

Raymond Evelyn

The Sun Maid: A Story of Fort Dearborn



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PREFACE

In some measure, the story of the Sun Maid is an allegory.

Both the heroine and the city of her love grew from insignificant beginnings; the one into a type of broadest womanhood, the other into a grandeur which has made it unique among the cities of the world.

Discouragements, sorrows, and seeming ruin but developed in each the same high attributes of courage, indomitable will power, and far-reaching sympathy. The story of the youth of either would be a tale unfinished; and those who have followed, with any degree of interest, the fortunes of either during any period will keep that interest to the end.

There are things which never age. Such was the heart of the Maid who remained glad as a girl to the end of her century, and such the marvellous Chicago with a century rounded glory which is still the glory of a youth whose future magnificence no man can estimate.

E. R., Baltimore, January, 1900.

CHAPTER I.

AS THE SUN WENT DOWN

With gloom in his heart, Black Partridge strode homeward along the beach path.

The glory of a brilliant August sunset crimsoned the tops of the sandhills on the west and the waters of the broad lake on the east; but if the preoccupied Indian observed this at all, it was to see in it an omen of impending tragedy. Red was the color of blood, and he foresaw that blood must flow, and freely.

"They are all fools. All. They know that Black Partridge cannot lie, yet they believe not his words. The white man lies, and works his own destruction. His doom be on his head!"

As his thought took this line the chief's brow grew still more stern, and an expression of contempt curled the corners of his wide, thin lips. A savage though he was, at that moment he felt himself immeasurably superior to the pale-faces whom he had known; and in the consciousness of his integrity he held his tall form even more erect, while he turned his face toward the sky in gratitude to that Great Spirit who had made him what he was.

Then again he remembered the past, and again his feather-adorned head drooped beneath its burden of regret, while his brown fingers clasped and unclasped themselves about a glittering medal which decorated his necklace, and was the most

cherished of his few possessions.

“I have worn it for long, and it has rested lightly upon my heart; but now it becomes a knife that pierces. Therefore I must return it whence it came.”

Yet something like a sigh escaped him, and his hands fell down straight at his sides. Also, his narrow eyes gazed forward upon the horizon, absently, as if their inward visions were much clearer than anything external. In this manner he went onward for a little distance, till his moccasined foot struck sharply against something lying in his path, and so roused him from his reverie.

“Ugh! Ugh! So. When the squaw dies the papoose must suffer.”

The soft obstruction was a little child, curled into a rounded heap, and fast asleep upon this primitive public highway. The touch of the red man’s foot had partially wakened the sleeper, and when he bent and laid his hand upon her shoulder, she sprang up lightly, at once beginning to laugh and chatter with a gayety that infected even the stolid Indian.

“Ugh! The Little-One-Who-Laugh. Why are you here alone, so far from the Fort, Kitty Briscoe?”

“I runned away. Bunny rabbit runned away. I did catch him two times. I did find some posies, all yellow and round and – posies runned away, too. Ain’t that funny? Kitty go seek them.”

Her laughter trilled out, bird clear, and a mischievous twinkle lighted her big blue eyes.

“I runned away. Bunny rabbit runned to catch me. I runned

to catch bunny. I caught the posies. Yellow posies gone – I go find them, too.”

As if it were the best joke in the world, the little creature still laughed over her own conceit of so many runnings till, in whirling about, she discovered the remnants of the flowers she had lost upon the heat-hardened path behind her. Indeed, when she had dropped down to sleep, overcome by sudden weariness, it had been with the cool leaves and blossoms for a couch. Now the love of all green and growing things was an inborn passion with this child, and her face sobered to a keen distress as she gazed upon her ruined treasures. But almost at once the cloud passed, and she laughed again.

“Poor posies, tired posies, sleepy, too. Kitty sorry. Put them in the water trough and wake them up. Then they hold their eyes open, just like Kitty’s.”

“Ugh! Where the papoose sleeps the blossoms wither,” remarked Black Partridge, regarding the bruised and faded plants with more attention. They were wild orchids, and he knew that the child must have wandered far afield to obtain them. At that time of year such blooms were extremely rare, and only to be found in the moist shadows of some tree-bordered stream quite remote from this sandy beach.

“Oh, dear! Something aches my feet. I will go home to my little bed. Pick up the posies, Feather-man, and take poor Kitty.”

With entire confidence that the Indian would do as she wished, the small maid clasped his buckskin-covered knee and leaned her

dimpled cheek against it. It proved a comfortable support, and with a babyish yawn she promptly fell asleep again.

Had she been a child of his own village, even of his own wigwam, Black Partridge would have shaken her roughly aside, feeling his dignity affronted by her familiarity; but in her case he could not do this and on this night least of all.

The little stray was the orphan of Fort Dearborn; whose soldier father had met a soldier's common fate, and whose mother had quickly followed him with her broken heart. Then the babe of a few weeks became the charge of the kind women at the Fort, and the pet of the garrison in general.

But now far graver matters than the pranks of a mischievous child filled the minds of all her friends. The peaceful, monotonous life of the past few years was over, and the order had gone forth that the post should be evacuated. Preparations had already begun for the long and hazardous journey which confronted that isolated band of white people, and the mothers of a score of other restless young folk had been too busy and anxious to notice when this child slipped away to wander on the prairie.

For a brief time the weary baby slumbered against the red man's knee, while he considered the course he would best pursue; whether to return her at once to the family of the commandant, or to carry her southward to the Pottawatomie lodge whither he was bound. Then, his decision made, he lifted the child to his breast and resumed his homeward way.

But the bright head pillowed so near his eyes seemed to dazzle him, and its floating golden locks to catch and hold, in a peculiar fashion, the rays of the sunset. From this, with his race instinct of poetic imagery, which finds in nature a type for everything, he caught a quaint suggestion.

“She is like the sun himself. She is all warmth and brightness. She is his child, now that her pale-faced parents sleep the long sleep, and none other claims her. None? Yes, one. I, Black Partridge, the Man-Who-Lies-Not. In my village, Muck-otey-pokee, lives my sister, the daughter of a chief, her whose one son died of the fever on that same dark night when the arrow of a Sioux warrior killed a brave, his sire. In her closed tepee there will again be light. The Sun Maid shall make it. So shall she escape the fate of the doomed pale-faces, and so shall the daughter of my house again be glad.”

Thus, bearing her new name, and all unconsciously, the little Sun Maid was carried southward and still southward till the twilight fell and her new guardian reached the Pottawatomie village, on the Illinois prairie, where he dwelt.

Sultry as the night was, there was yet a great council fire blazing in the midst of the settlement, and around this were grouped many young braves of the tribe. Before the arrival of their chief there had been a babel of tongues in the council, but all discussion ceased as he joined the circle in the firelight.

The sudden silence was ominous, and the wise leader understood it; but it was not his purpose then to quarrel with

any man. Ignoring the scowling glances bestowed upon him, he gave the customary evening salutation and, advancing directly to the fire, plucked a blazing fagot from it. This he lifted high and purposely held so that its brightness illuminated the face and figure of the child upon his breast.

A guttural exclamation of astonishment ran from brave to brave. The action of their chief was significant, but its meaning not clearly comprehended. Had he brought the white baby as a hostage from the distant garrison, in pledge that the compact of its commandant would surely be kept? Or had some other tribe anticipated their own in obtaining the gifts to be distributed?

Shut-Hand, one of the older warriors, whose name suggested his character, rose swiftly to his feet, and demanded menacingly: "What means our father, thus bringing hither the white papoose?"

"That which the Black Partridge does – he does."

Rebuked, but unsatisfied, the miserly inquirer sat down. Then, with a gesture of protection, the chief raised the sleeping little one, that all within the circle might better see her wonderful, glowing beauty, intensified as it was by the flare of the flames as well as by contrast to the dusky faces round about.

"Who suffers harm to her shall himself suffer. She is the Sun Maid, the new daughter of our tribe."

Having said this, and still carrying the burning fagot, he walked to the closed tepee of his widowed sister and lifted its door flap. Stooping his tall head till its feathered crest swept

the floor he entered the spacious lodge. But he sniffed with contempt at the stifling atmosphere within, and laying down his torch raised the other half of the entrance curtain.

At the back of the wigwam, crouching in the attitude she had sustained almost constantly since her bereavement, sat the Woman-Who-Mourns. She did not lift her head, or give any sign of welcome till the chief had crossed to her side, and in a tone of command bade her:

“Arise and listen, my sister, for I bring you joy.”

“There is no joy,” answered the woman, obediently lifting her tall figure to a rigidly erect posture; by long habit compelled to outward respect, though her heart remained indifferent.

“Put back the hair from your eyes. Behold. For the dead son I give you the living daughter. In that land to which both have gone will her lost mother care for your lost child as you now care for her.”

Slowly, a pair of lean, brown hands came out from the swathing blanket and parted the long locks that served as a veil to hide a haggard, sorrowful face. After the deep gloom the sudden firelight dazzled the woman’s sight, and she blinked curiously toward the burden upon her brother’s breast. Then the small eyes began to see more clearly and to evince the amazement that filled her.

“Dreams have been with me. They were many and strange. Is this another?”

“This a glad reality. It is the Sun Maid. She has no parents.

You have no child. She is yours. Take her and learn to laugh once more as in the days that are gone.”

Then he held the little creature toward her; and still amazed, but still obedient, the heart-broken squaw extended her arms and received the unconscious foundling. As the warm, soft flesh touched her own a thrill passed through her desolate heart, and all the tenderness of motherhood returned.

“Who is she? Whence did she come? Where will she go?”

“She is the Sun Maid. From the Fort by the great lake, where are still white men enough to die – as die they must. For there is treachery afoot, and they who were first treacherous must bear their own punishment. Only she shall be saved; and where she will go is in the power of the Woman-Who-Mourns, and of her alone.”

Without another word, and leaving the still blazing fagot lying on the earthen floor, the chief went swiftly away.

But he had brought fresh air and light and comfort with him, as he had prophesied. The small Sun Maid was already brightening the dusky lodge as might an actual ray from her glorious namesake.

It was proof of her utter exhaustion that she still slept soundly while her new foster-mother prepared a bed of softest furs spread over fresh green branches and went hurriedly out to beg from a neighbor squaw a draught of evening’s milk. This action in itself was sufficiently surprising to set all tongues a-chatter.

The lodge of Muck-otey-pokee had many of the comforts

common to the white men's settlements. Its herd of cattle even surpassed that at Fort Dearborn itself, and was a matter of no small pride to the Pottawatomie villagers. From the old mission fathers they had learned, also, some useful arts, and wherever their prairie lands were tilled a rich result was always obtainable.

So it was to a home of plenty, as well as safety, that Black Partridge had brought the little Sun Maid; and when she at length awoke to see a dusky face, full of wonderment and love, bending above her, she put out her arms and gurgled in a glee which brought an answering smile to lips that had not smiled for long.

With an instinct of yearning tenderness, the Woman-Who-Mourns had lightened her sombre attire by all the devices possible, so that while the child slept she had transformed herself. She had neatly plaited her heavy hair, and wound about her head some strings of gay beads. She had fastened a scarlet tanager's wing to her breast, now covered by a bright-hued cotton gown once sent her from the Fort, and for which she had discarded her dingy blanket. But the greatest alteration of all was in the face itself, where a dawning happiness brought out afresh all the good points of a former comeliness.

"Oh! Pretty! I have so many, many nice mammas. Are you another?"

"Yes. All your mother now. My Sun Maid. My Girl-Child. My papoose!"

"That is nice. But I'm hungry. Give me my breakfast, Other Mother. Then I will go seek my bunny rabbit, that runned away,

and my yellow posies that went to sleep when I did. Did you put them to bed, too, Other Mother?"

"There are many which shall wake for you, papoose," answered the woman, promptly; for though she did not understand about the missing blossoms, it was fortunate that she did both understand and speak the language of her adopted daughter. Her dead husband had been the tribe's interpreter, and both from him and from the Fort's chaplain she had acquired considerable knowledge.

Until her widowhood and voluntary seclusion the Woman-Who-Mourns had been a person of note at Muck-otey-pokee; and now by her guardianship of this stranger white child she bade fair to again become such.

CHAPTER II.

TWO FOR BREAKFAST

The dead son of the Woman-Who-Mourns had never been disobedient, and small Kitty Briscoe had never obeyed anybody. She had laughed and frolicked her way through all rules and over all obstacles with a merry indifference that would have been insolent had it been less innocent and charming. During her short life the orphan had heard no voice but was full of tenderness, toward her at least; and every babyish misdemeanor had been pardoned almost before it was committed, by reason of her exceeding loveliness and overflowing affection. She had so loved all that she feared none, and not one of the kind mothers at the Fort had felt it her especial duty to discipline so sweet and fearless a nature. By and by, when she grew older, why, of course, the child must come under the yoke, like other children of that stern generation; but for the present, what was she but an ignorant baby, a motherless babe at that?

So that, on that first morning of their life together, it gave the latest foster-mother a very decided shock when she directed:

“Take your bowl of suppawn and milk, and eat it here by the fire, Girl-Child,” to have the other reply, with equal decision:

“Kitty will take it to the out-doors.”

“How? The papoose must eat her breakfast here, as I

command.”

“But Kitty must take it out the doors. What will the pigeons say? Come with me, Other Mother.”

Quite to her own astonishment, the proud daughter of a chief complied. Superstition had suggested to her that this white-robed little creature, with her trustful eyes and her wonderful hair, who seemed rather to float over the space to the threshold than to tread upon the earthen floor, was the re-embodied spirit of her own lost child come back to comfort her sorrow and to be a power for good in her tribe.

But if the Sun Maid were a spirit, she had many earthly qualities; and with a truly human carelessness she had no sooner stepped beyond the tent flap than she let fall her heavy bowl and spilled her breakfast. For there stood her last night’s rescuer, his arms full of flowers.

“Oh, the posies! the posies! Nice Feather-man did bring them.”

“Ugh! Black Partridge, the Truth-Teller. I have come to take my leave. Also to ask you, my sister, shall I carry away the Sun Maid to her own people? Or shall she abide with you?”

“Take her away, my brother? Do you not guess, then, who she is?”

“Why should I guess when I know. I saw her father die, and I stood beside her mother’s grave. The white papoose has neither tribe nor kinsman.”

“There for once the Truth-Teller speaks unwisely. The Sun

Maid, whom you found asleep on the path, is my own flesh and blood.”

In surprise Black Partridge stared at the woman, whose face glowed with delight. Then he reflected that it would be as well to leave her undisturbed in her strange notion. The helpless little one would be the better cared for, under such circumstances, and the time might speedily come when she would need all the protection possible for anybody to give.

“It is well – as you believe; yet then you are no longer the Woman-Who-Mourns, but again Wahneenah, the Happy.”

For a moment they silently regarded the child who had thrown herself face downward upon the great heap of orchids that Black Partridge had brought, and which he had risen very early to gather. They were of the same sort that the little one had grieved over on the night before, only much larger and fairer, and of far greater number. Talking to the blossoms and caressing them as if they were human playmates, the Sun Maid forgot that she was hungry, until Wahneenah had brought a second bowl of porridge and, gently lifting her charge to a place upon the mat, had bidden her eat.

“Oh, yes! My breakfast. I did forget it, didn’t I? Oh, the darling posies! Oh! the pretty Feather-man, that couldn’t tell a naughty story. I know ’bout him. We all know ’bout him to our Fort. My Captain says he is the bestest Feather-man in all the – everywhere.”

“Ugh! Ugh!”

The low grunt of assent seemed to come from every side the big wigwam. At all times there were many idle Indians at Muck-otey-pokee, but of late their number had been largely increased by bands of visiting Pottawatomies. These had come to tarry with their tribesmen in the village till the distribution of goods should be made from Fort Dearborn, as had been ordered by General Hull; or until the hour was ripe for their treacherous assault upon the little garrison.

The Man-Who-Kills was in the very centre of the group which had squatted in a semi-circle as near as it dared before the tepee of their chief's sister, and the low grunts came from this band of spectators.

"We will sit and watch. So will we learn what the Black Partridge means," and when Spotted Rabbit so advised his brothers, they had come in the darkness and arranged themselves as has been described.

The chief had found them there when, before dawn, he came with his offering of flowers, and Wahneenah had seen them when she raised the curtain of her tent and looked out to learn what manner of day was coming. But neither had noticed them any more than they did the birds rustling in the cottonwood beside the wigwam, or the wild creatures skurrying across the path for their early drink at the stream below.

Neither had the Sun Maid paid them any attention, for she had always been accustomed to meeting the savages both at the Fort and on her rides abroad with any of her garrison friends; so

she deliberately sipped her breakfast, pausing now and then to arrange the pouch-like petals of some favored blossoms and to converse with them in her fantastic fashion, quite believing that they heard and understood.

“Did the nice Feather-man bring you all softly, little posies? Aren’t you glad you’ve come to live with Kitty? Other Mother will give you all some breakfast, too, of coldest water in the brook. Then you will sit up straight and hold your heads high. That’s the way the children do when my Captain takes the book with the green cover and makes them spell things out of it. Oscar doesn’t like the green book. It makes him wriggle his nose – so; but Margaret is as fond of it as I am of you. Oh, dear! Some day, all my mothers say, I, too, will have to sit and look on the printing and spell words. I can, though, even now. Listen, posies. D-o-g – that’s – that’s – I guess it’s ‘cat.’ Isn’t it, posies? But you don’t have to spell things, do you? I needn’t either. Not to-day, and maybe not to-morrow day. Because, you see, I runned away. Oh, how I did run! So fast, so far, before I found your little sisters, posies, dear. Then I guess I went to sleep, without ever saying my ‘Now I lay me,’ and the black Feather-man came, and – that’s all.”

Wahneenah had gone back to her household duties, for she had many things on hand that day. Not the least, to make her neglected tepee a brighter, fitter home for this stray sunbeam which the Great Spirit had sent to her out of the sky, and into which He had breathed the soul of her lost one. Indistinctly, she heard the murmuring of the babyish voice at the threshold and

occasionally caught some of the words it uttered. These served but to establish her in her belief that the child had more than mortal senses; else how should she fancy that the blossoms would hear and understand her prattle?

"Listen. She talks to the weeds as the white men talk to us. She is a witch," said the Man-Who-Kills to his neighbor in the circle, the White Pelican.

"She is only a child of the pale-faces. The Black Partridge has set her among us to move our hearts to pity."

"The White Pelican was ever a coward," snorted the Man-Who-Kills.

But the younger warrior merely turned his head and smiled contemptuously. Then he critically scrutinized the ill-proportioned figure of the ugly-tempered brave. The fellow's crooked back, abnormally long arms and short legs were an anomaly in that race of stalwart Indians, and the soul of the savage corresponded to his outward development. For his very name had been given him in derision; because, though he always threatened and always sneaked after his prey, he had never been known to slay an enemy in open combat.

"That is as the tomahawks prove. The scalps hang close on the pole of my wigwam," finally remarked the Pelican.

"Ugh! But there was never such a scalp as that of the papoose yonder. It shall hang above all others in *my* tepee. I have said it."

"Having said it, you may unsay it. That is no human fleece upon that small head. She is sacred."

“How? Is the White Pelican a man of dreams?”

The elder brave also used a tone of contempt, though not with marked success. His thought reverted to the night before, when the chief had stood beside the council fire holding the sleeping child in his arms. Her wonderful yellow hair, fine as spun cobwebs and almost as light, had blown over the breast of Black Partridge like a cloud, and it had glistened and shimmered in the firelight as if possessed of restless life. The little figure was clothed in white, as the Fort mothers had fancied best suited their charge's fairness, even though the fabric must of necessity be coarse; and this garment likewise caught the glow of the dancing flames till it seemed luminous in itself.

As an idle rumor spreads and grows among better cultured people so superstition held in power these watchful Indians. Said one:

“The father of his tribe has met a spirit on the prairie and brought it to our village. Is the deed for good or evil?”

This was what the men in the semi-circle had come to find out. So they relapsed again into silence, but kept a fixed gaze upon the indifferent child before them. She continued her playing and feeding as unconsciously as if she, the flowers, and the sunshine, were quite alone. Some even fancied that they could hear the orchids whispering in return; and it was due to that morning's incident that, thereafter, few among the Pottawatomies would lightly bruise or break a blossom which they then learned to believe was gifted with a sensate life.

But presently a sibilant “Hst!” ran the length of the squatting line, and warriors who feared not death for themselves felt their muscles stiffen under a tension of dread as they saw the slow, sinuous approach of a poisonous reptile to the child on the mat; and the thought of each watcher was the same:

“Now, indeed, the test – spirit or mortal?”

The snake glided onward, its graceful body showing through the grass, its head slightly upraised, and its intention unmistakable.

An Indian can be the most silent thing on earth, if he so wills, and at once it was as if all that row of red men had become stone. Even Wahneenah, in the wigwam behind, was startled by the stillness, and cautiously tiptoed forward to learn its cause. Then her heart, like theirs, hushed its beating and she rigidly awaited the outcome.

Only the child herself was undisturbed. She did not cease the slow lifting of the clay spoon to her lips, and between sips she still prattled and gurgled in sheer content.

“Kitty is most fullled up, ’cause she did have so big a breakfast, she did. Nice Other Mother did give it me. I wish my bunny rabbit had not runned away. Then he could have some. Never mind. Here comes a beau’ful cunning snake. I did see one two times to my Fort. Bad Jacky soldier did kill him dead, and that made Kitty cry. Come, pretty thing, do you want Kitty’s breakfast? Then you may have it every bit.”

So she tossed her hair from her eyes and sat with uplifted

spoon while the moccasin glided up to the mat and over it, till its mouth could reach the shallow bowl in the child's lap.

"Oh! the funny way it eats. Poor thing! It hasn't any spoon. It might have Kitty's, only –"

The bright eyes regarded the rudely shaped implement and the mouth it was to feed; then the little one's ready laughter bubbled forth.

"Funny Kitty! How could it hold a spoon was bigger 'n itself – when its hands have never grown? Other pretty one, that Jacky killed, that didn't have its hands, either. Hush, snaky. Did I make you afraid, I laugh so much? Now I will keep very, very still till you are through. Then you may go back home to your childrens, and tell them all about your nice breakfast. Where do you live? Is it in a Fort, as Kitty does? Oh, I forgot! I did promise to keep still. Quite, quite still, till you go way away."

So she did; while not only the red-skins, but all nature seemed to pause and watch the strange spectacle; for the light breeze that had come with the sunrise now died away, and every leaf stood still in the great heat which descended upon the earth.

It seemed to Wahneenah, watching in a very motherly fear, and to the squatting braves, in their increasing awe, as if hours passed while the child and the reptile remained messmates. But at length the dangerous serpent was satisfied and, turning slowly about, retreated whence it came.

Then Mistress Kitty lifted her voice and called merrily:

"Come, Other Mother! Come and see. I did have a lovely,

lovely creepy one to eat with me. He did eat so funny Kitty had to laugh. Then I remembered that my other peoples to my Fort tell all the children to be good and I was good, wasn't I? Say, Other Mother, my posies want some water."

"They shall have it, White Papoose, my Girl-Child-Who-Is-Safe. She whom the Great Spirit has restored nothing can harm."

Then she led the Sun Maid away, after she had gathered up every flower, not daring that anything beloved of her strange foster-child should be neglected.

The watching Indians also rose and returned into the village from that point on its outskirts where Wahneenah's wigwam stood. They spoke little, for in each mind the conviction had become firm that the Sun Maid was, in deed and truth, a being from the Great Beyond, safe from every mortal hurt.

Yet still, the Man-Who-Kills fingered the edge of his tomahawk with regret and remarked in a manner intended to show his great prowess:

"Even a mighty warrior cannot fight against the powers of the sky."

After a little, one, less credulous than his fellows, replied boastfully:

"Before the sun shall rise and set a second time the white scalp will hang at my belt."

Nobody answered the boast till at length a voice seemed to come out of the ground before them, and at its first sound every brave stood still to listen for that which was to follow. All

recognized the voice, even the strangers from the most distant settlements. It was heard in prophecy only, and it belonged to old Katasha, the One-Who-Knows.

“No. It is not so. Long after every one of this great Pottawatomie nation shall have passed out of sight, toward the place where the day dies, the hair of the Sun Maid’s head shall be still shining. Its gold will have turned to snow, but generation after generation shall bow down to it in honor. Go. The road is plain. There is blood upon it, and some of this is yours. But the scalp of the Sun Maid is in the keeping of the Great Spirit. It is sacred. It cannot be harmed. Go.”

Then the venerable woman, who had risen from her bed upon the ground to utter her message, returned to her repose, and the warriors filed past her with bowed heads and great dejection of spirit. In this mood they joined another company about the dead council fire, and in angry resentment listened to the speech of the Black Partridge as he pleaded with them for the last time.

“For it is the last. This day I make one more journey to the Fort, and there I will remain until you join me. We have promised safe escort for our white neighbors through the lands of the hostile tribes who dare not wage war against us. The white man trusts us. He counts us his friends. Shall we keep our promise and our honor, or shall we become traitors to the truth?”

It was Shut-Hand who answered for his tribesmen:

“It is the pale-face who is a traitor to honesty. The goods which our Great Father gave him in trust for his red children have been

destroyed. The white soldiers have forgotten their duty and have taught us to forget ours. When the sun rises on the morrow we will join the Black Partridge at the Fort by the great water, and we will do what seems right in our eyes. The Black Partridge is our father and our chief. He must not then place the good of our enemies before the good of his own people. We have spoken.”

So the great Indian, who was more noble than his clansmen, went out from among them upon a hopeless errand. This time he did not make his journey on foot, but upon the back of his fleetest horse; and the medal he meant to relinquish was wrapped in a bit of deerskin and fastened to his belt.

“Well, at least the Sun Maid will be safe. When the braves, with the squaws and children, join their brothers at the camp, Wahneenah will remain at Muck-otey-pokee; as should every other woman of the Pottawatomie nation, were I as powerful in reality as I appear. It is the squaws who urge the men to the darkest deeds. Ugh! What will be must be. Tchtk! Go on!”

But the bay horse was already travelling at its best, slow as its pace seemed to the Black Partridge.

CHAPTER III. IN INDIAN ATTIRE

Not many hours after Black Partridge turned his back upon Muck-otey-pokee, all its fighting men, with their squaws and children, also left it, as their chief had foreseen they would. They followed the direction he had taken, though they did not proceed to the garrison itself.

The camp to which they repaired was a little distance from the Fort, and had been pitched beside the river, where was then a fringe of cottonwoods and locusts affording a grateful shade. Here the squaws cooked and gossiped, while their sons played the ancient games of throwing the spear through the ring, casting the hatchet, and shooting birds on the wing.

The braves tested their weapons and boasted of many valorous deeds; or were else entirely silent, brooding upon mischief yet to come. Over all was the thrill of excitement and anticipation, which the great heat of the season seemed to deepen rather than dispel.

At the Fort, Black Partridge pleaded finally and in vain.

“We have been ordered to evacuate, and we will obey. All things are in readiness. The stores are already in the wagons, and other wagons wait for the sick, the women, and the children. Your people have promised us a safe conveyance through their

country, and as far as we shall need it. They will be well paid. Part they have received, and the rest of their reward will be promptly delivered at the end of the journey. There is no more to be said"; and with this conclusion the weary commandant sat down in his denuded home to take a bit of food and a few moments' rest. He nodded hospitably toward an empty chair on the farther side of the deal table, by way of invitation that the Indian should join him, but this the honest chief declined to do.

"No, good father, that can no longer be. I have come to return you this medal. I have worn it long and in peace. It was the gift of your people, a pledge between us of friendship. My friendship remains unbroken, but there also remains a tie which is stronger. I am the chief of my tribe. My young men are brave, and they have been deceived. They will punish the deceivers, and I have no power to prevent this. Nor do I blame them, though I would hold them to their compact if I could."

"Cannot the Truth-Teller compel his sons to his own habit?"

"Not when his white father sets them a bad example."

"Black Partridge, your words are bold."

"Your deed was bolder, father. It was the deed of a fool."

"Take care!"

As if he had not heard, the chief spoke steadily on:

"My tribesman, Winnemeg – the white man's friend – brought the order that all goods stored here should be justly distributed among my people, to every man his portion. Was it thus done?"

"Come, Black Partridge, you are not wanting in good sense

nor in honesty. You must admit that such a course would have been hazardous in the extreme. The idea of putting liquor and ammunition into the hands of the red men was one of utter madness. It was worse than foolhardy. The broken firearms are safe in the well, and the more dangerous whiskey has mingled itself harmlessly with the waters of the river and the lake.”

“There is something more foolish than folly,” said the Indian, gravely, “and that is a lie! The powder drowned in the well will kill more pale-faces than it could have done in the hands of your red children. The river-diluted whiskey will inflame more hot heads than if it had been dispensed honorably and in its full strength. But now the end. Though I will do what I can do, even the Truth-Teller cannot fight treachery. Prepare for the worst. And so – farewell!”

Then the tall chief bowed his head in sadness and went away; but the terrible truth of what he then uttered all the world now knows.

Meanwhile, in the almost empty village among the cottonwoods, the Sun Maid played and laughed and chattered as she had always done in her old home at the Fort. And all day, those wiser women like Wahneenah, who had refrained from following their tribe to the distant camp, watched and attended the child in admiring awe.

By nightfall the Sun Maid had been loaded with gifts. Lahnwenah, wife of the avaricious Shut-Hand but herself surnamed the Giver, came earliest of all, with a necklace of

bears' claws and curious shells which had come from the Pacific slope, none knew how many years before.

The Sun Maid received the gift with delight and her usual exclamation of "Nice!" but when the donor attempted to clasp the trinket about the fair little throat she was met by a decided. "No, no, no!"

"Girl-Child! All gifts are worthy, but this woman has given her best," corrected Wahneenah, with some sternness. This baby might be a spirit, in truth, but it was the spirit of her own child and she must still hold it under authority.

At sound of the altered tones, Kitty looked up swiftly and her lip quivered. Then she replied with equal decision:

"Other Mother must not speak to me like that. Kitty is not bad. It is a pretty, pretty thing, but it is dirty. It must have its faces washed. Then I will wear it and love it all my life."

An Indian girl would have been punished for such frankness, but Lahnwenah showed no resentment. Beneath her outward manner lay a deeper meaning. To her the necklace was a talisman. From generations long dead it had come down to her, and always as a life-saver. Whoever wore it could never be harmed "by hatchet or arrow, nor by fire or flood." Yet that very morning had her own brother, the Man-Who-Kills, assured her that the child's life was a doomed one, and she had more faith in his threats than had his neighbors in their village. She knew that the one thing he respected was this heirloom, and that he would not dare injure anybody who wore it. The Sun Maid was,

undoubtedly, under the guardianship of higher powers than a poor squaw's, yet it could harm nobody to take all precautions.

So, with a grim smile, the donor carried her gift to the near-by brook and held it for a few moments beneath the sluggish water; then she returned to the wigwam and again proffered it to the foundling.

"Yes. That is nice now. Kitty will wear it all the time. Won't the childrens be pleased when they see it! Maybe they may wear it, too, if the dear blanket lady says they may. Can they, Other Mother?"

The squaws exchanged significant glances. They knew it was not probable that the Fort orphan and her old playmates would ever meet again; but Wahneenah answered evasively:

"They can wear it when they come to the Sun Maid's home."

Again Lahnovenah would have put the necklace in its place, and a second time she was prevented; for at that moment the One-Who-Knows came slowly down the path between the trees, and held up her crutch warningly, as she called, in her feeble voice:

"Wait! This is a ceremony. Let all the women come."

Lahnovenah ran to summon them, and they gathered about the tepee in expectant silence. When old Katasha exerted herself it behooved all the daughters of her tribe to be in attendance.

Wahneenah hastened to spread her best mat for the visitor's use, and helped to seat her upon it.

"Ugh! Old feet grow clumsy and old arms weak. Take this bundle, sister of my chief, and do with its contents as seems right

to thee.”

The other squaws squatted around, eagerly curious, while Wahneenah untied the threads of sinew which fastened the blanket-wrapped parcel. This outer covering itself was different from anything she had ever handled, being exquisitely soft in texture and gaudily bright in hue. It was also of a small size, such as might fit a child's shoulders.

Within the blanket was a little tunic of creamy buckskin, gayly bedecked with a fringe of beads around the neck and arms' eyes, while the short skirt ended in a border of fur, also bead-trimmed in an odd pattern. With it were tiny leggings that matched the tunic; and a dainty pair of moccasins completed the costume.

As garment after garment was spread out before the astonished gaze of the squaws their exclamations of surprise came loud and fast. A group of white mothers over a fashionable outfit for a modern child could not have been more enthusiastic or excited.

Yet through all this she who had brought it remained stolid and silent; till at length her manner impressed the others, and they remembered that she had said: "It is a ceremony." Then Wahneenah motioned the squaws to be silent, and demanded quietly:

"What is this that the One-Who-Knows sees good to be done at the lodge of her chief's daughter?"

"Take the papoose. Set her before me. Watch and see."

Wide-eyed and smiling, and quite unafraid, the little orphan

from the Fort stood, as she was directed, close beside the aged squaw while she was silently disrobed. Her baby eyes had caught the glitter of beads on the new garments, and there was never a girl-child born who did not like new clothes. When she was quite undressed, and her white body shone like a marble statue in contrast to their dusky forms, the hushed voices of the Indians burst forth again in a torrent of admiration.

But Kitty was too young to understand this, and deemed it some new game in which she played the principal part.

The prophetess held up her hand and the women ceased chattering. Then she pointed toward the brook and, herself comprehending what was meant by this gesture, the Sun Maid ran lightly to the bank and leaped in. With a scream of fear, that was very human and mother-like, Wahneenah followed swiftly. For the instant she had forgotten that the merry little one was a "spirit," and could not drown.

Fortunately, the stream was not deep, and was delightfully sun-warmed. Besides, the Fort children had all been as much at home in the water as on the land and a daily plunge had been a matter of course. So Kitty laughed and clapped her hands as she ducked again and again into the deepest of the shallow pools, splashing and gurgling in glee, till another signal from the aged crone bade the foster-mother bring the bather back.

"No, no! Kitty likes the water. Kitty did make the Feather-lady wash the necklace. Now the old Feather-lady makes Kitty wash Kitty. No, I do not want to go. I want to stay right here in

the brook.”

“But – the beautiful tunic! What about that, papoose?”

It was not at all a “spiritual” argument, yet it sufficed; and with a spring the little one was out of the water and clinging to Wahneenah’s breast.

As she was set down, dewy and glistening, she pranced and tossed her dripping hair about till the drops it scattered touched some faces that had not known the feel of water in many a day. With an “Ugh!” of disgust the squaws withdrew to a safe distance from this unsolicited bath, though remaining keenly watchful of what the One-Who-Knows might do. This was, first, the anointing of the child’s body with some unctuous substance that the old woman had brought, wrapped in a pawpaw leaf.

Since towels were a luxury unknown in the wilderness, as soon as this anointing was finished Katasha clothed the child in her new costume and laid her hand upon the sunny head, while she muttered a charm to “preserve it from all evil and all enemies.” Then, apparently exhausted by her own efforts, the prophetess directed Lahnwenah, the Giver, to put on the antique White Necklace.

This was so long that it went twice about the Sun Maid’s throat and would have been promptly pulled off by her own fingers, as an adornment quite too warm for the season had not the fastening been one she could not undo and the string, which held the ornaments, of strong sinew.

Then Wahneenah took the prophetess into her wigwam, and

prepared a meal of dried venison meat, hulled corn, and the juice of wild berries pressed out and sweetened. Katasha's visits were of rare occurrence, and it had been long since the Woman-Who-Mourns had played the hostess, save in this late matter of her foster-child; so for a time she forgot all save the necessity of doing honor to her guest. When she did remember the Sun Maid and went in anxious haste to the doorway, the child had vanished.

"She is gone! The Great Spirit has recalled her!" cried Wahneenah, in distress.

"Fear not, the White Papoose is safe. She will live long and her hands will be full. As they fill they will overflow. She is a river that enriches yet suffers no loss. Patience. Patience. You have taken joy into your home, but you have also taken sorrow. Accept both, and wait what will come."

Even Wahneenah, to whom many deferred, felt that she herself must pay deference to this venerable prophetess, and so remained quiet in her wigwam as long as her guest chose to rest there. This was until the sun was near its setting and till the foster-mother's heart had grown sick with anxiety. So, no sooner had Katasha's figure disappeared among the trees than Wahneenah set out at frantic speed to find the little one.

"Have you seen the Sun Maid?" she demanded of the few she met; and at last one set her on the right track.

"Yes. She chased a gray squirrel that had been wounded. It was still so swift it could just outstrip her, and she followed beyond the village, away along the bank. Osceolo passed near, and saw

the squirrel seek refuge in the lodge of Spotted Adder. The Sun Maid also entered.”

“The lodge of Spotted Adder!” repeated Wahneenah, slowly.
“Then only the Great Spirit can preserve her!”

CHAPTER IV.

THE WHITE BOW

Wahneenah had lived so entirely within the seclusion of her own lodge that she had become almost a stranger in the village. It was long since she had travelled so far as the isolated hut into which the youth, Osceolo, had seen the Sun Maid disappear, and as she approached it her womanly heart smote her with pain and self-reproach, while she reflected thus:

“Has it come to this? Spotted Adder, the Mighty, whose wigwam was once the richest of all my father’s tribe. I remember that its curtains of fine skins were painted by the Man-Of-Visions himself, and told the history of the Pottawatomies since the beginning of the world. Many a heap of furs and peltries went in payment for their adornment, but – where are they now! While I have sat in darkness with my sorrow new things have become old. Yet he is accursed. Else the trouble would not have befallen him. I have heard the women talking, through my dreams. He has lain down and cannot again arise. And the White Papoose is with him! Will she be accursed, too? Fool! Why do I fear? Is she not a child of the sky, and forever safe, as Katasha said? But the touch of her arms was warm, like the clasp of the son I bore, and – ”

The mother’s reverie ended in a very human distress. There was a rumor among her people that whoever came near the

Spotted Adder would instantly be infected by whatever was the dread disease from which he suffered. That the Sun Maid's wonderful loveliness should receive a blemish seemed a thing intolerable and, in another instant, regardless of her own danger, Wahneenah had crept beneath the broken flap of bark, into a scene of squalor indescribable. Even this squaw, who knew quite well how wretched the tepees of her poorer tribesmen often were, was appalled now; and though the torn skins and strips of bark which covered the hut admitted plenty of light and air, she gasped for breath before she could speak.

"My Girl-Child! My Sun Maid! Come away. Wrong, wrong to have entered here, to have made me so anxious. Come."

"No, no, Other Mother! Kitty cannot come. Kitty must stay. See the poor gray squirrel? It has broked its leg. It went so – hoppety-pat, hoppety-pat, as fast as fast. I thought it was playing and just running away. So Kitty runned too. Kitty always runs away when Kitty can."

"Ugh! I believe you. Come."

"No, Kitty must stay. Poor sick man needs Kitty. I did give him a nice drink. Berries, too. Kitty putted them in his mouth all the time. Poor man!"

Wahneenah's anger rose. Was she, a chief's daughter, to be thus flouted by a baby, a pale-face at that? Surely, there was nothing whatever spiritual now about this self-willed, spoiled creature, whom an unkind fate had imposed upon her. She stooped to lift the little one and compel obedience, but was met

by a smile so fearless and happy that her arms fell to her sides.

“That’s a good Other Mother. Poor sick man has wanted to turn him over, and he couldn’t. Kitty tried and tried, and Kitty couldn’t. Now my Other Mother’s come. She can. She is so beau’ful strong and kind!”

There was a grunt, which might have been a groan, from the corner of the hut where the Spotted Adder lay; and a convulsive movement of the contorted limbs as he vainly strove to change his uncomfortable position. Wahneenah watched him, with the contempt which the women of her race feel for any masculine weakness, and did not offer to assist. His poverty she pitied, and would have relieved, though his physical infirmity was repugnant to her. She would not touch him.

But the Sun Maid was on her feet at once, tenderly laying upon the ground the wounded squirrel which she had held upon her lap. The wild thing had, apparently, lost all its timidity and now fully trusted the child who had caressed its fur and murmured soft, pitying sounds, in that low voice of hers, which the Fort people had sometimes felt was an unknown language. Certainly, she had had a strange power, always, over any animal that came near her and this case was no exception. Her white friends would not have been surprised by the incident, but Wahneenah was, and it brought back her belief that this was a child of supernatural gifts. She even began to feel ashamed of her treatment of Spotted Adder, though she waited to see what his small nurse would do.

“Poor sick Feather-man! Is you hurted now? Does your face

ache you to make it screw itself all this way?" and she made a comical grimace, imitative of the sufferer's expression.

"Ugh! Ugh!"

"Yes; Kitty hears. Other Mother, that is all the word he says. All the time it is just 'Ugh! Ugh!' I wish he would talk Kitty's talk. Make him do it, Other Mother. Please!"

"That I cannot do. He knows it not. But he has a speech I understand. What need you, Spotted Adder?" she concluded, in his own dialect.

"Ugh! It is the voice of Wahneenah, the Happy. What does she here, in the lodge of the outcast? It is many a moon since the footfall of a woman sounded on my floor. Why does one come now?"

"In pursuit of this child, the adopted daughter of our tribe, whom the Black Partridge himself has given me. It was ill of you, accursed, to wile her hither with your unholy spells."

"I wiled her not. It was the gray squirrel. Broken in his life, as am I, the once Mighty. Many wounded creatures seek shelter here. It is a sanctuary. They alone fear not the miserable one."

"Does not the tribe see to it that you have food and drink set within your wigwam, once during each journey of the sun? I have so heard."

"Ugh! Food and drink. Sometimes I cannot reach them. They are not even pushed beyond the door flap, or what is left of it. They are all afraid. All. Yet they are fools. That which has befallen me may happen to each when his time comes. It is the

sickness of the bones. There is no contagion in it. But it twists the straight limbs into torturing curves and it rends the body with agony. One would be glad to die, but death – like friendship – holds itself aloof. Ugh! The drink! The drink!”

The Sun Maid could understand the language of the eyes, if not the lips, and she followed their wistful gaze toward the clay bowl from which she had before given him the water. But it was empty now, and seizing it with all her strength, for it was heavy and awkward in shape, she sped out of the wigwam toward a spring she had discovered.

“Four, ten, lots of times Kitty has broughted the nice water, and every time the poor, sick Feather-man has dranked it up. He must be terrible thirsty, and so is Kitty. I guess I will drink first, this time.”

Filling the utensil, she struggled to lift it to her own lips, but it was rudely pushed away.

“Papoose! Would you drink to your own death? The thing is accursed, I tell you!”

“Why, Other Mother! It is just as clean as clean. Kitty did wash and wash it long ago. It was all dirty, worse than my new necklace, but it is clean now. Do you want a drink, Other Mother? Is you thirsty, too, like the sick one and Kitty?”

“If I were, it would be long before I touched my lips to that cup.”

“Would it? Now I will fill it again. Then you must take it, Other Mother, and quick, quick, back to that raggedy house.

Kitty is tired, she has come here and there so many, many times.”

“Is it here you have spent this long day, papoose?”

“I did come here when the gray squirrel runned away. I did stay ever since.”

Wahneenah’s heart sank. But to her credit it was that, for the time being, she forgot the stories she had heard, and remembered only that there was suffering which she must relieve. It might be that already the soul of Spotted Adder was winged for its long flight, and could carry for her to that wide Unknown, where her own dead tarried, some message from her, the bereft. As this thought flashed through her brain she seized the bowl and hastened with it to the lodge.

This time, also, she forgot everything but the possibility that had come to her, and kneeling beside the old Indian she held the dish to his mouth.

“It is the fever, the fever! A little while and the awful chill will come again. The racking pain, the thirst! Ugh! Wahneenah, the Happy, is braver than her sisters. Her courage shall prove her blessing. The lips of the dying speak truth.”

“And the ears of the dying? Can they still hear and remember? Will the Spotted Adder take my message to the men I have lost? Sire and son, there was no Pottawatomie ever born so brave as they. Tell them I have been faithful. I have been the Woman-Who-Mourns. I have kept to my darkened wigwam and remembered only them, till she came, this child you have seen. She is a gift from the sky. She has come to comfort and sustain.

She was born a pale-face, but she has a red man's heart. She is all brave and true and dauntless. None fear her, and she fears none. I believe that they have sent her to me. I believe that in her they both live. Ask them if this is so."

"There is no need to ask, Wahneenah, the Happy. Happy, indeed, who has been blessed with a gift so gracious. She is the Merciful. The Unafraid. She will pass in safety through many perils. All day she has sat beside me whom all others shun. She has moistened my lips, she has kept the gnats from stinging, she has sung in her unknown tongue of that land whither I go, and soon, – the land of the sky from whence she came. The light of the morning is on her hair and the dusk of evening in her eyes. As she has ministered to me, the deserted, the solitary, so she will minister unto multitudes. I can see them crowding, crowding; the generations yet unborn. The vision of the dying is true."

On the floor beside them the Sun Maid sat, caressing the wounded squirrel. Through the torn curtains the waning sunlight slanted and lighted the bleak interior. It seemed to rest most brilliantly upon the child, and in the eyes of the Spotted Adder she was like a lamp set to illumine his path through the dark valley, an unexpected messenger from the Great Father, showing him beforehand a glimpse of the beauty and tenderness of the Land Beyond. Yet even if a spirit, she wore a human shape, and she would have human needs. She would be often in danger against which she must be guarded.

"Wahneenah, fetch me the bow and quiver."

“Which?” she asked, in surprise, though in reality she knew.

“Is there one that should be named with mine? The White Bow from the land of eternal snow; the arrows winged with feathers from the white eagle’s wing, – light as thistle down, strong as love, invincible as death.”

The Spotted Adder had been the orator of his tribe. Men had listened to his words in admiration, wondering whence he obtained the eloquence which moved them; and at that moment it was as if all the power of his earlier manhood had returned.

The White Bow was well known among all the Pottawatomic tribes. Even the Sacs and Foxes had heard of it and feared it. It was older than the Giver’s historic necklace, and tradition said that it had been hurled to earth on the breath of a mighty snowstorm. It had fallen before the wigwam of the Spotted Adder’s ancestor and had been handed down from father to son, as fair and sound as on the day of its first bestowal. None knew the wood of which it was fashioned, which many could bend and twist but none could break. The string which first bound it had never worn nor wasted, and not a feather had ever fallen from the arrows in the quiver, nor had their number ever diminished, no matter how often sped. It was the one possession left to the neglected warrior and had been protected by its own reputed origin. There were daring thieves in many a tribe, but never a thief so bold he would risk his soul in the seizure of the White Bow.

Wahneenah felt no choice but to comply with the Indian’s

command. She took the bow and its accoutrements from the sheltered niche in the tepee where it hung; the only spot, it seemed, that had not been subjected to the destruction of the elements. She had never held it in her hand before, and she wondered at its lightness as she carried it to its owner, and placed it in the gnarled fingers which would never string it again.

“Good! Call the child to stand here.”

With awe, Wahneenah motioned the little one within the red man’s reach. The last vestige of fear or repulsion had vanished from her own mind before the majesty of this hour.

“Does the poor, sick Feather-man want another drink? Shall Kitty fetch it now?”

“Hush, papoose!”

He would have opened the small white hand and clasped it about the bow, which reached full three times the height of the child, and along whose beautiful length she gazed in wonder, but he could not.

“Take it, Girl-Child. It is a gift. It is more magical than the necklace. Take it, hold it tight – that will please him – and say what is in your heart.”

“Oh, the beau’ful bow! Is it for Kitty? To keep, forever and ever? Why, it is bigger than that one of the Sauganash, and far prettier than Winnemeg’s. It cannot be for Kitty, just little Kitty girl.”

“Yes; it is.”

Then the Sun Maid laid it reverently down, and catching hold

her scant tunic made the old-fashioned curtsy which her Fort friends had taught her.

“Thank you, poor Feather-man. I will take care of it very nice. I won’t break it, not once.”

“Ugh!” grunted the Indian, with satisfaction. Then he closed his eyes as if he would sleep.

“Good-night, Spotted Adder, the Mighty. I thank you, also, on the child’s behalf. It is the second gift this day of talismans that must protect. Surely, she will be clothed in safety. Hearken to me. I must go home. The Sun Maid must be fed and put to sleep. But I will return. I am no longer afraid. You were my father’s friend. All that a woman’s hand can now do for your comfort shall be done.”

But the Spotted Adder made no sign, and whether he did or did not hear her, Wahneenah never knew. She walked swiftly homeward, bearing the White Papoose upon one strong arm and the White Bow upon the other. Yet she noticed, with a smile, that the child still clung tenderly to her own burden of the injured squirrel, and that she was infinitely more careful of it and its suffering than of the wonderful gift she had received.

Long before her own tepee was reached the Sun Maid was fast asleep; and as the small head rested more and more heavily upon Wahneenah’s shoulder, and the soft breath of childhood fanned her throat, the woman again doubted the spiritual origin of the foundling, and felt fresh gratitude for its simple humanity.

“Well, whoever and whatever she is, she is already thrice

protected. By her Indian dress, by her White Bow, and by Lahnowenah's White Necklace. She is quite safe from every enemy now."

"Not quite," said a voice at Wahneenah's elbow.

But it was only Osceolo, the Simple. Nobody minded him or his words.

CHAPTER V.

HORSES: WHITE AND BLACK

On the morning of the 15th of August, 1812, the sun rose in unclouded splendor, and transformed the great Lake Michigan into a sheet of gold.

"It is a good omen," said one of the women at Fort Dearborn, as she looked out over the shining water.

But only the merry children responded to her attempted cheerfulness.

"We shall have a grand ride. I wish nobody need make the journey on foot; and I'm glad, for once, I'm just a boy, and not a grown-up man."

"Even a boy may have to do a man's work, this day, Gaspar Keith. I wish that you were strong enough to hold a gun; but you have been taught how to use an arrow. Is your quiver well supplied?"

That his captain should speak to him, a child, so seriously, impressed the lad profoundly. His ruddy cheek paled, and a fit of trembling seized him. A sombre memory rose to frighten him, and he caught his breath as he asked:

"Do you think there will be any trouble, Captain Heald? I thought I heard the soldiers saying that the Pottawatomies would take care of us."

“Who trusts to an Indian’s care leans on a broken reed. You know that from your own experience. Surely, you must remember your earlier childhood, even though you have been forbidden to talk of it here.”

“Oh! I do, I do! Not often in the daytime, but in the long, long nights. The other children sleep. They have never seen what I did, or heard the dreadful yells that come in my dreams and wake me up. Then I seem to see the flames, the blood, the dead white faces. Oh, sir, don’t tell me that must come again: don’t, don’t! I cannot bear it. I would rather die right now and here – safe in our Fort.”

Instantly the soldier regretted his own words. But the lad was one of the larger children at the garrison and should be incited, he thought, to take some share in the matter of defence, should defence be necessary. He had not known that under Gaspar’s quiet, almost sullen demeanor, had lain such hidden experiences. Else he would have talked them over with the boy, and have tried to make him forget instead of remember his early wrongs.

For Gaspar Keith was the son of an Indian trader, and had been born in an isolated cabin far to the northwest of his present home. The little cabin had been overflowing with young life and gayety, even in that wilderness. His mother was a Frenchwoman of the happiest possible temperament and, because no other society was available, had made comrades of her children. “What we did in Montreal” was the type of what she attempted to do under her more restricted conditions. So, for a long season

of peace, the Keiths sang and made merry over every trifling incident. Did the father bring home an extra load of game, at once there was a feast prepared and all the friendly Indians, the only neighbors, were invited to come and partake.

On one such occasion, when a red-skinned guest had brought with him a bottle of the forbidden "fire-water," a quarrel ensued. The trader was of sterner sort than his light-hearted wife, and of violent temper. In his own house his word was law, and he remonstrated with the Indian for his action. To little Gaspar, in his memories, it seemed but a moment's transition from a laughing group about a well-spread table to a scene of horror. He saw – but he could never afterward speak in any definite way of what he saw. Only he knew that almost before he had pushed back from his place he had been caught up on the shoulder of the chief Winnemeg, also a guest; and in another moment was riding behind that warrior at breakneck speed toward the little garrison, in pursuit of shelter for himself and aid for his defenceless family.

The shelter was speedily found, but the aid came too late; and for a time the women of the Fort had a difficult task in comforting the fright-crazed boy. However, they were used to such incidents. Their courage and generosity were unlimited, and they persevered in their care till he recovered and repaid them by his faithful devotion and service.

The manner of his arrival among them was never discussed in his presence, and as he gradually came to act like other, happier children, they hoped he had outgrown his troubles. He had now

been at the Fort for two years, during all which time he had gone but short distances from it. Yet even in his restricted outings he had picked up much knowledge of useful things from the settlers near, and of things apparently not so useful from his red-faced friends. So it happened that there was not, probably, even any Indian boy who could string a bow or aim an arrow better than Gaspar.

The Sauganash himself had presented the little fellow with a bow of finest workmanship, and had taught him the rare trick of shooting at fixed paces. It had been the delight of the garrison to watch him, in their hours of recreation, accomplish this feat. Sighting some bird flying high overhead, the lad would take swift aim and discharge each arrow from his quiver at a certain count. There never seemed any variation in the distances between the discharged arrows as they made the arc – upward with unerring aim, and downward in the body of the bird; hitting it, one by one, at proportionate intervals of time and space.

The women thought it a cruel sport, and would have prevented it if they could; but the men knew that it was a wonderful achievement, and that many fine archers among the surrounding tribes would fail in accomplishing it. Therefore, it was natural that the Fort's commandant should be anxious to know if his ward's equipment were in order, on a morning so full of possible dangers as this.

“There is no talk of dying, Gaspar. You are a man, child, if not full grown. You are brave and skilful. You have a clear head, too;

so listen closely to what I say. In our garrison are not more than forty men able to fight. There are a dozen women and twenty children, of which none have been trained to use a bow as you can. Besides these helpless ones, there are many sick soldiers to occupy the wagons. I know you expected to be with your mates, but I have another plan for you. I want you to ride Tempest, and to sling your bow on your saddle horn."

"Ride – Tempest! Why, Captain Heald! Nobody – that is, nobody but you – can ride him. I was never on his back – "

"It's time you were. Lad, do you know how many Indians are in camp near us, or have broken camp this morning to join us?"

"Oh! quite a lot, I guess."

"Just so. A whole 'lot.' About five hundred, or a few less."

The two were busily at work, packing the last of the few possessions that the commandant must convey to Fort Wayne, and which he could entrust to no other hands than his own and those of this deft-fingered lad, and they made no pause while they talked. Indeed, Gaspar's movements were even swifter now, as if he were eager to be through and off.

"Five hundred, sir? They are friendly Indians, though. Black Partridge and Winnemeg – "

"Are but as straws against the current. Gaspar, I shall need a boy who can be trusted. These red neighbors of ours are not so 'friendly' as they seem. They are dissatisfied. They mean mischief, I fear, though God forbid! Well, we are soldiers, and we cannot shrink. You must ride Tempest. You must tell nobody

why. You can keep at a short distance from our main band, and act as scout. Captain Wells will march in front with his Miamis, upon whose assistance – the Miamis’, I mean – I do not greatly count. They are cowards. They fear the ‘canoe men.’ Well, what do you say, my son?”

Gaspar caught his breath. His own fear of an Indian had been nearly overcome by the friendship of those chiefs who were so constantly at the Fort; but the night before had brought him a recurrence of the terrifying visions which were as much memories as dreams. After such a night he was scarcely himself in courage, greatly as he desired to please the captain. Then he reflected how high was the honor designed him. He, a little boy, just past ten and going on eleven for a whole fortnight now, and – of course he’d do it!

“Well, I’ll ride him. That is, I’ll try. Like as not, he’ll shake me off first try.”

“Make the second try, then. You know the copy in your writing-book?”

“Yes, sir. I wrote the whole page of it, yesterday, and the chaplain said it was well done. Shall I get him now? Are you almost ready?”

The commandant looked at the waiting wagons, the assembled company, the women and little ones who were so dear and in such a perilous case. For a moment his heart sank, stout soldier though he was, and it was no detriment to his manhood that a fervent if silent prayer escaped him.

“Yes, fetch him if you can. If not, I’ll come.”

Tempest was a gelding of fine Kentucky breed. There were others of his line at the garrison, and upon them some of the women even were to ride. But Tempest was the king of the stables. He was the master’s half-broken pet and recreation. For sterner uses, as for that morning’s work, there was a better trained animal, and on this the commandant would make his own journey.

A smile curled the officer’s lips despite his anxiety as, presently, out from the stables galloped a bareheaded lad, clinging desperately to Tempest’s back, who tried as desperately to shake off his unusual burden. But the saddle girth was well secured, and the rider clung like a burr. His bow was slung crosswise before him and his full quiver hung at his back.

A cheer went up. The sight was as helpful to the soldiers as it was amusing, and they fell into line with a ready step as the band struck up – what was that tune? *The Dead March*? By whose ill-judgment this?

Well, there was no time to question. Any music helps to keep a line of men in step, and there was the determined Gaspar cavorting and wheeling before and around the soldiers in a way to provoke a mirth that no dismal strain could dispel. So the gates were flung open, and in orderly procession, each man in his place, each heart set upon its duty, the little garrison marched through them for the last time.

Of what took place within the next dread hours, of the Indians’

treachery and the white men's courage, there is no need to give the details. It is history. But of brave Gaspar Keith on the wild gelding, Tempest, history makes no mention. There is many a hero whose name is unknown, and the lad was a hero that day. He did what he could, and his empty quiver, his broken bow, told their own story to a Pottawatomie warrior who came upon the boy just as the sun crossed the meridian on that memorable day.

Gaspar was lying unconscious beneath a clump of forest trees, and Tempest grazing quietly beside him. There was no wound upon the lad, and whether he had been thrown to the ground by the animal, or had slipped from his saddle out of sheer weariness, even he could never tell.

The Indian who found him was none other than the Man-Who-Kills; and, from a perfectly safe distance for himself, he had watched the young pale-face with admiration and covetousness.

"By and by, when the fight is over, I will get him. He shall be my prisoner. The black gelding is finer than any horse ever galloped into Muck-otey-pokee. They shall both be mine. I will tell a big tale at the council fires of my brothers, and they shall account me brave. Talking is easier than fighting, any time, and why should I peril my life, following this mad war-path of theirs to that far-away Fort Wayne? Enough is a plenty. I have hidden lots of plunder while the men of my tribe did their killing, and the Man-Who-Kills will always be wise, as he is always brave. I could shoot as fast and as far as anybody if – if I wished. But I

do not wish. It is too much trouble. So I will tie the boy on the gelding's back and lead them home in triumph. Will my squaw, Sorah, flout me now? No. No, indeed! And there is no need to say that I dared not mount the beast myself. But I can lead him all right, and when the Woman-Who-Mourns, that haughty sister of my chief, sees me coming she will say: 'Behold! how merciful is this mighty warrior!'"

These reflections of the astute Indian, as he rested upon the shaded sward, afforded him such satisfaction that he did, indeed, handle poor Gaspar with more gentleness than might have been expected; because such a person commonly mistakes brutality for bravery.

Oddly enough, Tempest offered no resistance to the red man's plan, and allowed himself to be burdened by the helpless Gaspar and led slowly to the Indian village. There the party aroused less interest than the Man-Who-Kills had anticipated, for other prisoners had already been brought in and, besides this, something had occurred that seemed to the women far more important.

This was the fresh grief of Wahneenah as she roamed from wigwam to wigwam, searching for her adopted daughter and imploring help to find her. For again the Sun Maid had disappeared, as suddenly and more completely than on the previous day though after much the same manner.

The child had been attending her injured squirrel and giving her bowls of orchids fresh drinks, upon the threshold mat of her

new home, and her indulgent foster-mother had gone to fetch from the stream the water needed for the latter purpose. At the brook's edge she had stopped, "just for a moment," to discuss with the other squaws the news of the massacre that was fast coming to them by the straggling bands of returning braves.

But the brief absence was long enough to have worked the mischief. The small runaway had left her posies and her squirrel and departed, nobody could guess whither.

Till at last again came Osceolo, the mischievous, and remarked, indifferently:

"The Woman-Who-Mourns may save her steps. The White Papoose and the Snowbird are far over the prairie while the women search."

"Osceolo! You are the son of the evil spirit! You bring distress in your hand as a gift! But take care what you say now. You know, as I know, that nobody can mount the White Snowbird and live. Or if one could succeed and pass beyond the village borders, it would be a ride to some far land whence there is no return. What is the mare, Snowbird, but a creature bewitched? or the home of the soul of a dead maiden, who would rather live thus with her people than without them as a spirit in the Great Beyond? You know all this, and yet you tell me –"

"That the Sun Maid is flying now on the Snowbird's back toward the setting sun, who is her father."

"How do you know this?"

"I saw it."

“Who took her to the Snowbird’s corral? Who? Osceolo, torment of our tribe, it was you! It was you! Boy, do you know what you have done? Do you know that out there, on the prairie where you have sent her, the spirit of murder is abroad? Not a pale-face shall escape. She was safe here, where your own chief, the Black Partridge, placed her. Hear me. If harm befalls her, if by moonrise she is not restored to me, you shall bear the punishment. You – ”

By a gesture he stopped her. Now thoroughly frightened, the mischievous boy put up his arms as if to ward off the coming threat. Half credulous, and half doubtful that the Sun Maid was more than mortal, he had made a test for himself. He had remembered the Snowbird, fretting its high spirit out within the closed paddock, and a daring notion had seized him. It was this:

“While the Woman-Who-Mourns gossips with her neighbors, I’ll catch up the papoose and carry her there. She’ll come fast enough. She ran away yesterday, and she played with me before the Spotted Adder’s hut. She trusts everybody. I’ll have some fun, even if my father didn’t let me go with him to the camp yonder.”

Among all nations boyhood is the same – plays the same wild pranks, with equal disregard of consequences; and Osceolo would far rather have had a good time than a good supper. He thought he was having a perfectly fascinating good time when he bound a long blanket over the Snowbird’s back and then fastened Kitty Briscoe in the folds of the blanket. He had laughed gayly as he clapped his hands and set the mare free, and the little one

riding her had laughed and clapped also. He had watched them out of sight over the prairie, and had felt quite proud of himself.

“If she is a spirit she’ll come back safe; and if she’s nothing but a white man’s baby – why, that’s all she is. Only a squaw child at that, though the silly women have made such ado. I wonder – will I ever see her again? Well, I’ll go around by Wahneenah’s tepee, after a while, and enjoy the worry. It’s the smartest thing I’ve done yet; and she did look cunning, too. She wasn’t a bit afraid – she isn’t afraid of anything – which makes her better than most girl papooses, and she was laughing as hard as I was when she went away.”

With these thoughts, Osceolo had come back to the spot where Wahneenah met him and demanded if he knew aught of her charge; and there was no hilarity in his face now as he watched her enter her wigwam and drop its curtains behind her. He suddenly remembered – many things; and at thought of the Black Partridge’s wrath he turned faint and sick.

But the test had been made and no regret could recall it.

Meanwhile, there came into his mind the fact: a black horse had just entered the village and a white one had gone out of it. The narrow superstition in which he had been reared taught him that the one brought misfortune and the other carried away happiness; and, in a redoubled terror at his own act and its consequences, Osceolo turned and fled.

CHAPTER VI.

THE THREE GIFTS

“The Black Partridge has served his white friends faithfully. He should now remember his own people, and rest his heart among them,” said the White Pelican as he rode homeward beside his chief, not many hours after the massacre of the sandhills.

The elder warrior lifted his bowed head, and regarded his nephew in sadness. His eyes had that far-away, dreamy look which was unusual among his race and had given him, at times, a strange power over his fellows. Because, unfortunately, the dreams were, after all, very practical, and the silent visions were of things that might have been averted.

“The White Pelican, also, did well. He protected those whom he wished to kill. He did it for my sake. It shall not be forgotten, though the effort was useless. The end has begun.”

The younger brave touched his fine horse impatiently, and the animal sprang forward a few paces. As he did so, the rider caught a gleam of something white skimming along the horizon line, and wondered what it might be. But he had set out to attend his chief and, curbing his mount by a strong pull, whirled about and rode back to the side of Black Partridge.

“What is the end that has begun, Man-Who-Cannot-Lie?”

“The downfall of our nations. They have been as the trees of the forest and the grasses of the prairie. The trees shall be felled and the grasses shall be cut. The white man’s hand shall accomplish both.”

“For once, the Truth-Teller is mistaken. We will wrest our lands back from the grasp of the pale-faces. We will learn their arts and conquer them with their own weapons. We will destroy their villages – few they are and widely scattered. Pouf! This morning’s work is but a show of what is yet to come. As we did then, so we will do in the future. I, too, would go with my tribe to that other fort far beyond the Great Lake. I would help again to wipe away these usurpers from our homes, as I wipe – this, from my horse’s flank. Only my promise to remain with my chief and my kinsman prevents.”

The youth had stooped and brushed a bit of grass bloom from the animal’s shining skin; and as he raised his head again he looked inquiringly into the stern face of the other. Thus, indirectly, was he begging permission to join the contemplated raid upon another distant garrison.

Black Partridge understood but ignored the silent petition. He had other, higher plans for the White Pelican. He would himself train the courageous youth to be as wise and diplomatic as he was brave. When the training was over, he should be sent to that distant land where the Great Father of the white men dwelt, and should there make a plea for the whole Indian race.

“Would not a man who saved all this” – sweeping his arm

around toward every point of the prairie – “to his people be better than one who killed a half-dozen pale-faces yet lost his home?”

“Why – yes,” said the other, regretfully. “But – ”

“But it is the last chance. The time draws near when not an Indian wigwam will dot this grand plain. Already, in the talk of the white men, there is the plan forming to send us westward. Many a day’s journey will lie between us and this beloved spot. Our canoes will soon vanish from the Great Lake, and we shall cease to glide over our beautiful river. Hear me. It is fate. These people who have come to oust us from our birthright have been sent by the Great Spirit. It is His will. We have had our one day of life and of possession. They are to have theirs. Who will come after them and destroy them? They – ”

But the White Pelican could endure no more. The Black Partridge was not often in such a mood as this, stern and sombre though he might sometimes be, nor had his prophecies so far an outlook. That the Indians should ever be driven entirely away by their white enemies seemed a thing impossible to the stout-hearted young brave, and he spoke his mind freely.

“My father has had sorrow this day, and his eyes are too dim to see clearly. Or he has eaten of the white man’s food and it has turned his brain. Were it not for his dim eyesight, I would ask him to tell the White Pelican what that creature might be that darts and wheels and prances yonder”; and he pointed toward the western horizon.

Now there was a hidden taunt in the warrior’s words. No

man in the whole Pottawatomie nation was reputed to have such clearness of eyesight as the Black Partridge. The readiness with which he could distinguish objects so distant as to be invisible to other men had passed into a proverb among his neighbors, who believed that his inward “visions” in some manner furthered this extraordinary outward eyesight.

The chief flashed a scornful glance upon his attendant and, quite naturally, toward the designated object. White Pelican saw his gaze become intent and his indifference give way to amazement. Then, with a cry of alarm, that was half incredulity, the Black Partridge wheeled and struck out swiftly toward the west.

“Ugh! It looked unusual, even to me, but my father has recognized something beyond my guessing. He rides like the wind, yet his horse was well spent an hour ago.”

Regardless of his own recent eagerness to be at Muck-otey-pokee, and relating the day’s doings to an admiring circle of stay-at-homes, the young brave followed his leader. In a brief time they came up with a wild, high-spirited white horse, which rushed frantically from point to point in the vain hope of shaking from its back a burden to which it was not used.

“Souls of my ancestors! It is – the Snowbird!”

“It is the Sun Maid!” returned Black Partridge.

But for all his straining vision, White Pelican could not make out that it was indeed that wonderful child who was wrapped and bundled in the long blanket and lashed to the Snowbird’s back by

many thongs of leather. Not until, by one dexterous swoop of his horsehair rope, the chief collared the terrified mare and brought her to her knees.

“Cut the straps. Set the child free.”

The brave promptly obeyed; while the chief, holding the struggling mare with one hand, carefully drew the Sun Maid from her swathing blanket and laid her across his shoulder. Her little figure hung limp and relaxed where it was placed, and he saw that she had fainted.

“Take her to that row of alder bushes yonder. There should be water there. I’ll finish what has been begun, and prove whether this is a beast bewitched, or only a vicious mare that needs a master.”

The White Pelican would have preferred the horse-breaking to acting as child’s nurse to this uncanny small maiden who had ridden a creature none other in his tribe would have attempted. But he did as he was bidden and laid the little one down in the cooling shade of the alders. Then he put the water on her face and forced a few drops between her parted lips. After that he fixed all his attention on the efforts of Black Partridge to bring into subjection the unbroken mare.

However, the efforts were neither very severe nor long continued. Like many another, the Snowbird had received a worse name than she deserved, and she had already been well wearied by her wild gallop on the prairie. She had done her best to throw and kill the child which Osceolo had bound upon

her back, but she had only succeeded in tightening the bands and exhausting both herself and her unconscious rider. More than that, Black Partridge had a will stronger than hers and it conquered.

“Well, I did ride a long, long way, didn’t I? Feather-man, did you put Kitty on the nice cool grass? Will you give Kitty another drink of water? I guess I’m pretty tired, ain’t I?”

These words recalled the White Pelican’s attention to his charge.

“Ugh! It’s a wonder you’re alive.”

“Is it? I rode till I got so sleepy I couldn’t see. The sky kept whirling and whirling, and the sun did come right down into my face. And I got so twisted up I couldn’t breathe. I guess – I guess I don’t much love that Osceolo. He said it would be fun, and it was – a while. But he didn’t come, too, and – I’m glad I’m here now. Who’s that walking? Oh! my own Black Partridge, the nicest Feather-man there is!”

The Sun Maid sat up and lifted her arms to be taken, while she bestowed upon the chief one of her sweetest smiles. But he received it gravely, and regarded the child in her new Indian dress with critical scrutiny. Who had thus clothed her he could not surmise, for too short a time had elapsed since he had taken her to his village for his sister to prepare these well-fitting garments. Finally, superstition began to influence him also, as it had influenced the weaker-minded people at Muck-otey-pokee, as he spoke to the White Pelican, rather than to the child.

“Place her upon the Snowbird. They belong to each other, though I know not how they found one another.”

“Osceolo,” answered the younger brave, tersely.

“Humph! Then there’s more of black spirits than white in this affair. However, I have spoken. Place the Sun Maid on the Snowbird’s back.”

Kitty would have objected and strongly; but there was something so unusually stern in the elder warrior’s face and so full of hatred in that of the younger that she was bewildered and wisely kept silence.

Having made a comfortable saddle out of the long blanket, they seated her again upon the white mare’s back, and each on either side, they led her slowly toward Muck-otey-pokee. But the little one had again fallen asleep long before they reached it, and now there could have been no gentler mount for so helpless a rider than this suddenly tamed White Snowbird.

At the entrance to the village Wahneenah met them. She had again put on her mourning garb, and her hair was unplaited, while the lines of her face had deepened perceptibly. She had lamented to Katasha:

“The Great Spirit sent me back my lost ones in the form of the Sun Maid, and because of my own carelessness and sternness He has recalled her. Now is our separation complete, and not even in the Unknown Land shall I find them again.”

But the One-Who-Knows had answered, impatiently:

“Leave be. Whatever is must happen. The child is safe.

Nothing can harm her. Has she not the three gifts? The White Necklace from the shore of the Sea-without-end?¹ The White Bow from the eternal north? and the White Snowbird, into which entered the white soul of a blameless virgin? Have I not clothed her with the garb of our people? You are a fool, Wahneenah. Go hide in your wigwam, and keep silence.”

This was good advice, but Wahneenah couldn't take it. She was too human, too motherly, and under all her superstition, too sure of the Sun Maid's real flesh-and-blood existence to be easily comforted. So she went, instead, to the outskirts of the settlement to watch for what might be coming of good or ill. And so she came all the sooner to find her lost darling, and she vowed within herself that never again, so long as her own life should last, would she lose sight of that precious golden head.

“My Girl-Child! My White Papoose, Beloved! Found again! But how could you?”

“I did get runned away with myself this time, nice Other Mother. Don't look at Kitty that way. Kitty is very hungry. Nice Black Partridge Feather-man did find me, riding and riding and riding. The pretty Snowbird had lots of wings, I guess, for she flew and flew and flew. But I didn't see Osceolo. He couldn't have come, could he? I thought he was coming, too, when he clapped his hands and shoed me off so fast. Where is he?”

That was what several were desirous to learn. The affair had turned out much better than might have been expected, but there

¹ Pacific Ocean.

would be a day of reckoning for the village torment when he and its chief should chance to meet.

Knowing this, Osceolo remained in hiding for some time. Until, indeed, his curiosity got the better of his discretion. This happened when the Man-Who-Kills came stealing to his retreat and begged his assistance.

“I want you to take my white boy-captive and lead him to the tepee of the Woman-Who-Mourns. My wife Sorah will not have him in her wigwam. She says that from the moment that other white child, the Sun Maid, came to the lodge of Wahneenah, there has been trouble without end, even though all the three charms against evil have been bestowed upon her. There are no charms for this dark boy, but there’s always trouble enough (where Sorah is). He’s so worn and unhappy, he’ll make no objection, but will follow like a dog. He neither speaks nor sleeps nor eats. I have no use for a fool, I. You do it, Osceolo, and you’ll see what I will give you in reward! Also, if the Woman-Who-Mourns has lost the Sun Maid, maybe this Dark-Eye will be a better stayer.”

“But what will you give me, Man-Who-Kills? I – I think I’d rather not meddle any more with the family of my chief.”

“Ugh! Are a coward, eh? Never mind. There are other lads at Muck-otey-pokee, and plenty of plunder in my wigwam.”

“All right. Come along, Dark-Eye. Might as well be Dark-Brow, too, for he looks like a night without stars. What will you do with his horse, Man-Who-Kills?”

“Let you ride it for me, sometimes.”

“I can do it”; and without further delay, leading the utterly passive and disheartened Gaspar, the Indian lad set off for Wahneenah’s home. The captive had no expectation of anything but the most dreadful fate, and his tired brain reeled at the remembrance of what he might yet undergo. Yet, what use to resist?

Meanwhile, Osceolo, confident that all the braves whom he need fear were still absent from the village, started his charge along the trail at a rapid pace, and reached the wigwam of the Woman-Who-Mourns at the very moment when Black Partridge, White Pelican, and the Sun Maid came riding to it from the prairie.

She was alive, then! She was, in truth, a “spirit”! His mischievousness had had no power to harm her, she was exempt from any ill that might befall another, she had come back to – How could such an innocent-appearing creature punish one who had so misled her?

He had no time to guess. For the child had caught sight of the stupid lad he was leading, and with a cry of ecstasy had sprung from the Snowbird and landed plump upon the prisoner’s shoulders.

“Gaspar! My Gaspar, my Gaspar! Mine, mine, mine!”

It was a transformation scene. The white boy had staggered under the unexpected assault of his old playmate, but he had instantly recognized her. With a cry as full of joy as her own, he

clasped her close, and showered his kisses on her upturned face.

“Kitty! why, Kitty! You aren’t dead, then? You are not hurt? And we thought – oh, Kitty, Kitty, Kitty!”

Clinging to each other, they slipped to the ground, too absorbed in themselves to notice anything else; while Osceolo watched them in almost equal absorption.

But he was roused sooner than they. A hand fell on his shoulder. A hand whose touch could be as gentle as a woman’s, but was now like a steel band crushing the very bones.

“Osceolo!”

“Yes, Black Partridge,” quavered the terrified lad.

“You will come to my tepee. Alone!”

CHAPTER VII.

A THREEFOLD CORD IS STRONGEST

“She is a spirit. I know that nothing can harm her. Yet many things can harm me. I have no desire to suffer any further anxiety. Therefore – this. My Girl-Child, my White Papoose, come here.”

The Sun Maid reluctantly obeyed. It was the morning after her perilous ride on the back of an untamed horse and her joyful reunion with Gaspar, her old playmate of the Fort. The two were now just without the wigwam of Wahneenah, sitting clasped in each other’s arms, as if fearful that a fresh separation awaited them should they once relinquish this tight hold of one another; and it was in much the same feeling that the foster-mother regarded them.

“But why, Other Mother? I do love my Gaspar boy. I did know him always.”

“You’ve known me two years, Kitty,” corrected the truthful lad. “But I suppose that is as long as you can remember. You’re such a baby.”

“How old is the Sun Maid – as you white people reckon ages?” asked Wahneenah.

“She is five years old. Her birthday was on the Fourth of July. We had a celebration. Our Captain fired as many rounds

of ammunition as she was years old. The mothers made her a cake, with sugar on the top, and with five little candles they made themselves on purpose, and colored with strawberry juice. Oh, surely, there never was such a cake in all the world as they made for our ‘baby!’” cried the lad, forgetting for the moment present troubles in this delightful memory.

“Well, there are other women who can make other cakes,” said Wahneenah, with ready jealousy.

“Oh, but an Indian cake – ” began Gaspar, then stopped abruptly, frightened at his own boldness.

Wahneenah smiled. For small Kitty was swift to see the change in her playmate’s face, and her own caught, for an instant, a reflection of its fear. The foster-mother wished to banish this fear.

“Wahneenah likes those who say their thoughts out straight and clear. She is the sister of the Man-Who-Cannot-Lie. It is the crime of the pale-faces that they will lie, and always. Wherefore, they are always in danger. Take warning. Learn to be truth-tellers, like the Pottawatomies, and you will have no trouble.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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