edges of paradise border on hell," he said. "Wait! Sniff that odor floating."

"It is jasmine!" I muttered, and my throat tightened with a homesick spasm.

"It is the last of the arbutus," he said, dropping his voice to a gentle monotone. "This is New York province, county of Tryon, sir, and yonder bird trilling is not that gray minstrel of the Spanish orange-tree, mocking the jays and the crimson fire-birds which sing 'Peet! peet!' among the china-berries. Do you know the wild partridge-pea of the pine barrens, that scatters its seeds with a faint report when the pods are touched? There is in this land a red bud which has burst thundering into crimson bloom, scattering seeds o' death to the eight winds. And every seed breeds a battle, and every root drinks blood!"

He straightened in his stirrups, blue eyes ablaze, face burning under its heavy mask of tan and dust.

"If I know a man when I see him, I know you," he said. "God save our country, friend, upon this sweet May day."

"Amen, sir," I replied, tingling. "And God save the King the whole year round!"

"Yes," he repeated, with a disagreeable laugh, "God save the King; he is past all human aid now, and headed straight to hell. Friend, let us part ere we quarrel. You will be with me or against me this day week. I knew it was a man I addressed, and no tavern-post."

"Yet this brawl with Boston is no affair of mine," I said, troubled. "Who touches the ancient liberties of Englishmen touches my country, that is all I know."

"Which country, sir?"

"Greater Britain."

"And when Greater Britain divides?"

"It must not!"

"It has."

I unbound the scarlet handkerchief which I wore for a cap, and held it between my fingers to dry its sweat in the breeze. Watching it flutter, I said:

"Friend, in my country we never cross the branch till we come to it, nor leave the hammock till the river-sands are beneath our feet. No hunting-shirt is sewed till the bullet has done its errand, nor do men fish for gray mullet with a hook and line. There is always time to pray for wisdom."

"Friend," replied Mount, "I wear red quills on my moccasins, you wear bits of sea-shell. That is all the difference between us. Good-bye. Varick Manor is the first house four miles ahead."

He wheeled his horse, then, as at a second thought, checked him and looked back at me.

"You will see queer folk yonder at the patroon's," he said. "You are accustomed to the manners of your peers; you were bred in that land where hospitality, courtesy, and deference are shown to equals; where dignity and graciousness are expected from the elders; where duty and humility are inbred in the young. So is it with us—except where you are going. The great patroon families, with their vast estates, their patents, their feudal systems, have stood supreme here for years. Theirs is the power of life and death over their retainers; they reign absolute in their manors, they account only to God for their trusts. And they are great folk, sir, even yet—these Livingstons, these Van Rensselaers, these Phillipses, lords of their manors still; Dutch of descent, polished, courtly, proud, bearing the title of patroon as a noble bears his coronet."

He raised his hand, smiling. "It is not so with the Varicks. They are patroons, too, yet kin to the Johnsons, of Johnson Hall and Guy Park, and kin to the Ormond-Butlers. But they are different from either Johnson or Butler—vastly different from the Schuylers or the Livingstons—"

He shrugged his broad shoulders and dropped his hand: "The Varicks are all mad, sir. Good-bye."

He struck his horse with his soft leather heels; the animal bounded out into the western road, and his rider swung around once more towards me with a gesture partly friendly, partly, perhaps, in menace. "Tell Sir Lupus to go to the devil!" he cried, gayly, and cantered away through the golden dust.

I sat my horse to watch him; presently, far away on the hill's crest, the sun caught his rifle and sparkled for a space, then the point of white fire went out, and there was nothing on the hill-top save the dust drifting.

Lonelier than I had yet been since that day, three months gone, when I had set out from our plantation on the shallow Halifax, which the hammock scarcely separates from the ocean, I gathered bridle with listless fingers and spoke to my mare. "Isene, we must be moving eastward—always moving, sweetheart. Come, lass, there's grain somewhere in this Northern land where you have carried me." And to myself, muttering aloud as I rode: "A fine name he has given to my cousins the Varicks, this giant forest-runner, with his boy's face and limbs of iron! And he was none too cordial concerning the Butlers, either—cousins, too, but in what degree they must tell me, for I don't know—"

The road entering the forest, I ceased my prattle by instinct, and again for the thousandth time I sniffed at odors new to me, and scanned leafy depths for those familiar trees which stand warden in our Southern forests. There were pines, but they were not our pines, these feathery, dark-stemmed trees; there were oaks, but neither our golden water oaks nor our great, green-and-silver live-oaks. Little, pale flowers bloomed everywhere, shadows only of our bright blossoms of the South; and the rare birds I saw were gray and small, and chary of song, as though the stillness that slept in this Northern forest was a danger not to be awakened. Loneliness fell on me; my shoulders bent and my head hung heavily. Isene, my mare, paced the soft forest-road without a sound, so quietly that the squatting rabbit leaped from between her forelegs, and the slim, striped, squirrel-like creatures crouched paralyzed as we passed ere they burst into their shrill chatter of fright or anger, I know not which.

Had I a night to spend in this wilderness I should not know where to find a palmetto-fan for a torch, where to seek light-wood for splinter. It was all new to me; signs read riddles; tracks were sealed books; the east winds brought rain, where at home they bring heaven's own balm to us of the Spanish grants on the seaboard; the northwest winds that we dread turn these Northern skies to sapphire, and set bees a-humming on every bud.

There was no salt in the air, no citrus scent in the breeze, no heavy incense of the great magnolia bloom perfuming the wilderness like a cathedral aisle where a young bride passes, clouded in lace.

But in the heat a heavy, sweetish odor hung; balsam it is called, and mingled, too, with a faint scent like our bay, which comes from a woody bush called sweet-fern. That, and the strong smell of the bluish, short-needled pine, was ever clogging my nostrils and confusing me. Once I thought to scent a 'possum, but the musky taint came from a rotting log; and a stale fox might have crossed to windward and I not noticed, so blunted had grown my nose in this unfamiliar Northern world.

Musing, restless, dimly confused, and doubly watchful, I rode through the timber-belt, and out at last into a dusty, sunny road. And straightway I sighted a house.

The house was of stone, and large and square and gray, with only a pillared porch instead of the long double galleries we build; and it had a row of windows in the roof, called dormers, and was surrounded by a stockade of enormous timbers, in the four corners of which were set little forts pierced for rifle fire.

Noble trees stood within the fortified lines; outside, green meadows ringed the place; and the grass was thick and soft, and vivid as a green jewel in color—such grass as we never see save for a spot here and there in swampy places where the sun falls in early spring.

The house was yet a hundred rods away to the eastward. I rode on slowly, noticing the neglected fences on either hand, and thought that my cousin Varick might have found an hour to mend them, for his pride's sake.

Isene, my mare, had already scented the distant stables, and was pricking forward her beautiful ears as I unslung my broad hat of plaited palmetto and placed it on my head, the better to salute my hosts when I should ride to their threshold in the Spanish fashion we followed at home.

So, cantering on, I crossed a log bridge which spanned a ravine, below which I saw a grist-mill; and so came to the stockade. The gate was open and unguarded, and I guided my mare through without a challenge from the small corner forts, and rode straight to the porch, where an ancient negro serving-man stood, dressed in a tawdry livery too large for him. As I drew bridle he gave me a dull, almost sullen glance, and it was not until I spoke sharply to him that he shambled forward and descended the two steps to hold my stirrup.

"Is Sir Lupus at home?" I asked, looking curiously at this mute, dull-eyed black, so different from our grinning lads at home.

"Yaas, suh, he done come home, suh."

"Then announce Mr. George Ormond," I said.

He stared, but did not offer to move.

"Did you hear me?" I asked, astonished.

"Yaas, suh, I done hear yoh, suh."

I looked him over in amazement, then walked past him towards the door.

"Is you gwine look foh Mars' Lupus?" he asked, barring my way with one wrinkled, blue-black hand on the brass door-knob. "Kaze ef you is, you don't had better, suh."

I could only stare.

"Kaze Mars' Lupus done say he gwine kill de fustest man what 'sturb him, suh," continued the black man, in a listless monotone. "An' I spec' he gwine do it."

"Is Sir Lupus abed at this hour?" I asked.

"Yaas, suh."

There was no emotion in the old man's voice. Something made me think that he had given the same message to visitors many times.

I was very angry at the discourtesy, for he must have known when to expect me from my servant, who had accompanied me by water with my boxes from St. Augustine to Philadelphia, where I lingered while he went forward, bearing my letter with him. Yet, angry and disgusted as I was, there was nothing for me to do except to swallow the humiliation, walk in, and twiddle my thumbs until the boorish lord of the manor waked to greet his invited guest.

"I suppose I may enter," I said, sarcastically.

"Yaas, suh; Miss Dorry done say: 'Cato,' she say, 'ef de young gem'man come when Mars' Lupus am drunk, jess take care n' him, Cato; put him mos' anywhere 'cep in mah bed, Cato, an' jess call me ef I ain' busy 'bout mah business—'"

Still rambling on, he opened the door, and I entered a wide hallway, dirty and disordered. As I stood hesitating, a terrific crash sounded from the floor above.

"Spec' Miss Dorry busy," observed the old man, raising his solemn, wrinkled face to listen.

"Uncle," I said, "is it true that you are all mad in this house?"

"We sho' is, suh," he replied, without interest.

"Are you too crazy to care for my horse?"

"Oh no, suh."

"Then go and rub her down, and feed her, and let me sit here in the hallway. I want to think."

Another crash shook the ceiling of solid oak; very far away I heard a young girl's laughter, then a stifled chorus of voices from the floor above.

"Das Miss Dorry an' de chilluns," observed the old man.

"Who are the others?"

"Waal, dey is Miss Celia, an' Mars' Harry, an' Mars' Ruyven, an' Mars' Sam'l, an' de babby, li'l Mars' Benny."

"All mad?"

"Yaas, suh."

"I'll be, too, if I remain here," I said. "Is there an inn near by?"

"De Turkle-dove an' Olives."

"Where?"

"Bout five mile long de pike, suh."

"Feed my horse," I said, sullenly, and sat down on a settle, rifle cradled between my knees, and in my heart wrath immeasurable against my kin the Varicks.

## II IN THE HALLWAY

So this was Northern hospitality! This a Northern gentleman's home, with its cobwebbed ceiling, its little window-panes opaque with stain of rain and dust, its carpetless floors innocent of wax, littered with odds and ends—here a battered riding-cane; there a pair of tarnished spurs; yonder a scarlet hunting-coat a-trail on the banisters, with skirts all mud from feet that mayhap had used it as a mat in rainy weather!

I leaned forward and picked up the riding-crop; its cane end was capped with heavy gold. The spurs I also lifted for inspection; they were beautifully wrought in silver.

Faugh! Here was no poverty, but the shiftlessness of a sot, trampling good things into the mire!

I looked into the fireplace. Ashes of dead embers choked it; the andirons, smoke-smearred and crusted, stood out stark against the sooty maw of the hearth.

Still, for all, the hall was made in good and even noble proportion; simple, as should be the abode of a gentleman; over-massive, perhaps, and even destitute of those gracious and symmetrical galleries which we of the South think no shame to take pride in; for the banisters were brutally heavy, and the rail above like a rampart, and for a newel-post some ass had set a bronze cannon, breech upward; and it was green and beautiful, but offensive to sane consistency.

Standing, the better to observe the hall on all sides, it came to me that some one had stripped a fine English mansion of fine but ancient furniture, to bring it across an ocean and through a forest for the embellishment of this coarse house. For there were pictures in frames showing generals and statesmen of the Ormond-Butlers, one even of the great duke who fled to France; and there were pictures of the Varicks before they mingled with us Irish—apple-cheeked Dutchmen, cadaverous youths bearing match-locks, and one, an admiral, with star and sash across his varnish-cracked corselet of blue steel, looking at me with pale, smoky eyes.

Rusted suits of mail, and groups of weapons made into star shapes and circles, points outward, were ranged between the heavy pictures, each centred with a moth-ravaged stag's head, smothered in dust.

As I slowly paced the panelled wall, nose in air to observe these neglected trophies, I came to another picture, hung all alone near the wall where it passes under the staircase, and at first, for the darkness, I could not see.

Imperceptibly the outlines of the shape grew in the gloom from a deep, rich background, and I made out a figure of a youth all cased in armor save for the helmet, which was borne in one smooth, blue-veined hand.

The face, too, began to assume form; rounded, delicate, crowned with a mass of golden hair; and suddenly I perceived the eyes, and they seemed to open sweetly, like violets in a dim wood.

"What Ormond is this?" I muttered, bewitched, yet sullen to see such feminine roundness in any youth; and, with my sleeve of buckskin, I rubbed the dust from the gilded plate set in the lower frame.

"The Maid-at-Arms," I read aloud.

Then there came to me, at first like the far ring of a voice scarcely heard through southern winds, the faint echo of a legend told me ere my mother died—perhaps told me by her in those drifting hours of a childhood nigh forgotten. Yet I seemed to see white, sun-drenched sands and the long, blue swell of a summer sea, and I heard winds in the palms, and a song—truly it was my mother's; I knew it now—and, of a sudden, the words came borne on a whisper of ancient melody:

"This for the deed she did at Ashby Farms,  
Helen of Ormond, Royal Maid-at-Arms!"

Memory was stirring at last, and the gray legend grew from the past, how a maid, Helen of Ormond, for love of her cousin, held prisoner in his own house at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, sheared off her hair, clothed her limbs in steel, and rode away to seek him; and how she came to the house at Ashby and rode straight into the gateway, forcing her horse to the great hall where her lover lay, and flung him, all in chains, across her saddle-bow, riding like a demon to freedom through the Desmonds, his enemies. Ah! now my throat was aching with the memory of the song, and of that strange line I never understood—"Wearing the ghost-ring!"—and, of themselves, the words grew and died, formed on my silent lips:

"This for the deed she did at Ashby Farms,  
Helen of Ormond, Royal Maid-at-Arms!

"Though for all time the lords of Ormond be  
Butlers to Majesty,  
Yet shall new honors fall upon her  
Who, armored, rode for love to Ashby Farms;  
Let this her title be: A Maid-at-Arms!

"Serene mid love's alarms,  
For all time shall the Maids-at-Arms,  
*Wearing the ghost-ring*, triumph with their constancy.  
And sweetly conquer with a sigh  
And vanquish with a tear  
Captains a trembling world might fear.

"This for the deed she did at Ashby Farms,  
Helen of Ormond, Royal Maid-at-Arms!"

Staring at the picture, lips quivering with the soundless words, such wretched loneliness came over me that a dryness in my throat set me gulping, and I groped my way back to the settle by the fireplace and sat down heavily in homesick solitude.

Then hate came, a quick hatred for these Northern skies, and these strangers of the North who dared claim kin with me, to lure me northward with false offer of council and mockery of hospitality.

I was on my feet again in a flash, hot with anger, ready with insult to meet insult, for I meant to go ere I had greeted my host—an insult, indeed, and a deadly one among us. Furious, I bent to snatch my rifle from the settle where it lay, and, as I flung it to my shoulder, wheeling to go, my eyes fell upon a figure stealing down the stairway from above, a woman in flowered silk, bare of throat and elbow, fingers scarcely touching the banisters as she moved.

She hesitated, one foot poised for the step below; then it fell noiselessly, and she stood before me.

Anger died out under the level beauty of her gaze. I bowed, just as I caught a trace of mockery in the mouth's scarlet curve, and bowed the lower for it, too, straightening slowly to the dignity her mischievous eyes seemed to flout; and her lips, too, defied me, all silently—nay, in every limb and from every finger-tip she seemed to flout me, and the slow, deep courtesy she made me was too slow and far too low, and her recovery a marvel of plastic malice.

"My cousin Ormond?" she lisped;—"I am Dorothy Varick."

We measured each other for a moment in silence.

There was a trace of powder on her bright hair, like a mist of snow on gold; her gown's yoke was torn, for all its richness, and a wisp of lace in rags fell, clouding the delicate half-sleeve of China silk.

Her face, colored like palest ivory with rose, was no doll's face, for all its symmetry and a forgotten patch to balance the dimple in her rounded chin; it was even noble in a sense, and, if too chaste for sensuous beauty, yet touched with a strange and pensive sweetness, like 'witched marble waking into flesh.

Suddenly a voice came from above: "Dorothy, come here!"

My cousin frowned, glanced at me, then laughed.

"Dorothy, I want my watch!" repeated the voice.

Still looking at me, my cousin slowly drew from her bosom a huge, jewelled watch, and displayed it for my inspection.

"We were matching mint-dates with shillings for father's watch; I won it," she observed.

"Dorothy!" insisted the voice.

"Oh, la!" she cried, impatiently, "will you hush?"

"No, I won't!"

"Then our cousin Ormond will come up-stairs and give you what Paddy gave the kettle-drum—won't you?" she added, raising her eyes to me.

"And what was that?" I asked, astonished.

Somebody on the landing above went off into fits of laughter; and, as I reddened, my cousin Dorothy, too, began to laugh, showing an edge of small, white teeth under the red lip's line.

"Are you vexed because we laugh?" she asked.

My tongue stung with a retort, but I stood silent. These Varicks might forget their manners, but I might not forget mine.

She honored me with a smile, sweeping me from head to foot with her bright eyes. My buckskins were dirty from travel, and the thrums in rags; and I knew that she noted all these matters.

"Cousin," she lisped, "I fear you are something of a macaroni."

Instantly a fresh volley of laughter rattled from the landing—such clear, hearty laughter that it infected me, spite my chagrin.

"He's a good fellow, our cousin Ormond!" came a fresh young voice from above.

"He shall be one of us!" cried another; and I thought to catch a glimpse of a flowered petticoat whisked from the gallery's edge.

I looked at my cousin Dorothy Varick; she stood at gaze, laughter in her eyes, but the mouth demure.

"Cousin Dorothy," said I, "I believe I am a good fellow, even though ragged and respectable. If these qualities be not bars to your society, give me your hand in fellowship, for upon my soul I am nigh sick for a welcome from somebody in this unfriendly land."

Still at gaze, she slowly raised her arm and held out to me a fresh, sun-tanned hand; and I had meant to press it, but a sudden shyness scotched me, and, as the soft fingers rested in my palm, I raised them and touched them with my lips in silent respect.

"You have pretty manners," she said, looking at her hand, but not withdrawing it from where it rested. Then, of an impulse, her fingers closed on mine firmly, and she looked me straight in the eye.

"You are a good comrade; welcome to Varicks', cousin Ormond!"

Our hands fell apart, and, glancing up, I perceived a group of youthful barbarians on the stairs, intently watching us. As my eyes fell on them they scattered, then closed in together defiantly. A red-haired lad of seventeen came down the steps, offering his hand awkwardly.

"I'm Ruyven Varick," he said. "These girls are fools to bait men of our age—" He broke off to seize Dorothy by the arm. "Give me that watch, you vixen!"

His sister scornfully freed her arm, and Ruyven stood sullenly clutching a handful of torn lace.

"Why don't you present us to our cousin Ormond?" spoke up a maid of sixteen.

"Who wants to make your acquaintance?" retorted Ruyven, edging again towards his sister.

I protested that I did; and Dorothy, with mock empressement, presented me to Cecile Butler, a slender, olive-skinned girl with pretty, dark eyes, who offered me her hand to kiss in such determined manner that I bowed very low to cover my smile, knowing that she had witnessed my salute to my cousin Dorothy and meant to take nothing less for herself.

"And those boys yonder are Harry Varick and Sam Butler, my cousins," observed Dorothy, nonchalantly relapsing into barbarism to point them out separately with her pink-tipped thumb; "and that lad on the stairs is Benny. Come on, we're to throw hunting-knives for pennies. Can you?—but of course you can."

I looked around at my barbarian kin, who had produced hunters' knives from recesses in their clothing, and now gathered impatiently around Dorothy, who appeared to be the leader in their collective deviltries.

"All the same, that watch is mine," broke out Ruyven, defiantly. "I'll leave it to our cousin Ormond—" but Dorothy cut in: "Cousin, it was done in this manner: father lost his timepiece, and the law is that whoever finds things about the house may keep them. So we all ran to the porch where father had fallen off his horse last night, and I think we all saw it at the same time; and I, being the older and stronger—"

"You're not the stronger!" cried Sam and Harry, in the same breath.

"I," repeated Dorothy, serenely, "being not only older than Ruyven by a year, but also stronger than you all together, kept the watch, spite of your silly clamor—and mean to keep it."

"Then we matched shillings for it!" cried Cecile.

"It was only fair; we all discovered it," explained Dorothy. "But Ruyven matched with a Spanish piece where the date was under the reverse, and he says he won. Did he, cousin?"

"Mint-dates always match!" said Ruyven; "gentlemen of our age understand that, Cousin George, don't we?"

"Have I not won fairly?" asked Dorothy, looking at me. "If I have not, tell me."

With that, Sam Butler and Harry set up a clamor that they and Cecile had been unfairly dealt with, and all appealed to me until, bewildered, I sat down on the stairs and looked wistfully at Dorothy.

"In Heaven's name, cousins, give me something to eat and drink before you bring your lawsuits to me for judgment," I said.

"Oh," cried Dorothy, biting her lip, "I forgot. Come with me, cousin!" She seized a bell-rope and rang it furiously, and a loud gong filled the hall with its brazen din; but nobody came.

"Where the devil are those blacks?" said Dorothy, biting off her words with a crisp snap that startled me more than her profanity. "Cato! Where are you, you lazy—"

"Ahm hyah, Miss Dorry," came a patient voice from the kitchen stairs.

"Then bring something to eat—bring it to the gun-room instantly—something for Captain Ormond—and a bottle of Sir Lupus's own claret—and two glasses—"

"Three glasses!" cried Ruyven.

"Four!" "Five!" shouted Harry and Cecile.

"Six!" added Samuel; and little Benny piped out, "Theven!"

"Then bring two bottles, Cato," called out Dorothy.

"I want some small-beer!" protested Benny.

"Oh, go suck your thumbs," retorted Ruyven, with an elder brother's brutality; but Dorothy ordered the small-beer, and bade the negro hasten.

"We all mean to bear you company, Cousin," said Ruyven, cheerfully, patting my arm for my reassurance; and truly I lacked something of assurance among these kinsmen of mine, who appeared to lack none.

"You spoke of me as Captain Ormond," I said, turning with a smile to Dorothy.

"Oh, it's all one," she said, gayly; "if you're not a captain now, you will be soon, I'll wager—but I'm not to talk of that before the children—"

"You may talk of it before me," said Ruyven. "Harry, take Benny and Sam and Cecile out of earshot—"

"Pooh!" cried Harry, "I know all about Sir John's new regiment—"

"Will you hush your head, you little fool!" cut in Dorothy. "Servants and asses have long ears, and I'll clip yours if you bray again!"

The jingling of glasses on a tray put an end to the matter; Cato, the black, followed by two more blacks, entered the hall bearing silver salvers, and at a nod from Dorothy we all trooped after them.

"Guests first!" hissed Dorothy, in a fierce whisper, as Ruyven crowded past me, and he slunk back, mortified, while Dorothy, in a languid voice and with the air of a duchess, drawled, "Your arm, cousin," and slipped her hand into my arm, tossing her head with a heavy-lidded, insolent glance at poor Ruyven.

And thus we entered the gun-room, I with Dorothy Varick on my arm, and behind me, though I was not at first aware of it, Harry, gravely conducting Cecile in a similar manner, followed by Samuel and Benny, arm-in-arm, while Ruyven trudged sulkily by himself.

### III

## COUSINS

There was a large, discolored table in the armory, or gun-room, as they called it; and on this, without a cloth, our repast was spread by Cato, while the other servants retired, panting and grinning like over-fat hounds after a pack-run.

And, by Heaven! they lacked nothing for solid silver, my cousins the Varicks, nor yet for fine glass, which I observed without appearance of vulgar curiosity while Cato carved a cold joint of butcher's roast and cracked the bottles of wine—a claret that perfumed the room like a garden in September.

"Cousin Dorothy, I have the honor to raise my glass to you," I said.

"I drink your health, Cousin George," she said, gravely—"Benny, let that wine alone! Is there no small-beer there, that you go coughing and staining your bib over wine forbidden? Take his glass away, Ruyven! Take it quick, I say!"

Benny, deprived of his claret, collapsed moodily into a heap, and sat swinging his legs and clipping the table, at every kick of his shoon, until my wine danced in my glass and soiled the table.

"Stop that, you!" cried Cecile.

Benny subsided, scowling.

Though Dorothy was at some pains to assure me that they had dined but an hour before, that did not appear to blunt their appetites. And the manner in which they drank astonished me, a glass of wine being considered sufficient for young ladies at home, and a half-glass for lads like Harry and Sam. Yet when I emptied my glass Dorothy emptied hers, and the servants refilled hers when they refilled mine, till I grew anxious and watched to see that her face flushed not, but had my anxiety for my pains, as she changed not a pulse-beat for all the red wine she swallowed.

And Lord! how busy were her little white teeth, while her pretty eyes roved about, watchful that order be kept at this gypsy repast. Cecile and Harry fell to struggling for a glass, which snapped and flew to flakes under their clutching fingers, drenching them with claret.

"Silence!" cried Dorothy, rising, eyes ablaze. "Do you wish our cousin Ormond to take us for manner-less savages?"

"Why not?" retorted Harry. "We are!"

"Oh, Lud!" drawled Cecile, languidly fanning her flushed face, "I would I had drunk small-beer—Harry, if you kick me again I'll pinch!"

"It's a shame," observed Ruyven, "that gentlemen of our age may not take a glass of wine together in comfort."

"Your age!" laughed Dorothy. "Cousin Ormond is twenty-three, silly, and I'm eighteen—or close to it."

"And I'm seventeen," retorted Ruyven.

"Yet I throw you at wrestling," observed Dorothy, with a shrug.

"Oh, your big feet! Who can move them?" he rejoined.

"Big feet? Mine?" She bent, tore a satin shoe from her foot, and slapped it down on the table in challenge to all to equal it—a small, silver-buckled thing of Paddington's make, with a smart red heel and a slender body, slim as the crystal slipper of romance.

There was no denying its shapeliness; presently she removed it, and, stooping, slowly drew it on her foot.

"Is that the shoe Sir John drank your health from?" sneered Ruyven.

A rich flush mounted to Dorothy's hair, and she caught at her wine-glass as though to throw it at her brother.

"A married man, too," he laughed—"Sir John Johnson, the fat baronet of the Mohawks—"

"Damn you, will you hold your silly tongue?" she cried, and rose to launch the glass, but I sprang to my feet, horrified and astounded, arm outstretched.

"Ruyven," I said, sharply, "is it you who fling such a taunt to shame your own kin? If there is aught of impropriety in what this man Sir John has done, is it not our affair with him in place of a silly gibe at Dorothy?"

"I ask pardon," stammered Ruyven; "had there been impropriety in what that fool, Sir John, did I should not have spoke, but have acted long since, Cousin Ormond."

"I'm sure of it," I said, warmly. "Forgive me, Ruyven."

"Oh, la!" said Dorothy, her lips twitching to a smile, "Ruyven only said it to plague me. I hate that baronet, and Ruyven knows it, and harps ever on a foolish drinking-bout where all fell to the table, even Walter Butler, and that slow adder Sir John among the first. And they do say," she added, with scorn, "that the baronet did find one of my old shoon and filled it to my health—damn him!"

"Dorothy!" I broke in, "who in Heaven's name taught you such shameful oaths?"

"Oaths?" Her face burned scarlet. "Is it a shameful oath to say 'Damn him'?"

"It is a common oath men use—not gentlewomen," I said.

"Oh! I supposed it harmless. They all laugh when I say it—father and Guy Johnson and the rest; and they swear other oaths—words I would not say if I could—but I did not know there was harm in a good smart 'damn!'"

She leaned back, one slender hand playing with the stem of her glass; and the flush faded from her face like an afterglow from a serene horizon.

"I fear," she said, "you of the South wear a polish we lack."

"Best mirror your faults in it while you have the chance," said Harry, promptly.

"We lack polish—even Walter Butler and Guy Johnson sneer at us under father's nose," said Ruyven. "What the devil is it in us Varicks that set folk whispering and snickering and nudging one another? Am I parti-colored, like an Oneida at a scalp-dance? Does Harry wear bat's wings for ears? Are Dorothy's legs crooked, that they all stare?"

"It's your red head," observed Cecile. "The good folk think to see the noon-sun setting in the wood—"

"Oh, tally! you always say that," snapped Ruyven.

Dorothy, leaning forward, looked at me with dreamy blue eyes that saw beyond me.

"We are doubtless a little mad, . . . as they say," she mused. "Otherwise we seem to be like other folk. We have clothing befitting, when we choose to wear it; we were schooled in Albany; we are people of quality, like the other patroons; we lack nothing for servants or tenants—what ails them all, to nudge and stare and grin when we pass?"

"Mr. Livingston says our deportment shocks all," murmured Cecile.

"The Schuylers will have none of us," added Harry, plaintively—"and I admire them, too."

"Oh, they all conduct shamefully when I go to school in Albany," burst out Sammy; "and I thrashed that puling young patroon, too, for he saw me and refused my salute. But I think he will render me my bow next time."

"Do the quality not visit you here?" I asked Dorothy.

"Visit us? No, cousin. Who is to receive them? Our mother is dead."

Cecile said: "Once they did come, but Uncle Varick had that mistress of Sir John's to sup with them and they took offence."

"Mrs. Van Cortlandt said she was a painted hussy—" began Harry.

"The Van Rensselaers left the house, vowing that Sir Lupus had used them shamefully," added Cecile; "and Sir Lupus said: 'Tush! tush! When the Van Rensselaers are too good for the Putnams of Tribes Hill I'll eat my spurs!' and then he laughed till he cried."

"They never came again; nobody of quality ever came; nobody ever comes," said Ruyven.

"Excepting the Johnsons and the Butlers," corrected Sammy.

"And then everybody gets tight; they were here last night and Uncle Varick is still abed," said little Benny, innocently.

"Will you all hold your tongues?" cried Dorothy, fiercely. "Father said we were not to tell anybody that Sir John and the Ormond-Butlers visited us."

"Why not?" I asked.

Dorothy clasped both hands under her chin, rested her bare elbows on the table, and leaned close to me, whispering confidentially: "Because of the war with the Boston people. The country is overrun with rebels—rebel troops at Albany, rebel gunners at Stanwix, rebels at Edward and Hunter and Johnstown. A scout of ten men came here last week; they were harrying a war-party of Brant's Mohawks, and Stoner was with them, and that great ox in buckskin, Jack Mount. And do you know what he said to father? He said, 'For Heaven's sake, turn red or blue, Sir Lupus, for if you don't we'll hang you to a crab-apple and chance the color.' And father said, 'I'm no partisan King's man'; and Jack Mount said, 'You're the joker of the pack, are you?' And father said, 'I'm not in the shuffle, and you can bear me out, you rogue!' And then Jack Mount wagged his big forefinger at him and said, 'Sir Lupus, if you're but a joker, one or t'other side must discard you!' And they rode away, priming their rifles and laughing, and father swore and shook his cane at them."

In her eagerness her lips almost touched my ear, and her breath warmed my cheek.

"All that I saw and heard," she whispered, "and I know father told Walter Butler, for a scout came yesterday, saying that a scout from the Rangers and the Royal Greens had crossed the hills, and I saw some of Sir John's Scotch loons riding like warlocks on the new road, and that great fool, Francys McCraw, tearing along at their head and crowing like a cock."

"Cousin, cousin," I protested, "all this—all these names—even the causes and the manners of this war, are incomprehensible to me."

"Oh," she said, in surprise, "have you in Florida not heard of our war?"

"Yes, yes—all know that war is with you, but that is all. I know that these Boston men are fighting our King; but why do the Indians take part?"

She looked at me blankly, and made a little gesture of dismay.

"I see I must teach you history, cousin," she said. "Father tells us that history is being made all about us in these days—and, would you believe it? Benny took it that books were being made in the woods all around the house, and stole out to see, spite of the law that father made—"

"Who thaw me?" shouted Benny.

"Hush! Be quiet!" said Dorothy.

Benny lay back in his chair and beat upon the table, howling defiance at his sister through Harry's shouts of laughter.

"Silence!" cried Dorothy, rising, flushed and furious. "Is this a corn-feast, that you all sit yelping in a circle? Ruyven, hold that door, and see that no one follows us—"

"What for?" demanded Ruyven, rising. "If you mean to keep our cousin Ormond to yourself—"

"I wish to discuss secrets with my cousin Ormond," said Dorothy, loftily, and stepped from her chair, nose in the air, and that heavy-lidded, insolent glance which once before had withered Ruyven, and now withered him again.

"We will go to the play-room," she whispered, passing me; "that room has a bolt; they'll all be kicking at the door presently. Follow me."

Ere we had reached the head of the stairs we heard a yell, a rush of feet, and she laughed, crying: "Did I not say so? They are after us now full bark! Come!"

She caught my hand in hers and sped up the few remaining steps, then through the upper hallway, guiding me the while her light feet flew; and I, embarrassed, bewildered, half laughing, half shamed to go a-racing through a strange house in such absurd a fashion.

"Here!" she panted, dragging me into a great, bare chamber and bolting the door, then leaned breathless against the wall to listen as the chase galloped up, clamoring, kicking and beating on panel and wall, baffled.

"They're raging to lose their new cousin," she breathed, smiling across at me with a glint of pride in her eyes. "They all think mightily of you, and now they'll be mad to follow you like hound-pups the whip, all day long." She tossed her head. "They're good lads, and Cecile is a sweet child, too, but they must be made to understand that there are moments when you and I desire to be alone together."

"Of course," I said, gravely.

"You and I have much to consider, much to discuss in these uncertain days," she said, confidently. "And we cannot babble matters of import to these children—"

"I'm seventeen!" howled Ruyven, through the key-hole. "Dorothy's not eighteen till next month, the little fool—"

"Don't mind him," said Dorothy, raising her voice for Ruyven's benefit. "A lad who listens to his elders through a key-hole is not fit for serious—"

A heavy assault on the door drowned Dorothy's voice. She waited calmly until the uproar had subsided.

"Let us sit by the window," she said, "and I will tell you how we Varicks stand betwixt the deep sea and the devil."

"I wish to come in!" shouted Ruyven, in a threatening voice. Dorothy laughed, and pointed to a great arm-chair of leather and oak. "I will sit there; place it by the window, cousin."

I placed the chair for her; she seated herself with unconscious grace, and motioned me to bring another chair for myself.

"Are you going to let me in?" cried Ruyven.

"Oh, go to the—" began Dorothy, then flushed and glanced at me, asking pardon in a low voice.

A nice parent, Sir Lupus, with every child in his family ready to swear like Flanders troopers at the first breath!

Half reclining in her chair, limbs comfortably extended, Dorothy crossed her ankles and clasped her hands behind her head, a picture of indolence in every line and curve, from satin shoon to the dull gold of her hair, which, as I have said, the powder scarcely frosted.

"To comprehend properly this war," she mused, more to herself than to me, "I suppose it is necessary to understand matters which I do not understand; how it chanced that our King lost his city of Boston, and why he has not long since sent his soldiers here into our county of Tryon."

"Too many rebels, cousin," I suggested, flippantly. She disregarded me, continuing quietly;

"But this much, however, I do understand, that our province of New York is the centre of all this trouble; that the men of Tryon hold the last pennyweight, and that the balanced scales will tip only when we patroons cast in our fortunes, ... either with our King or with the rebel Congress which defies him. I think our hearts, not our interests, must guide us in this affair, which touches our honor."

Such pretty eloquence, thoughtful withal, was not what I had looked for in this new cousin of mine—this free-tongued maid, who, like a painted peach-fruit all unripe, wears the gay livery of maturity, tricking the eye with a false ripeness.

"I have thought," she said, "that if the issues of this war depend on us, we patroons should not draw sword too hastily—yet not to sit like house-cats blinking at this world-wide blaze, but, in the full flood of the crisis, draw!—knowing of our own minds on which side lies the right."

"Who taught you this?" I asked, surprised to over-bluntness.

"Who taught me? What? To think?" She laughed. "Solitude is a rare spur to thought. I listen to the gentlemen who talk with father; and I would gladly join and have my say, too, but that they treat me like a fool, and I have my questions for my pains. Yet I swear I am dowered with more sense than Sir John Johnson, with his pale eyes and thick, white flesh, and his tarnished honor to dog him like the shadow of a damned man sold to Satan—"

"Is he dishonored?"

"Is a parole broken a dishonor? The Boston people took him and placed him on his honor to live at Johnson Hall and do no meddling. And now he's fled to Fort Niagara to raise the Mohawks. Is that honorable?"

After a moment I said: "But a moment since you told me that Sir John comes here."

She nodded. "He comes and gees in secret with young Walter Butler—one of your Ormond-Butlers, cousin—and old John Butler, his father, Colonel of the Rangers, who boast they mean to scalp the whole of Tryon County ere this blood-feud is ended. Oh, I have heard them talk and talk, drinking o' nights in the gun-room, and the escort's horses stamping at the porch with a man to each horse, to hold the poor brutes' noses lest they should neigh and wake the woods. Councils of war, they call them, these revels; but they end ever the same, with Sir John borne off to bed too drunk to curse the slaves who shoulder his fat bulk, and Walter Butler, sullen, stunned by wine, a brooding thing of malice carved in stone; and father roaring his same old songs, and beating time with his long pipe till the stem snaps, and he throws the glowing bowl at Cato—"

"Dorothy, Dorothy," I said, "are these the scenes you find already too familiar?"

"Stale as last month's loaf in a ratty cupboard."

"Do they not offend you?"

"Oh, I am no prude—"

"Do you mean to say Sir Lupus sanctions it?"

"What? My presence? Oh, I amuse them; they dress me in Ruyven's clothes and have me to wine—lacking a tenor voice for their songs—and at first, long ago, their wine made me stupid, and they found rare sport in baiting me; but now they tumble, one by one, ere the wine's fire touches my face, and father swears there is no man in County Tryon can keep our company o' nights and show a steady pair of legs like mine to bear him bedwards."

After a moment's silence I said: "Are these your Northern customs?"

"They are ours—and the others of our kind. I hear the plain folk of the country speak ill of us for the free life we lead at home—I mean the Palatines and the canting Dutch, not our tenants, though what even they may think of the manor house and of us I can only suspect, for they are all rebels at heart, Sir John says, and wear blue noses at the first run o' king's cider."

She gave a reckless laugh and crossed her knees, looking at me under half-veiled lids, smooth and pure as a child's.

"Food for the devil, they dub us in the Palatine church," she added, yawning, till I could see all her small, white teeth set in rose.

A nice nest of kinsmen had I uncovered in this hard, gray Northern forest! The Lord knows, we of the South do little penance for the pleasures a free life brings us under the Southern stars, yet such license as this is not to our taste, and I think a man a fool to teach his children to review with hardened eyes home scenes suited to a tavern.

Yet I was a guest, having accepted shelter and eaten salt; and I might not say my mind, even claiming kinsman's privilege to rebuke what seemed to me to touch the family honor.

Staring through the unwashed window-pane, moodily brooding on what I had learned, I followed impatiently the flight of those small, gray swallows of the North, colorless as shadows, whirling in spirals above the cold chimneys, to tumble in like flakes of gray soot only to drift out again, wind-blown, aimless, irrational, senseless things. And again that hatred seized me for all this pale Northern world, where the very birds gyrated like moon-smitten sprites, and the white spectre of virtue sat amid orgies where bloodless fools caroused.

"Are you homesick, cousin?" she asked.

"Ay—if you must know the truth!" I broke out, not meaning to say my fill and ease me. "This is not the world; it is a gray inferno, where shades rave without reason, where there is no color, no repose, nothing but blankness and unreason, and an air that stings all living life to spasms of unrest."

Your sun is hot, yet has no balm; your winds plague the skin and bones of a man; the forests are unfriendly; the waters all hurry as though bewitched! Brooks are cold and tasteless as the fog; the unsalted, spiceless air clogs the throat and whips the nerves till the very soul in the body strains, fluttering to be free! How can decent folk abide here?"

I hesitated, then broke into a harsh laugh, for my cousin sat staring at me, lips parted, like a fair shape struck into marble by a breath of magic.

"Pardon," I said. "Here am I, kindly invited to the council of a family whose interests lie scattered through estates from the West Indies to the Canadas, and I requite your hospitality by a rudeness I had not believed was in me."

I asked her pardon again for the petty outburst of an untravelled youngster whose first bath in this Northern air-ocean had chilled his senses and his courtesy.

"There is a land," I said, "where lately the gray bastions of St. Augustine reflected the gold and red of Spanish banners, and the blue sea mirrors a bluer sky. We Ormonds came there from the Western Indies, then drifted south, skirting the Matanzas to the sea islands on the Halifax, where I was born, an Englishman on Spanish soil, and have lived there, knowing no land but that of Florida, treading no city streets save those walled lanes of ancient Augustine. All this vast North is new to me, Dorothy; and, like our swamp-haunting Seminoles, my rustic's instinct finds hostility in what is new and strange, and I forget my breeding in this gray maze which half confuses, half alarms me."

"I am not offended," she said, smiling, "only I wonder what you find distasteful here. Is it the solitude?"

"No, for we also have that."

"Is it us?"

"Not you, Dorothy, nor yet Ruyven, nor the others. Forget what I said. As the Spaniards have it, 'Only a fool goes travelling,' and I'm not too notorious for my wisdom, even in Augustine. If it be the custom of the people here to go mad, I'll not sit in a corner croaking, 'Repent and be wise!' If the Varicks and the Butlers set the pace, I promise you to keep the quarry, Mistress Folly, in view—perhaps outfoot you all to Bedlam!... But, cousin, if you, too, run this uncoupled race with the pack, I mean to pace you, neck and neck, like a keen whip, ready to turn and lash the first who interferes with you."

"With me?" she repeated, smiling. "Am I a youngster to be coddled and protected? You have not seen our hunting. *I* lead, my friend; *you* follow."

She unclasped her arms, which till now had held her bright head cradled, and sat up, hands on her knees, grave as an Egyptian goddess guarding tombs.

"I'll wager I can outrun you, outshoot you, outride you, throw you at wrestle, cast the knife or hatchet truer than can you, catch more fish than you—and bigger ones at that!"

With an impatient gesture, peculiarly graceful, like the half-salute of a friendly swordsman ere you draw and stand on guard:

"Read the forest with me. I can outread you, sign for sign, track for track, trail in and trail out! The forest is to me Te-ka-on-do-duk [the place with a sign-post]. And when the confederacy speaks with five tongues, and every tongue split into five forked dialects, I make no answer in finger-signs, as needs must you, my cousin of the Se-a-wan-ha-ka [the land of shells]. We speak to the Iroquois with our lips, we People of the Morning. Our hands are for our rifles! Hiro [I have spoken]!"

She laughed, challenging me with eye and lip.

"And if you defy me to a bout with bowl or bottle I will not turn coward, neah-wen-ha [I thank you]! but I will drink with you and let my father judge whose legs best carry him to bed! Koue! Answer me, my cousin, Tahoontowhe [the night hawk]."

We were laughing now, yet I knew she had spoken seriously, and to plague her I said: "You boast like a Seminole chanting the war-song."

"I dare you to cast the hatchet!" she cried, reddening.

"Dare me to a trial less rude," I protested, laughing the louder.

"No, no! Come!" she said, impatient, unbolting the heavy door; and, willy-nilly, I followed, meeting the pack all sulking on the stairs, who rose to seize me as I came upon them.

"Let him alone!" cried Dorothy; "he says he can outcast me with the war-hatchet! Where is my hatchet? Sammy! Ruyven! find hatchets and come to the painted post."

"Sport!" cried Harry, leaping down-stairs before us. "Cecile, get your hatchet—get mine, too! Come on, Cousin Ormond, I'll guide you; it's the painted post by the spring—and hark, Cousin George, if you beat her I'll give you my silvered powder-horn!"

Cecile and Sammy hastened up, bearing in their arms the slim war-hatchets, cased in holsters of bright-beaded hide, and we took our weapons and started, piloted by Harry through the door, and across the shady, unkempt lawn to the stockade gate.

Dorothy and I walked side by side, like two champions in amiable confab before a friendly battle, intimately aloof from the gaping crowd which follows on the flanks of all true greatness.

Out across the deep-green meadow we marched, the others trailing on either side with eager advice to me, or chattering of contests past, when Walter Butler and Brant—he who is now war-chief of the loyal Mohawks—cast hatchets for a silver girdle, which Brant wears still; and the patroon, and Sir John, and all the great folk from Guy Park were here a-betting on the Mohawk, which, they say, so angered Walter Butler that he lost the contest. And that day dated the silent enmity between Brant and Butler, which never healed.

This I gathered amid all their chit-chat while we stood under the willows near the spring, watching Ruyven pace the distance from the post back across the greensward towards us.

Then, making his heel-mark in the grass, he took a green willow wand and set it, all feathered, in the turf.

"Is it fair for Dorothy to cast her own hatchet?" asked Harry.

"Give me Ruyven's," she said, half vexed. Aught that touched her sense of fairness sent a quick flame of anger to her cheeks which I admired.

"Keep your own hatchet, cousin," I said; "you may have need of it."

"Give me Ruyven's hatchet," she repeated, with a stamp of her foot which Ruyven hastened to respect. Then she turned to me, pink with defiance:

"It is always a stranger's honor," she said; so I advanced, drawing my light, keen weapon from its beaded sheath, which I had belted round me; and Ruyven took station by the post, ten paces to the right.

The post was painted scarlet, ringed with white above; below, in outline, the form of a man—an Indian—with folded arms, also drawn in white paint. The play was simple; the hatchet must imbed its blade close to the outlined shape, yet not "wound" or "draw blood."

"Brant at first refused to cast against that figure," said Harry, laughing. "He consented only because the figure, though Indian, was painted white."

I scarce heard him as I stood measuring with my eyes the distance. Then, taking one step forward to the willow wand, I hurled the hatchet, and it landed quivering in the shoulder of the outlined figure on the post.

"A wound!" cried Cecile; and, mortified, I stepped back, biting my lip, while Harry notched one point against me on the willow wand and Dorothy, tightening her girdle, whipped out her bright war-axe and stepped forward. Nor did she even pause to scan the post; her arm shot up, the keen axe-blade glittered and flew, sparkling and whirling, biting into the post, chuck! handle a-quiver. And you could not have laid a June willow-leaf betwixt the Indian's head and the hatchet's blade.

She turned to me, lips parted in a tormenting smile, and I praised the cast and took my hatchet from Ruyven to try once more. Yet again I broke skin on the thigh of the pictured captive; and again the glistening axe left Dorothy's hand, whirring to a safe score, a grass-stem's width from the Indian's head.

I understood that I had met my master, yet for the third time strove; and my axe whistled true, standing point-bedded a finger's breadth from the cheek.

"Can you mend that, Dorothy?" I asked, politely.

She stood smiling, silent, hatchet poised, then nodded, launching the axe. Crack! came the handles of the two hatchets, and rattled together. But the blade of her hatchet divided the space betwixt my blade and the painted face, nor touched the outline by a fair hair's breadth.

Astonishment was in my face, not chagrin, but she misread me, for the triumph died out in her eyes, and, "Oh!" she said; "I did not mean to win—truly I did not," offering her hands in friendly amend.

But at my quick laugh she brightened, still holding my hands, regarding me with curious eyes, brilliant as amethysts.

"I was afraid I had hurt your pride—before these silly children—" she began.

"Children!" shouted Ruyven. "I bet you ten shillings he can outcast you yet!"

"Done!" she flashed, then, all in a breath, smiled adorably and shook her head. "No, I'll not bet. He could win if he chose. We understand each other, my cousin Ormond and I," and gave my hands a little friendly shake with both of hers, then dropped them to still Ruyven's clamor for a wager.

"You little beast!" she said, fiercely; "is it courteous to pit your guests like game-cocks for your pleasure?"

"You did it yourself!" retorted Ruyven, indignantly—"and entered the pit yourself."

"For a jest, silly! There were no bets. Now frown and vapor and wag your finger—do! What do you lack? I will wrestle you if you wait until I don my buckskins. No? A foot-race?—and I'll bet you your ten shillings on myself! Ten to five—to three—to one! No? Then hush your silly head!"

"Because," said Ruyven, sullenly, coming up to me, "she can outrun me with her long legs, she gives herself the devil's own airs and graces. There's no living with her, I tell you. I wish I could go to the war."

"You'll have to go when father declares himself," observed Dorothy, quietly polishing her hatchet on its leather sheath.

"But he won't declare for King or Congress," retorted the boy.

"Wait till they start to plague us," murmured Dorothy. "Some fine July day cows will be missed, or a barn burned, or a shepherd found scalped. Then you'll see which way the coin spins!"

"Which way will it spin?" demanded Ruyven, incredulous yet eager.

"Ask that squirrel yonder," she said, briefly.

"Thanks; I've asked enough of chatterers," he snapped out, and came to the tree where we were sitting in the shadow on the cool, thick carpet of the grass—such grass as I had never seen in that fair Southland which I loved.

The younger children gathered shyly about me, their active tongues suddenly silent, as though, all at once, they had taken a sudden alarm to find me there.

The reaction of fatigue was settling over me—for my journey had been a long one that day—and I leaned my back against the tree and yawned, raising my hand to hide it.

"I wonder," I said, "whether anybody here knows if my boxes and servant have arrived from Philadelphia."

"Your boxes are in the hallway by your bed-chamber," said Dorothy. "Your servant went to Johnstown for news of you—let me see—I think it was Saturday—"

"Friday," said Ruyven, looking up from the willow wand which he was peeling.

"He never came back," observed Dorothy. "Some believe he ran away to Albany, some think the Boston people caught him and impressed him to work on the fort at Stanwix."

I felt my face growing hot.

"I should like to know," said I, "who has dared to interfere with my servant."

"So should I," said Ruyven, stoutly. "I'd knock his head off." The others stared. Dorothy, picking a meadow-flower to pieces, smiled quietly, but did not look up.

"What do you think has happened to my black?" I asked, watching her.

"I think Walter Butler's men caught him and packed him off to Fort Niagara," she said.

"Why do you believe that?" I asked, angrily.

"Because Mr. Butler came here looking for boat-men; and I know he tried to bribe Cato to go. Cato told me." She turned sharply to the others. "But mind you say nothing to Sir Lupus of this until I choose to tell him!"

"Have you proof that Mr. Butler was concerned in the disappearance of my servant?" I asked, with an unpleasant softness in my voice.

"No proof," replied Dorothy, also very softly.

"Then I may not even question him," I said.

"No, you can do nothing—now."

I thought a moment, frowning, then glanced up to find them all intently watching me.

"I should like," said I, "to have a tub of clean water and fresh clothing, and to sleep for an hour ere I dress to dine with Sir Lupus. But, first, I should like to see my mare, that she is well bedded and—"

"I'll see to her," said Dorothy, springing to her feet. "Ruyven, do you tell Cato to wait on Captain Ormond." And to Harry and Cecile: "Bowl on the lawn if you mean to bowl, and not in the hallway, while our cousin is sleeping." And to Benny: "If you tumble or fall into any foolishness, see that you squall no louder than a kitten mewling. Our cousin means to sleep for a whole hour."

As I rose, nodding to them gravely, all their shy deference seemed to return; they were no longer a careless, chattering band, crowding at my elbows to pluck my sleeves with, "Oh, Cousin Ormond" this, and "Listen, cousin," that; but they stood in a covey, close together, a trifle awed at my height, I suppose; and Ruyven and Dorothy conducted me with a new ceremony, each to outvie the other in politeness of language and deportment, calling to my notice details of the scenery in stilted phrases which nigh convulsed me, so that I could scarce control the set gravity of my features.

At the house door they parted company with me, all save Ruyven and Dorothy. The one marched off to summon Cato; the other stood silent, her head a little on one side, contemplating a spot of sunlight on the dusty floor.

"About young Walter Butler," she began, absently; "be not too short and sharp with him, cousin."

"I hope I shall have no reason to be too blunt with my own kin," I said.

"You may have reason—" She hesitated, then, with a pretty confidence in her eyes, "For my sake please to pass provocation unnoticed. None will doubt your courage if you overlook and refuse to be affronted."

"I cannot pass an affront," I said, bluntly. "What do you mean? Who is this quarrelsome Mr. Butler?"

"An Ormond-Butler," she said, earnestly; "but—but he has had trouble—a terrible disappointment in love, they say. He is morose at times—a sullen, suspicious man, one of those who are ever seeking for offence where none is dreamed of; a man quick to give umbrage, quicker to resent a fancied slight—a remorseless eye that fixes you with the passionless menace of a hawk's eye, dreamily marking you for a victim. He is cruel to his servants, cruel to his animals, terrible in his hatred of these Boston people. Nobody knows why they ridiculed him; but they did. That adds to the fuel which feeds the flame in him—that and the brooding on his own grievances—"

She moved nearer to me and laid her hand on my sleeve. "Cousin, the man is mad; I ask you to remember that in a moment of just provocation. It would grieve me if he were your enemy—I should not sleep for thinking."

"Dorothy," I said, smiling, "I use some weapons better than I do the war-axe. Are you afraid for me?"

She looked at me seriously. "In that little world which I know there is much that terrifies men, yet I can say, without boasting, there is not, in my world, one living creature or one witch or spirit that I dread—no, not even Catrine Montour!"

"And who is Catrine Montour?" I asked, amused at her earnestness.

Ere she could reply, Ruyven called from the stairs that Cato had my tub of water all prepared, and she walked away, nodding a brief adieu, pausing at the door to give me one sweet, swift smile of friendly interest.

## IV SIR LUPUS

I had bathed and slept, and waked once more to the deep, resonant notes of a conch-shell blowing; and I still lay abed, blinking at the sunset through the soiled panes of my western window, when Cato scraped at the door to enter, bearing my sea-boxes one by one.

Reaching behind me, I drew the keys from under my pillow and tossed them to the solemn black, lying still once more to watch him unlock my boxes and lay out my clothes and linen to the air.

"Company to sup, suh; gemmen from de No'th an' Guy Pahk, suh," he hinted, rolling his eyes at me and holding up my best wristbands, made of my mother's lace.

"I shall dress soberly, Cato," said I, yawning. "Give me a narrow queue-ribbon, too."

The old man mumbled and muttered, fussing about among the boxes until he found a full suit of silver-gray, silken stockings, and hound's-tongue shoes to match.

"Dishyere clothes sho' is sober," he reflected aloud. "One li'l gole vine a-crawlin' on de cuffs, nuvver li'l gole vine a-creepin' up de wes'coat, gole buckles on de houn'-tongue—Whar de hat? Hat done loose hisse'f! Here de hat! Gole lace on de hat—Cap'in Ormond sho' is quality gemm'n. Ef he ain't, how come dishyere gole lace on de hat?"

"Come, Cato," I remonstrated, "am I dressing for a ball at Augustine, that you stand there pulling my finery about to choose and pick? I tell you to give me a sober suit!" I snatched a flowered robe from the bed's foot-board, pulled it about me, and stepped to the floor.

Cato brought a chair and bowl, and, when I had washed once more I seated myself while the old man shook out my hair, dusted it to its natural brown, then fell to combing and brushing. My hair, with its obstinate inclination to curl, needed neither iron nor pomade; so, silvering it with my best French powder, he tied the short queue with a black ribbon and dusted my shoulders, critically considering me the while.

"A plain shirt," I said, briefly.

He brought a frilled one.

"I want a plain shirt," I insisted.

"Dishyere sho't am des de plaines' an' de—"

"You villain, don't I know what I want?"

"No, suh!"

And, upon my honor, I could not get that black mule to find me the shirt that I wished to wear. More than that, he utterly refused to permit me to dress in a certain suit of mouse-color without lace, but actually bundled me into the silver-gray, talking volubly all the while; and I, half laughing and wholly vexed, almost minded to go burrowing myself among my boxes and risk peppering silk and velvet with hair-powder.

But he dressed me as it suited him, patting my silk shoes into shape, smoothing coat-skirt and flowered vest-flap, shaking out the lace on stock and wrist with all the delicacy and cunning of a lady's-maid.

"Idiot!" said I, "am I tricked out to please you?"

"You sho' is, Cap'in Ormond, suh," he said, the first faint approach to a grin that I had seen wrinkling his aged face. And with that he hung my small-sword, whisked the powder from my shoulders with a bit of cambric, chose a laced handkerchief for me, and, ere I could remonstrate, passed a tiny jewelled pin into my powdered hair, where it sparkled like a frost crystal.

"I'm no macaroni!" I said, angrily; "take it away!"

"Cap'in Ormond, suh, you sho' is de fines' young gemm'n in de province, suh," he pleaded. "Dess regahd yo'se'f, suh, in dishyere lookum-glass. What I done tell you? Look foh yo'se'f, suh!"

Cap'in Butler gwine see how de quality gemm'n fixes up! Suh John Johnsing he gwine see! Dat ole Kunnel Butler he gwine see, too! Heah yo' is, suh, dess a-bloomin' lak de pink-an'-silver ghos' flower wif de gole heart."

"Cato," I asked, curiously, "why do you take pride in tricking out a stranger to dazzle your own people?"

The old man stood silent a moment, then looked up with the mild eyes of an aged hound long privileged in honorable retirement.

"Is you sho' a Ormond, suh?"

"Yes, Cato."

"Might you come f'om de Spanish grants, suh, long de Halifax?"

"Yes, yes; but we are English now. How did you know I came from the Halifax?"

"I knowed it, suh; I knowed h'it muss be dat-away!"

"How do you know it, Cato?"

"I spec' you favor yo' pap, suh, de ole Kunnel—"

"My father!"

"Mah ole marster, suh; I was raised 'long Matanzas, suh. Spanish man done cotch me on de Tomoka an' ship me to Quebec. Ole Suh William Johnsing, he done buy me; Suh John, he done sell me; Mars Varick, he buy me; an' hyah ah is, suh—heart dess daid foh de Halifax san's."

He bent his withered head and laid his face on my hands, but no tear fell.

After a moment he straightened, snuffled, and smiled, opening his lips with a dry click.

"H'it's dat-a-way, suh. Ole Cato dess 'bleged to fix up de young marster. Pride o' fambly, suh. What might you be desirin' now, Mars' Ormond? One li'l drap o' musk on yoh hanker? Lawd save us, but you sho' is gallus dishyere day! Spec' Miss Dorry gwine blink de vi'lets in her eyes. Yaas, suh. Miss Dorry am de only one, suh; de onliest Ormond in dishyere fambly. Seem mos' lak she done throw back to our folk, suh. Miss Dorry ain' no Varick; Miss Dorry all Ormond, suh, dess lak you an' me! Yaas, suh, h'its dat-a-way; h'it sho' is, Mars' Ormond."

I drew a deep, quivering breath. Home seemed so far, and the old slave would never live to see it. I felt as though this steel-cold North held me, too, like a trap—never to unclose.

"Cato," I said, abruptly, "let us go home."

He understood; a gleam of purest joy flickered in his eyes, then died out, quenched in swelling tears.

He wept awhile, standing there in the centre of the room, smearing the tears away with the flapping sleeves of his tarnished livery, while, like a committed panther, I paced the walls, to and fro, to and fro, heart aching for escape.

The light in the west deepened above the forests; a long, glowing crack opened between two thunderous clouds, like a hint of hidden hell, firing the whole sky. And in the blaze the crows winged, two and two, like witches flying home to the infernal pit, now all ablaze and kindling coal on coal along the dark sky's sombre brink.

Then the red bars faded on my wall to pink, to ashes; a fleck of rosy cloud in mid-zenith glimmered and went out, and the round edges of the world were curtained with the night.

Behind me, Cato struck flint and lighted two tall candles; outside the lawn, near the stockade, a stable-lad set a conch-horn to his lips, blowing a deep, melodious cattle-call, and far away I heard them coming—tin, ton! tin, ton! tinkle!—through the woods, slowly, slowly, till in the freshening dusk I smelled their milk and heard them lowing at the unseen pasture-bars.

I turned sharply; the candle-light dazzled me. As I passed Cato, the old man bowed till his coat-cuffs hung covering his dusky, wrinkled fingers.

"When we go, we go together, Cato," I said, huskily, and so passed on through the brightly lighted hallway and down the stairs.

Candle-light glimmered on the dark pictures, the rusted circles of arms, the stags' heads with their dusty eyes. A servant in yellow livery, lounging by the door, rose from the settle as I appeared and threw open the door on the left, announcing, "Cap'm Ormond!" in a slovenly fashion which merited a rebuke from somebody.

The room into which the yokel ushered me appeared to be a library, low of ceiling, misty with sour pipe smoke, which curled and floated level, wavering as the door closed behind me.

Through the fog, which nigh choked me with its staleness, I perceived a bulky gentleman seated at ease, sucking a long clay pipe, his bulging legs cocked up on a card-table, his little, inflamed eyes twinkling red in the candle-light.

"Captain Ormond?" he cried. "Captain be damned; you're my cousin, George Ormond, or I'm the fattest liar south of Montreal! Who the devil put 'em up to captaining you—eh? Was it that minx Dorothy? Dammy, I took it that the old Colonel had come to plague me from his grave—your father, sir! And a cursed fine fellow, if he was second cousin to a Varick, which he could not help, not he!—though I've heard him damn his luck to my very face, sir! Yes, sir, under my very nose!"

He fell into a fit of fat coughing, and seized a glass of spirits-and-water which stood on the table near his feet. The draught allayed his spasm; he wiped his broad, purple face, chuckled, tossed off the last of the liquor with a smack, and held out a mottled, fat hand, bare of wrist-lace. "Here's my heart with it, George!" he cried. "I'd stand up to greet you, but it takes ten minutes for me to find these feet o' mine, so I'll not keep you waiting. There's a chair; fill it with that pretty body of yours; cock up your feet—here's a pipe—here's snuff—here's the best rum north o' Norfolk, which that ass Dunmore laid in ashes to spite those who kicked him out!"

He squeezed my hand affectionately. "Pretty bird! Dammy, but you'll break a heart or two, you rogue! Oh, you are your father all over again; it's that way with you Ormonds—all alike, and handsome as that young devil Lucifer; too proud to be proud o' your dukes and admirals, and a thousand years of waiting on your King. As lads together your father used to take me by the ear and cuff me, crying, 'Beast! beast! You eat and drink too much! An Ormond's heart lies not in his belly!' And I kicked back, fighting stoutly for the crust he dragged me from. Dammy, why not? There's more Dutch Varick than Irish Ormond in me. Remember that, George, and we shall get on famously together, you and I. Forget it, and we quarrel. Hey! fill that tall Italian glass for a toast. I give you the family, George. May they keep tight hold on what is theirs through all this cursed war-folly. Here's to the patroons, God bless 'em!"

Forced by courtesy to drink ere I had yet tasted meat, I did my part with the best grace I could muster, turning the beautiful glass downward, with a bow to my host.

"The same trick o' grace in neck and wrist," he muttered, thickly, wiping his lips. "All Ormond, all Ormond, George, like that vixen o' mine, Dorothy. Hey! It's not too often that good blood throws back; the mongrel shows oftenest; but that big chit of a lass is no Varick; she's Ormond to the bones of her. Ruyven's a red-head; there's red in the rest o' them, and the slow Dutch blood. But Dorothy's eyes are like those wild iris-blooms that purple all our meadows, and she has the Ormond hair—that thick, dull gold, which that French Ormond, of King Stephen's time, was dowered with by his Saxon mother, Helen. Eh? You see, I read it in that book your father left us. If I'm no Ormond, I like to find out why, and I love to dispute the Ormond claim which Walter Butler makes—he with his dark face and hair, and those dusky, golden eyes of his, which turn so yellow when I plague him—the mad wild-cat that he is."

Another fit of choking closed his throat, and again he soaked it open with his chilled toddy, rattling the stick to stir it well ere he drained it at a single, gobbling gulp.

A faint disgust took hold on me, to sit there smothering in the fumes of pipe and liquor, while my gross kinsman guzzled and gabbled and guzzled again.

"George," he gasped, mopping his crimsoned face, "I'll tell you now that we Varicks and you Ormonds must stand out for neutrality in this war. The Butlers mean mischief; they're mad to go to fighting, and that means our common ruin. They'll be here to-night, damn them."

"Sir Lupus," I ventured, "we are all kinsmen, the Butlers, the Varicks, and the Ormonds. We are to gather here for self-protection during this rebellion. I am sure that in the presence of this common danger there can arise no family dissension."

"Yes, there can!" he fairly yelled. "Here am I risking life and property to persuade these Butlers that their interest lies in strictest neutrality. If Schuyler at Albany knew they visited me, his dragoons would gallop into Varick Manor and hang me to my barn door! Here am I, I say, doing my best to keep 'em quiet, and there's Sir John Johnson and all that bragging crew from Guy Park combating me—nay, would you believe their impudence?—striving to win me to arm my tenantry for this King of England, who has done nothing for me, save to make a knight of me to curry favor with the Dutch patrols in New York province—or state, as they call it now! And now I have you to count on for support, and we'll whistle another jig for them to-night, I'll warrant!"

He seized his unfilled glass, looked into it, and pushed it from him peevishly.

"Dammy," he said, "I'll not budge for them! I have thousands of acres, hundreds of tenants, farms, sugar-bushes, manufactories for pearl-ash, grist-mills, saw-mills, and I'm damned if I draw sword either way! Am I a madman, to risk all this? Am I a common fool, to chance anything now? Do they think me in my dotage? Indeed, sir, if I drew blade, if I as much as raised a finger, both sides would come swarming all over us—rebels a-looting and a-shooting, Indians whooping off my cattle, firing my barns, scalping my tenants—rebels at heart every one, and I'd not care tuppence who scalped 'em but that they pay me rent!"

He clinched his fat fists and beat the air angrily.

"I'm lord of this manor!" he bawled. "I'm Patroon Varick, and I'll do as I please!"

Amazed and mortified at his gross frankness, I sat silent, not knowing what to say. Interest alone swayed him; the right and wrong of this quarrel were nothing to him; he did not even take the trouble to pay a hypocrite's tribute to principle ere he turned his back on it; selfishness alone ruled, and he boasted of it, waving his short, fat arms in anger, or struggling to extend them heavenward, in protest against these people who dared urge him to declare himself and stand or fall with the cause he might embrace.

A faint disgust stirred my pulse. We Ormonds had as much to lose as he, but yelled it not to the skies, nor clamored of gain and loss in such unseemly fashion, ignoring higher motive.

"Sir Lupus," I said, "if we can remain neutral with honor, that surely is wisest. But can we?"

"Remain neutral! Of course we can!" he shouted.

"Honorably?"

"Eh? Where's honor in this mob-rule that breaks out in Boston to spot the whole land with a scurvy irruption! Honor? Where is it in this vile distemper which sets old neighbors here a-itching to cut each other's throats? One says, 'You're a Tory! Take that!' and slips a knife into him. T'other says, 'You're a rebel!' Bang!—and blows his head off! Honor? Bah!"

He removed his wig to wipe his damp and shiny pate, then set the wig on askew and glared at me out of his small, ruddy eyes.

"I'm for peace," he said, "and I care not who knows it. Then, whether Tory or rebel win the day, here am I, holding to my own with both hands and caring nothing which rag flies overhead, so that it brings peace and plenty to honest folk. And, mark me, then we shall live to see these plumed and gold-laced glory-mongers slinking round to beg their bread at our back doors. Dammy, let 'em bellow now! Let 'em shout for war! I'll keep my mills busy and my agent walking the old rent-beat. If they can fill their bellies with a mess of glory I'll not grudge them what they can snatch; but I'll fill mine with food less spiced, and we'll see which of us thrives best—these sons of Mars or the old patroon who stays at home and dips his nose into nothing worse than old Madeira!"

He gave me a cunning look, pushed his wig partly straight, and lay back, puffing quietly at his pipe.

I hesitated, choosing my words ere I spoke; and at first he listened contentedly, nodding approval, and pushing fresh tobacco into his clay with a fat forefinger.

I pointed out that it was my desire to save my lands from ravage, ruin, and ultimate confiscation by the victors; that for this reason he had summoned me, and I had come to confer with him and with other branches of our family, seeking how best this might be done.

I reminded him that, from his letters to me, I had acquired a fair knowledge of the estates endangered; that I understood that Sir John Johnson owned enormous tracts in Tryon County which his great father, Sir William, had left him when he died; that Colonel Claus, Guy Johnson, the Butlers, father and son, and the Varicks, all held estates of greatest value; and that these estates were menaced, now by Tory, now by rebel, and the lords of these broad manors were alternately solicited and threatened by the warring factions now so bloodily embroiled.

"We Ormonds can comprehend your dismay, your distress, your doubts," I said. "Our indigo grows almost within gunshot of the British outpost at New Smyrna; our oranges, our lemons, our cane, our cotton, must wither at a blast from the cannon of Saint Augustine. The rebels in Georgia threaten us, the Tories at Pensacola warn us, the Seminoles are gathering, the Minorcans are arming, the blacks in the Carolinas watch us, and the British regiments at Augustine are all itching to ravage and plunder and drive us into the sea if we declare not for the King who pays them."

Sir Lupus nodded, winked, and fell to slicing tobacco with a small, gold knife.

"We're all Quakers in these days—eh, George? We can't fight—no, we really can't! It's wrong, George,—oh, very wrong." And he fell a-chuckling, so that his paunch shook like a jelly.

"I think you do not understand me," I said.

He looked up quickly.

"We Ormonds are only waiting to draw sword."

"Draw sword!" he cried. "What d'ye mean?"

"I mean that, once convinced our honor demands it, we cannot choose but draw."

"Don't be an ass!" he shouted. "Have I not told you that there's no honor in this bloody squabble? Lord save the lad, he's mad as Walter Butler!"

"Sir Lupus," I said, angrily, "is a man an ass to defend his own land?"

"He is when it's not necessary! Lie snug; nobody is going to harm you. Lie snug, with both arms around your own land."

"I meant my own native land, not the miserable acres my slaves plant to feed and clothe me."

He glared, twisting his long pipe till the stem broke short.

"Well, which land do you mean to defend, England or these colonies?" he asked, staring.

"That is what I desire to learn, sir," I said, respectfully. "That is why I came North. With us in Florida, all is, so far, faction and jealousy, selfish intrigue and prejudiced dispute. The truth, the vital truth, is obscured; the right is hidden in a petty storm where local tyrants fill the air with dust, striving each to blind the other."

I leaned forward earnestly. "There must be right and wrong in this dispute; Truth stands naked somewhere in the world. It is for us to find her. Why, mark me, Sir Lupus, men cannot sit and blink at villany, nor look with indifference on a struggle to the death. One side is right, t'other wrong. And we must learn how matters stand."

"And what will it advance us to learn how matters stand?" he said, still staring, as though I were some persistent fool vexing him with unleavened babble. "Suppose these rebels are right—and, dammy, but I think they are—and suppose our King's troops are roundly trouncing them—and I think they are, too—do you mean to say you'd draw sword and go a-prowling, seeking for some obliging enemy to knock you in the head or hang you for a rebel to your neighbor's apple-tree?"

"Something of that sort," I said, good-humoredly.

"Oh, Don Quixote once more, eh?" he sneered, too mad to raise his voice to the more convenient bellow which seemed to soothe him as much as it distressed his listener. "Well, you've got a fool's mate in Sir George Covert, the insufferable dandy! And all you two need is a pair o' Panzas and a brace of windmills. Bah!" He grew angrier. "Bah, I say!" He broke out: "Damnation, sir! Go to the devil!"

I said, calmly: "Sir Lupus, I hear your observation with patience; I naturally receive your admonition with respect, but your bearing towards me I resent. Pray, sir, remember that I am under your roof *now*, but when I quit it I am free to call you to account."

"What! You'd fight me?"

"Scarcely, sir; but I should expect somebody to make your words good."

"Bah! Who? Ruyven? He's a lad! Dorothy is the only one to—" He broke out into a hoarse laugh. "Oh, you Ormonds! I might have saved myself the pains. And now you want to flesh your sword, it matters not in whom—Tory, rebel, neutral folk, they're all one to you, so that you fight! George, don't take offence; I naturally swear at those I differ with. I may love 'em and yet curse 'em like a sailor! Know me better, George! Bear with me; let me swear at you, lad! It's all I can do."

He spread out his fat hands imploringly, recrossing his enormous legs on the card-table. "I can't fight, George; I would gladly, but I'm too fat. Don't grudge me a few kindly oaths now and then. It's all I can do."

I was seized with a fit of laughter, utterly uncontrollable. Sir Lupus observed me peevishly, twiddling his broken pipe, and I saw he longed to launch it at my head, which made me laugh till his large, round, red face grew grayer and foggier through the mirth-mist in my eyes.

"Am I so droll?" he snapped.

"Oh yes, yes, Sir Lupus," I cried, weakly. "Don't grudge me this laugh. It is all I can do."

A grim smile came over his broad face.

"Touched!" he said. "I've a fine pair on my hands now—you and Sir George Covert—to plague me and prick me with your wit, like mosquitoes round a drowsy man. A fine family conference we shall have, with Sir John Johnson and the Butlers shooting one way, you and Sir George Covert firing t'other, and me betwixt you, singing psalms and getting all your arrows in me, fore and aft."

"Who is Sir George Covert?" I asked.

"One o' the Calverts, Lord Baltimore's kin, a sort of cousin of the Ormond-Butlers, a supercilious dandy, a languid macaroni; plagues me, damn his impudence, but I can't hate him—no! Hate him? Faith, I owe him more than any man on earth ... and love him for it—which is strange!"

"Has he an estate in jeopardy?" I inquired.

"Yes. He has a mansion in Albany, too, which he leases. He bought a mile on the great Vlaic and lives there all alone, shooting, fishing, playing the guitar o' moony nights, which they say sets the wild-cats wilder. Mark me, George, a petty mile square and a shooting shanty, and this languid ass says he means to fight for it. Lord help the man! I told him I'd buy him out to save him from embroiling us all, and what d' ye think? He stared at me through his lorgnons as though I had been some queer, new bird, and, says he, 'Lud!' says he, 'there's a world o' harmless sport in you yet, Sir Lupus, but you don't spell your title right,' says he. 'Change the *a* to an *o* and add an *ell* for good measure, and there you have it,' says he, a-drawling. With which he minced off, dusting his nose with his lace handkerchief, and I'm damned if I see the joke yet in spelling patroon with an *o* for the *a* and an *ell* for good measure!"

He paused, out of breath, to pour himself some spirits. "Joke?" he muttered. "Where the devil is it? I see no wit in that." And he picked up a fresh pipe from the rack on the table and moistened the clay with his fat tongue.

We sat in silence for a while. That this Sir George Covert should call the patroon a poltroon hurt me, for he was kin to us both; yet it seemed that there might be truth in the insolent fling, for selfishness and poltroonery are too often linked.

I raised my eyes and looked almost furtively at my cousin Varick. He had no neck; the spot where his bullet head joined his body was marked only by a narrow and soiled stock. His eyes alone relieved the monotony of a stolid countenance; all else was fat.

Sunk in my own reflections, lying back in my arm-chair, I watched dreamily the smoke pouring from the patroon's pipe, floating away, to hang wavering across the room, now lifting, now curling downward, as though drawn by a hidden current towards the unwaxed oaken floor.

No, there was no Ormond in him; he was all Varick, all Dutch, all patroon.

I had never seen any man like him save once, when a red-faced Albany merchant came a-waddling to the sea-islands looking for cotton and indigo, and we all despised him for the eagerness with which he trimmed his shillings at the Augustine taverns. Thrift is a word abused, and serves too often as a mask for avarice.

As I sat there fashioning wise saws and proverbs in my busy mind, the hall door opened and the first guest was announced—Sir George Covert.

And in he came, a well-built, lazy gentleman of forty, swinging gracefully on a pair o' legs no man need take shame in; ruffles on cuff and stock, hair perfumed, powdered, and rolled twice in French puffs, and on his hand a brilliant that sparkled purest fire. Under one arm he bore his gold-edged hat, and as he strolled forward, peering coolly about him through his quizzing glass, I thought I had never seen such graceful assurance, nor such insolently handsome eyes, marred by the faint shadows of dissipation.

Sir Lupus nodded a welcome and blew a great cloud of smoke into the air.

"Ah," observed Sir George, languidly, "Vesuvius in irruption?"

"How de do," said Sir Lupus, suspiciously.

"The mountain welcomes Mohammed," commented Sir George. "Mohammed greets the mountain! How de do, Sir Lupus! Ah!" He turned gracefully towards me, bowing. "Pray present me, Sir Lupus."

"My cousin, George Ormond," said Sir Lupus. "George first, George second," he added, with a sneer.

"No relation to George III., I trust, sir?" inquired Sir George, anxiously, offering his cool, well-kept hand.

"No," said I, laughing at his serious countenance and returning his clasp firmly.

"That's well, that's well," murmured Sir George, apparently vastly relieved, and invited me to take snuff with him.

We had scarcely exchanged a civil word or two ere the servant announced Captain Walter Butler, and I turned curiously, to see a dark, graceful young man enter and stand for a moment staring haughtily straight at me. He wore a very elegant black-and-orange uniform, without gorget; a black military cloak hung from his shoulders, caught up in his sword-knot.

With a quick movement he raised his hand and removed his officer's hat, and I saw on his gauntlets of fine doeskin the Ormond arms, heavily embroidered. Instantly the affectation displeased me.

"Come to the mountain, brother prophet," said Sir George, waving his hand towards the seated patroon. He came, lightly as a panther, his dark, well-cut features softening a trifle; and I thought him handsome in his uniform, wearing his own dark hair unpowdered, tied in a short queue; but when he turned full face to greet Sir George Covert, I was astonished to see the cruelty in his almost perfect features, which were smooth as a woman's, and lighted by a pair of clear, dark-golden eyes.

Ah, those wonderful eyes of Walter Butler—ever-changing eyes, now almost black, glimmering with ardent fire, now veiled and amber, now suddenly a shallow yellow, round, staring, blank as the eyes of a caged eagle; and, still again, piercing, glittering, narrowing to a slit. Terrible mad eyes, that I have never forgotten—never, never can forget.

As Sir Lupus named me, Walter Butler dropped Sir George's hand and grasped mine, too eagerly to please me.

"Ormond and Ormond-Butler need no friends to recommend them each to the other," he said. And straightway fell a-talking of the greatness of the Arrans and the Ormonds, and of that duke who, attainted, fled to France to save his neck.

I strove to be civil, yet he embarrassed me before the others, babbling of petty matters interesting only to those whose taste invites them to go burrowing in parish records and ill-smelling volumes written by some toad-eater to his patron.

For me, I am an Ormond, and I know that it would be shameful if I turned rascal and besmirched my name. As to the rest—the dukes, the glory, the greatness—I hold it concerns nobody but the dead, and it is a foolishness to plague folks' ears by boasting of deeds done by those you never knew, like a Seminole chanting ere he strikes the painted post.

Also, this Captain Walter Butler was overlarding his phrases with "Cousin Ormond," so that I was soon cloyed, and nigh ready to damn the relationship to his face.

Sir Lupus, who had managed to rise by this time, waddled off into the drawing-room across the hallway, motioning us to follow; and barely in time, too, for there came, shortly, Sir John Johnson with a company of ladies and gentlemen, very gay in their damasks, brocades, and velvets, which the folds of their foot-mantles, capuchins, and cardinals revealed.

The gentlemen had come a-horseback, and all wore very elegant uniforms under their sober cloaks, which were linked with gold chains at the throat; the ladies, prettily powdered and patched, appeared a trifle over-colored, and their necks and shoulders, innocent of buffonts, gleamed pearl-tinted above their gay breast-knots. And they made a sparkling bevy as they fluttered up the staircase to their cloak-room, while Sir John entered the drawing-room, followed by the other gentlemen, and stood in careless conversation with the patrol, while old Cato disembarrassed him of cloak and hat.

Sir John Johnson, son of the great Sir William, as I first saw him was a man of less than middle age, flabby, cold-eyed, heavy of foot and hand. On his light-colored hair he wore no powder; the rather long queue was tied with a green hair-ribbon; the thick, whitish folds of his double chin rested on a buckled stock.

For the rest, he wore a green-and-gold uniform of very elegant cut—green being the garb of his regiment, the Royal Greens, as I learned afterwards—and his buff-topped boots and his metals were brilliant and plainly new.

When the patrol named me to him he turned his lack-lustre eyes on me and offered me a large, damp hand.

In turn I was made acquainted with the several officers in his suite—Colonel John Butler, father of Captain Walter Butler, broad and squat, a withered prophecy of what the son might one day be; Colonel Daniel Claus, a rather merry and battered Indian fighter; Colonel Guy Johnson, of Guy Park, dark and taciturn; a Captain Campbell, and a Captain McDonald of Perth.

All wore the green uniform save the Butlers; all greeted me with particular civility and conducted like the respectable company they appeared to be, politely engaging me in pleasant conversation, desiring news from Florida, or complimenting me upon my courtesy, which, they vowed, had alone induced me to travel a thousand miles for the sake of permitting my kinsmen the pleasure of welcoming me.

One by one the gentlemen retired to exchange their spurred top-boots for white silk stockings and silken pumps, and to arrange their hair or stick a patch here and there, and rinse their hands in rose-water to cleanse them of the bridle's odor.

They were still thronging the gun-room, and I stood alone in the drawing-room with Sir George Covert, when a lady entered and courtesied low as we bowed together.

And truly she was a beauty, with her skin of rose-ivory, her powdered hair a-gleam with brilliants, her eyes of purest violet, a friendly smile hovering on her fresh, scarlet mouth.

"Well, sir," she said, "do you not know me?" And to Sir George: "I vow, he takes me for a guest in my own house!"

And then I knew my cousin Dorothy Varick.

She suffered us to salute her hand, gazing the while about her indifferently; and, as I released her slender fingers and raised my head, she, rounded arm still extended as though forgotten, snapped her thumb and forefinger together in vexation with a "Plague on it! There's that odious Sir John!"

"Is Sir John Johnson so offensive to your ladyship?" inquired Sir George, lazily.

"Offensive! Have you not heard how the beast drank wine from my slipper! Never mind! I cannot endure him. Sir George, you must sit by me at table—and you, too, Cousin Ormond, or he'll come bothering." She glanced at the open door of the gun-room, a frown on her white brow. "Oh, they're all here, I see. Sparks will fly ere sun-up. There's Campbell, and McDonald, too, wi' the memory of Glencoe still stewing betwixt them; and there's Guy Johnson, with a price on his head—and plenty to sell it for him in County Tryon, gentlemen! And there's young Walter Butler, cursing poor Cato that he touched his spur in drawing off his boots—if he strikes Cato I'll strike him! And where are their fine ladies, Sir George? Still primping at the mirror? Oh, la!" She stepped back, laughing, raising her lovely arms a little. "Look at me. Am I well laced, with nobody to aid me save Cecile, poor child, and Benny to hold the candles—he being young enough for the office?"

"Happy, happy Benny!" murmured Sir George, inspecting her through his quizzing-glass from head to toe.

"If you think it a happy office you may fill it yourself in future, Sir George," she said. "I never knew an ass who failed to bray in ecstasy at mention of a pair o' stays."

Sir George stared, and said, "Aha! clever—very, very clever!" in so patronizing a tone that Dorothy reddened and bit her lip in vexation.

"That is ever your way," she said, "when I parry you to your confusion. Take your eyes from me, Sir George! Cousin Ormond, am I dressed to your taste or not?"

She stood there in her gown of brocade, beautifully flowered in peach color, dainty, confident, challenging me to note one fault. Nor could I, from the gold hair-pegs in her hair to the tip of her slim, pompadour shoes peeping from the lace of her petticoat, which she lifted a trifle to show her silken, flowered hose.

And—"There!" she cried, "I gowned myself, and I wear no paint. I wish you would tell them as much when they laugh at me."

Now came the ladies, rustling down the stairway, and the gentlemen, strolling in from their toilet and stirrup-cups in the gun-room, and I noted that all wore service-swords, and laid their pistols on the table in the drawing-room.

"Do they fear a surprise?" I whispered to Sir George Covert.

"Oh yes; Jack Mount and the Stoners are abroad. But Sir John has a troop of his cut-throat horsemen picketed out around us. You see, Sir John broke his parole, and Walter Butler is attainted, and it might go hard with some of these gentlemen if General Schuyler's dragoons caught them here, plotting nose to nose."

"Who is this Jack Mount?" I asked, curiously, remembering my companion of the Albany road.

"One of Cresap's riflemen," he drawled, "sent back here from Boston to raise the country against the invasion. They say he was a highwayman once, but we Tories"—he laughed shamelessly—"say many things in these days which may not help us at the judgment day. Wait, there's that little rosebud, Claire Putnam, Sir John's flame. Take her in to table; she's a pretty little plaything. Lady Johnson, who was Polly Watts, is in Montreal, you see." He made a languid gesture with outspread hands, smiling.

The girl he indicated, Mistress Claire Putnam, was a fragile, willowy creature, over-thin, perhaps, yet wonderfully attractive and pretty, and there was much of good in her face, and a tinge of pathos, too, for all her bright vivacity.

"If Sir John Johnson put her away when he wedded Miss Watts," said Sir George, coolly, "I think he did it from interest and selfish calculation, not because he ceased to love her in his bloodless, fishy fashion. And now that Lady Johnson has fled to Canada, Sir John makes no pretence of hiding his amours in the society which he haunts; nor does that society take umbrage at the notorious relationship so impudently renewed. We're a shameless lot, Mr. Ormond."

At that moment I heard Sir John Johnson, at my elbow, saying to Sir Lupus: "Do you know what these damned rebels have had the impudence to do? I can scarce credit it myself, but it is said that their Congress has adopted a flag of thirteen stripes and thirteen stars on a blue field, and I'm cursed if I don't believe they mean to hoist the filthy rag in our very faces!"

## V

# A NIGHT AT THE PATROON'S

Under a flare of yellow candle-light we entered the dining-hall and seated ourselves before a table loaded with flowers and silver, and the most beautiful Flemish glass that I have ever seen; though they say that Sir William Johnson's was finer.

The square windows of the hall were closed, the dusty curtains closely drawn; the air, though fresh, was heavily saturated with perfume. Between each window, and higher up, small, square loop-holes pierced the solid walls. The wooden flap-hoods of these were open; through them poured the fresh night air, stirring the clustered flowers and the jewelled aigrets in the ladies' hair.

The spectacle was pretty, even beautiful; at every lady's cover lay a gift from the patroon, a crystal bosom-glass, mounted in silver filigree, filled with roses in scented water; and, at the sight, a gust of hand-clapping swept around the table, like the rattle of December winds through dry palmettos.

In a distant corner, slaves, dressed fancifully and turbaned like Barbary blackamoors, played on fiddles and guitars, and the music was such as I should have enjoyed, loving all melody as I do, yet could scarcely hear it in the flutter and chatter rising around me as the ladies placed the bosom-bottles in their stomachers and opened their Marlborough fans to set them waving all like restless wings.

Yet, under this surface elegance and display, one could scarcely choose but note how everywhere an amazing shiftlessness reigned in the patroon's house. Cobwebs canopied the ceiling-beams with their silvery, ragged banners afloat in the candle's heat; dust, like a velvet mantle, lay over the Dutch plates and teapots, ranged on shelves against the panelled wall midway 'twixt ceiling and unwaxed floor; the gaudy yellow liveries of the black servants were soiled and tarnished and ill fitting, and all wore slovenly rolls, tied to imitate scratch-wigs, the effect of which was amazing. The passion for cleanliness in the Dutch lies not in their men folk; a Dutch mistress of this manor house had died o' shame long since—or died o' scrubbing.

I felt mean and ungracious to sit there spying at my host's table, and strove to forget it, yet was forced to wipe furtively spoon and fork upon the napkin on my knees ere I durst acquaint them with my mouth; and so did others, as I saw; but they did it openly and without pretence of concealment, and nobody took offence.

Sir Lupus cared nothing for precedence at table, and said so when he seated us, which brought a sneer to Sir John Johnson's mouth and a scowl to Walter Butler's brow; but this provincial boorishness appeared to be forgotten ere the decanters had slopped the cloth twice, and fair faces flushed, and voices grew gayer, and the rattle of silver assaulting china and the mellow ring of glasses swelled into a steady, melodious din which stirred the blood to my cheeks.

We Ormonds love gayety—I choose the mildest phrase I know. Yet, take us at our worst, Irish that we are, and if there be a taint of license to our revels, and if we drink the devil's toast to the devil's own undoing, the vital spring of our people remains unpolluted, the nation's strength and purity unsoiled, guarded forever by the chastity of our women.

Savoring my claret, I glanced askance at my neighbors; on my left sat my cousin Dorothy Varick, frankly absorbed in a roasted pigeon, yet wielding knife and fork with much grace and address; on my right Magdalen Brant, step-cousin to Sir John, a lovely, soft-voiced girl, with velvety eyes and the faintest dusky tint, which showed the Indian blood through the carmine in her fresh, curved cheeks.

I started to speak to her, but there came a call from the end of the table, and we raised our glasses to Sir Lupus, for which civility he expressed his thanks and gave us the ladies, which we drank standing, and reversed our glasses with a cheer.

Then Walter Butler gave us "The Ormonds and the Earls of Arran," an amazing vanity, which shamed me so that I sat biting my lip, furious to see Sir John wink at Colonel Claus, and itching to fling my glass at the head of this young fool whose brain seemed cracked with brooding on his pedigree.

Meat was served ere I was called on, but later, a delicious Burgundy being decanted, all called me with a persistent clamor, so that I was obliged to ask permission of Sir Lupus, then rise, still tingling with the memory of the silly toast offered by Walter Butler.

"I give you," I said, "a republic where self-respect balances the coronet, where there is no monarch, no high-priest, but only a clean altar, served by the parliament of a united people. Gentlemen, raise your glasses to the colonies of America and their ancient liberties!"

And, amazed at what I had said, and knowing that I had not meant to say it, I lifted my glass and drained it.

Astonishment altered every face. Walter Butler mechanically raised his glass, then set it down, then raised it once more, gazing blankly at me; and I saw others hesitate, as though striving to recollect the exact terms of my toast. But, after a second's hesitation, all drank sitting. Then each looked inquiringly at me, at neighbors, puzzled, yet already partly reassured.

"Gad!" said Colonel Claus, bluntly, "I thought at first that Burgundy smacked somewhat of Boston tea."

"The Burgundy's sound enough," said Colonel John Butler, grimly.

"So is the toast," bawled Sir Lupus. "It's a pacific toast, a soothing sentiment, neither one thing nor t'other. Dammy, it's a toast no Quaker need refuse."

"Sir Lupus, your permission!" broke out Captain Campbell. "Gentlemen, it is strange that not one of his Majesty's officers has proposed the King!" He looked straight at me and said, without turning his head: "All loyal at this table will fill. Ladies, gentlemen, I give you his Majesty the King!"

The toast was finished amid cheers. I drained my glass and turned it down with a bow to Captain Campbell, who bowed to me as though greatly relieved.

The fiddles, bassoons, and guitars were playing and the slaves singing when the noise of the cheering died away; and I heard Dorothy beside me humming the air and tapping the floor with her silken shoe, while she moistened macaroons in a glass of Madeira and nibbled them with serene satisfaction.

"You appear to be happy," I whispered.

"Perfectly. I adore sweets. Will you try a dish of cinnamon cake? Sop it in Burgundy; they harmonize to a most heavenly taste.... Look at Magdalen Brant, is she not sweet? Her cousin is Molly Brant, old Sir William's sweetheart, fled to Canada.... She follows this week with Betty Austin, that black-eyed little mischief-maker on Sir John's right, who owes her diamonds to Guy Johnson. La! What a gossip I grow! But it's county talk, and all know it, and nobody cares save the Albany blue-noses and the Van Cortlandts, who fall backward with standing too straight—"

"Dorothy," I said, sharply, "a blunted innocence is better than none, but it's a pity you know so much!"

"How can I help it?" she asked, calmly, dipping another macaroon into her glass.

"It's a pity, all the same," I said.

"Dew on a duck's back, my friend," she observed, serenely. "Cousin, if I were fashioned for evil I had been tainted long since."

She sat up straight and swept the table with a heavy-lidded, insolent glance, eyebrows raised. The cold purity of her profile, the undimmed innocence, the childish beauty of the curved cheek, touched me to the quick. Ah! the white flower to nourish here amid unconcealed corruption, with petals stainless, with bloom undimmed, with all its exquisite fragrance still fresh and wholesome in an air heavy with wine and the odor of dying roses.

I looked around me. Guy Johnson, red in the face, was bending too closely beside his neighbor, Betty Austin. Colonel Claus talked loudly across the table to Captain McDonald, and swore fashionable oaths which the gaunt captain echoed obsequiously. Claire Putnam coquetted with her paddle-stick fan, defending her roses from Sir George Covert, while Sir John Johnson stared at them in cold disapproval; and I saw Magdalen Brant, chin propped on her clasped hands, close her eyes and breathe deeply while the wine burned her face, setting torches aflame in either cheek. Later, when I spoke to her, she laughed pitifully, saying that her ears hummed like bee-hives. Then she said that she meant to go, but made no movement; and presently her dark eyes closed again, and I saw the fever pulse beating in her neck.

Some one had overturned a silver basin full of flowers, and a servant, sopping up the water, had brushed Walter Butler so that he flew into a passion and flung a glass at the terrified black, which set Sir Lupus laughing till he choked, but which enraged me that he should so conduct in the presence of his host's daughter.

Yet if Sir Lupus could not only overlook it, but laugh at it, I, certes, had no right to rebuke what to me seemed a gross insult.

Toasts flew fast now, and there was a punch in a silver bowl as large as a bushel—and spirits, too, which was strange, seeing that the ladies remained at table.

Then Captain Campbell would have all to drink the Royal Greens, standing on chairs, one foot on the table, which appeared to be his regiment's mess custom, and we did so, the ladies laughing and protesting, but finally planting their dainty shoes on the edge of the table; and Magdalen Brant nigh fell off her chair—for lack of balance, as Sir George Covert protested, one foot alone being too small to sustain her.

"That Cinderella compliment at our expense!" cried Betty Austin, but Sir Lupus cried: "Silence all, and keep one foot on the table!" And a little black slave lad, scarce more than a babe, appeared, dressed in a lynx-skin, bearing a basket of pretty boxes woven out of scented grass and embroidered with silk flowers.

At every corner he laid a box, all exclaiming and wondering what the surprise might be, until the little black, arching his back, fetched a yowl like a lynx and ran out on all fours.

"The gentlemen will open the boxes! Ladies, keep one foot on the table!" bawled Sir Lupus. We bent to open the boxes; Magdalen Brant and Dorothy Varick, each resting a hand on my shoulder to steady them, peeped curiously down to see. And, "Oh!" cried everybody, as the lifted box-lids discovered snow-white pigeons sitting on great gilt eggs.

The white pigeons fluttered out, some to the table, where they craned their necks and ruffled their snowy plumes; others flapped up to the loop-holes, where they sat and watched us.

"Break the eggs!" cried the patrol.

I broke mine; inside was a pair of shoe-roses, each set with a pearl and clasped with a gold pin.

Betty Austin clapped her hands in delight; Dorothy bent double, tore off the silken roses from each shoe in turn, and I pinned on the new jewelled roses amid a gale of laughter.

"A health to the patrol!" cried Sir George Covert, and we gave it with a will, glasses down. Then all settled to our seats once more to hear Sir George sing a song.

A slave passed him a guitar; he touched the strings and sang with good taste a song in questionable taste:

"Jeanneton prend sa faucille."

A delicate melody and neatly done; yet the verse—

"Le deuxième plus habile  
L'embrassant sous le menton"—

made me redden, and the envoi nigh burned me alive  
with blushes, yet was rapturously applauded, and the  
patroon fell a-choking with his gross laughter.

Then Walter Butler would sing, and, I confess, did  
it well, though the song was sad and the words too  
melancholy to please.

"I know a rebel song," cried Colonel Claus. "Here,  
give me that fiddle and I'll fiddle it, dammy if I don't-ay,  
and sing it, too!"

In a shower of gibes and laughter the fiddle was  
fetched, and the Indian fighter seized the bow and drew  
a most distressful strain, singing in a whining voice:

"Come hearken to a bloody tale,  
Of how the soldiery  
Did murder men in Boston,  
As you full soon shall see.  
It came to pass on March the fifth  
Of seventeen-seventy,  
A regiment, the twenty-ninth.  
Provoked a sad affray!"

"Chorus!" shouted Captain Campbell, beating time:

"Fol-de-rol-de-rol-de-ray-  
Provoked a sad affray!"

"That's not in the song!" protested Colonel Claus, but everybody sang it in whining tones.

"Continue!" cried Captain Campbell, amid a burst of laughter. And Claus gravely drew his  
fiddle-bow across the strings and sang:

"In King Street, by the Butcher's Hall  
The soldiers on us fell,  
Likewise before their barracks  
(It is the truth I tell).  
And such a dreadful carnage  
In Boston ne'er was known;  
They killed Samuel Maverick-  
He gave a piteous groan."

And, "Fol-de-rol!" roared Captain Campbell, "He gave a piteous groan!"

"John Clark he was wounded,  
On him they did fire;  
James Caldwell and Crispus Attucks

Lay bleeding in the mire;  
Their regiment, the twenty-ninth,  
Killed Monk and Sam I Gray,  
While Patrick Carr lay cold in death  
And could not flee away—

"Oh, tally!" broke out Sir John; "are we to listen to such stuff all night?"

More laughter; and Sir George Covert said that he feared Sir John Johnson had no sense of humor.

"I have heard that before," said Sir John, turning his cold eyes on Sir George. "But if we've got to sing at wine, in Heaven's name let us sing something sensible."

"No, no!" bawled Claus. "This is the abode of folly to-night!" And he sang a catch from "Pills to Purge Melancholy," as broad a verse as I cared to hear in such company.

"Cheer up, Sir John!" cried Betty Austin; "there are other slippers to drink from—"

Sir John stood up, exasperated, but could not face the storm of laughter, nor could Dorothy, silent and white in her anger; and she rose to go, but seemed to think better of it and resumed her seat, disdainful eyes sweeping the table.

"Face the fools," I whispered. "Your confusion is their victory."

Captain McDonald, stirring the punch, filled all glasses, crying out that we should drink to our sweethearts in bumpers.

"Drink 'em in wine," protested Captain Campbell, thickly. "Who but a feckless McDonald wud drink his leddy in poonch?"

"I said poonch!" retorted McDonald, sternly. "If ye wish wine, drink it; but I'm thinkin' the Argyle Campbells are better judges o' blood than of red wine.

"Stop that clan-feud!" bawled the patrol, angrily.

But the old clan-feud blazed up, kindled from the ever-smouldering embers of Glencoe, which the massacre of a whole clan had not extinguished in all these years.

"And why should an Argyle Campbell judge blood?" cried Captain Campbell, in a menacing voice.

"And why not?" retorted McDonald. "Breadalbane spilled enough to teach ye."

"Teach who?"

"Teach you!—and the whole breed o' black Campbells from Perth to Galway and Fonda's Bush, which ye dub Broadalbin. I had rather be a Monteith and have the betrayal of Wallace cast in my face than be a Campbell of Argyle wi' the memory o' Glencoe to follow me to hell."

"Silence!" roared the patrol, struggling to his feet. Sir George Covert caught at Captain Campbell's sleeve as he rose; Sir John Johnson stood up, livid with anger.

"Let this end now!" he said, sternly. "Do officers of the Royal Greens conduct like yokels at a fair? Answer me, Captain Campbell! And you, Captain McDonald! Take your seat, sir; and if I hear that cursed word 'Glencoe' 'again, the first who utters it faces a court-martial!"

Partly sobered, the Campbell glared mutely at the McDonald; the latter also appeared to have recovered a portion of his senses and resumed his seat in silence, glowering at the empty glasses before him.

"Now be sensible, gentlemen," said Colonel Claus, with a jovial nod to the patrol; "let pass, let pass. This is no time to raise the fiery cross in the hills. Gad, there's a new pibroch to march to these days—

"Pibroch o' Hirokôue!  
Pibroch o' Hirokônue!"

he hummed, deliberately, but nobody laughed, and the grave, pale faces of the women turned questioningly one to the other.

Enemies or allies, there was terror in the name of "Iroquois." But Walter Butler looked up from his gloomy meditation and raised his glass with a ghastly laugh.

"I drink to our red allies," he said, slowly drained his glass till but a color remained in it, then dipped his finger in the dregs and drew upon the white table-cloth a blood-red cross.

"There's your clan-sign, you Campbells, you McDonalds," he said, with a terrifying smile which none could misinterpret.

Then Sir George Covert said: "Sir William Johnson knew best. Had he lived, there had been no talk of the Iroquois as allies or as enemies."

I said, looking straight at Walter Butler: "Can there be any serious talk of turning these wild beasts loose against the settlers of Tryon County?"

"Against rebels," observed Sir John Johnson, coldly. "No loyal man need fear our Mohawks."

A dead silence followed. Servants, clearing the round table of silver, flowers, cloth—all, save glasses and decanters—stepped noiselessly, and I knew the terror of the Iroquois name had sharpened their dull ears. Then came old Cato, tricked out in flame-colored plush, bearing the staff of major-domo; and the servants in their tarnished liveries marshalled behind him and filed out, leaving us seated before a bare table, with only our glasses and bottles to break the expanse of polished mahogany and soiled cloth.

Captain McDonald rose, lifted the steaming kettle from the hob, and set it on a great, blue tile, and the gentlemen mixed their spirits thoughtfully, or lighted long, clay pipes.

The patroon, wreathed in smoke, lay back in his great chair and rattled his toddy-stick for attention—an unnecessary noise, for all were watching him, and even Walter Butler's gloomy gaze constantly reverted to that gross, red face, almost buried in thick tobacco-smoke, like the head of some intemperate and grotesquely swollen Jupiter crowned with clouds.

The plea of the patroon for neutrality in the war now sweeping towards the Mohawk Valley I had heard before. So, doubtless, had those present.

He waxed pathetic over the danger to his vast estate; he pointed out the conservative attitude of the great patroons and lords of the manors of Livingston, Cosby, Phillipse, Van Rensselaer, and Van Cortlandt.

"What about Schuyler?" I asked.

"Schuyler's a fool!" he retorted, angrily. "Any landed proprietor here can become a rebel general in exchange for his estate! A fine bargain! A thrifty dicker! Let Philip Schuyler enjoy his brief reign in Albany. What's the market value of the glory he exchanged for his broad acres? Can you appraise it, Sir John?"

Then Sir John Johnson arose, and, for the only moment in his career, he stood upon a principle—a fallacious one, but still a principle; and for that I respected him, and have never quite forgotten it, even through the terrible years when he razed and burned and murdered among a people who can never forget the red atrocities of his devastations.

Glancing slowly around the table, with his pale, cold eyes contracting in the candle's glare, he spoke in a voice absolutely passionless, yet which carried the conviction to all that what he uttered was hopelessly final:

"Sir Lupus complains that he hazards all, should he cast his fortunes with his King. Yet I have done that thing. I am to-day a man with a price set on my head by these rebels of my own country. My lands, if not already confiscated by rebel commissioners, are occupied by rebels; my manor-houses, my forts, my mills, my tenants' farms are held by the rebels and my revenues denied me. I was confined on parole within the limits of Johnson Hall. They say I broke my parole, but they lie. It was only when I had certain news that the Boston rebels were coming to seize my person and violate a sacred convention that I retired to Canada."

He paused. The explanation was not enough to satisfy me, and I expected him to justify the arming of Johnson Hall and his discovered intrigues with the Mohawks which set the rebels on the march to seize his person. He gave none, resuming quietly:

"I have hazarded a vast estate, vaster than yours, Sir Lupus, greater than the estates of all these gentlemen combined. I do it because I owe obedience to the King who has honored me, and for no other reason on earth. Yet I do it in fullest confidence and belief that my lands will be restored to me when this rebellion is stamped on and trodden out to the last miserable spark."

He hesitated, wiped his thin mouth with his laced handkerchief, and turned directly towards the patrol.

"You ask me to remain neutral. You promise me that, even at this late hour, my surrender and oath of neutrality will restore me my estates and guarantee me a peaceful, industrious life betwixt two tempests. It may be so, Sir Lupus. I think it would be so. But, my friend, to fail my King when he has need of me is a villainy I am incapable of. The fortunes of his Majesty are my fortunes; I stand or fall with him. This is my duty as I see it. And, gentlemen, I shall follow it while life endures."

He resumed his seat amid absolute silence. Presently the patrol raised his eyes and looked at Colonel John Butler.

"May we hear from you, sir?" he asked, gravely.

"I trust that all may, one day, hear from Butler's Rangers," he said.

"And I swear they shall," broke in Walter Butler, his dark eyes burning like golden coals.

"I think the Royal Greens may make some little noise in the world," said Captain Campbell, with an oath.

Guy Johnson waved his thin, brown hand towards the patrol: "I hold my King's commission as intendant of Indian affairs for North America. That is enough for me. Though they rob me of Guy Park and every acre, I shall redeem my lands in a manner no man can ever forget!"

"Gentlemen," added Colonel Claus, in his bluff way, "you all make great merit of risking property and life in this wretched teapot tempest; you all take credit for unchaining the Mohawks. But you give them no credit. What have the Iroquois to gain by aiding us? Why do they dig up the hatchet, hazarding the only thing they have—their lives? Because they are led by a man who told the rebel Congress that the covenant chain which the King gave to the Mohawks is still unspotted by dishonor, unruined by treachery, unbroken, intact, without one link missing! Gentlemen, I give you Joseph Brant, war-chief of the Mohawk nation! Hiro!"

All filled and drank—save three—Sir George Covert, Dorothy Varick, and myself.

I felt Walter Butler's glowing eyes upon me, and they seemed to burn out the last vestige of my patience.

"Don't rise! Don't speak now!" whispered Dorothy, her hand closing on my arm.

"I must speak," I said, aloud, and all heard me and turned on me their fevered eyes.

"Speak out, in God's name!" said Sir George Covert, and I rose, repeating, "In God's name, then!"

"Give no offence to Walter Butler, I beg of you," whispered Dorothy.

I scarcely heard her; through the candle-light I saw the ring of eyes shining, all watching me.

"I applaud the loyal sentiments expressed by Sir John Johnson," I said, slowly. "Devotion to principle is respected by all men of honor. They tell me that our King has taxed a commonwealth against its will. You admit his Majesty's right to do so. That ranges you on one side. Gentlemen," I said, deliberately, "I deny the right of Englishmen to take away the liberties of Englishmen. That ranges me on the other side."

A profound silence ensued. The ring of eyes glowed.

"And now," said I, gravely, "that we stand arrayed, each on his proper side, honestly, loyally differing one from the other, let us, if we can, strive to avert a last resort to arms. And if we cannot, let us draw honorably, and trust to God and a stainless blade!"

I bent my eyes on Walter Butler; he met them with a vacant glare.

"Captain Butler," I said, "if our swords be to-day stainless, he who first dares employ a savage to do his work forfeits the right to bear the arms and title of a soldier."

"Mr. Ormond! Mr. Ormond!" broke in Colonel Claus. "Do you impeach Lord George Germaine?"

"I care not whom I impeach!" I said, hotly. "If Lord George Germaine counsels the employment of Indians against Englishmen, rebels though they be, he is a monstrous villain and a fool!"

"Fool!" shouted Colonel Campbell, choking with rage. "He'd be a fool to let these rebels win over the Iroquois before we did!"

"What rebel has sought to employ the Indians?" I asked. "If any in authority have dreamed of such a horror, they are guilty as though already judged and damned!"

"Mr. Ormond," cut in Guy Johnson, fairly trembling with fury, "you deal very freely in damnation. Do you perhaps assume the divine right which you deny your King?"

"And do you find merit in crass treason, sir?" burst out McDonald, striking the table with clinched fist.

"Treason," cut in Sir John Johnson, "was the undoing of a certain noble duke in Queen Anne's time."

"You are in error," I said, calmly.

"Was James, Duke of Ormond, not impeached by Mr. Stanhope in open Parliament?" shouted Captain McDonald.

"The House of Commons," I replied, calmly, "dishonored itself and its traditions by bringing a bill of attainder against the Duke of Ormond. That could not make him a traitor."

"He was not a traitor," broke out Walter Butler, white to the lips, "but you are!"

"A lie," I said.

With the awful hue of death stamped on his face, Walter Butler rose and faced me; and though they dragged us to our seats, shouting and exclaiming in the uproar made by falling chairs and the rush of feet, he still kept his eyes on me, shallow, yellow, depthless, terrible eyes.

"A nice scene to pass in women's presence!" roared the patroon. "Dammy, Captain Butler, the fault lies first with you! Withdraw that word 'traitor,' which touches us all!"

"He has so named himself," said Walter Butler, "Withdraw it! You foul your own nest, sir!"

A moment passed. "I withdraw it," motioned Butler, with parched lips.

"Then I withdraw the lie," I said, watching him.

"That is well," roared the patroon. "That is as it should be. Shall kinsmen quarrel at such a time? Offer your hand, Captain Butler. Offer yours, George."

"No," I said, and gazed mildly at the patroon.

Sir George Covert rose and sauntered over to my chair. Under cover of the hubbub, not yet subsided, he said: "I fancy you will shortly require a discreet friend."

"Not at all, sir," I replied, aloud. "If the war spares Mr. Butler and myself, then I shall call on you. I've another quarrel first." All turned to look at me, and I added, "A quarrel touching the liberties of Englishmen." Sir John Johnson sneered, and it was hard to swallow, being the sword-master that I am.

But the patroon broke out furiously. "Mr. Ormond honors himself. If any here so much as looks the word 'coward,' he will answer to me—old and fat as I am! I've no previous engagement; I care not who prevails, King or Congress. I care nothing so they leave me my own! I'm free to resent a word, a look, a breath—ay, the flutter of a lid, Sir John!"

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