

Chambers Robert William

The Little Red Foot



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CHAPTER I

SIR WILLIAM PASSES

The day Sir William died there died the greatest American of his day. Because, on that mid-summer evening, His Excellency was still only a Virginia gentleman not yet famous, and best known because of courage and sagacity displayed in that bloody business of Braddock.

Indeed, all Americans then living, and who since have become famous, were little celebrated, excepting locally, on the day Sir William Johnson died. Few were known outside a single province; scarcely one among them had been heard of abroad. But Sir William was a world figure; a great constructive genius; the greatest land-owner in North America; a wise magistrate, a victorious soldier, a builder of cities amid a wilderness; a redeemer of men.

He was a Baronet of the British Realm; His Majesty's Superintendent of Indian Affairs for all North America. He was the only living white man implicitly trusted by the savages of this continent, because he never broke his word to them. He was, perhaps, the only representative of royal authority in the Western Hemisphere utterly believed in by the dishonest, tyrannical, and stupid pack of Royal Governors, Magistrates and lesser vermin that afflicted the colonies with the British plague.

He was kind and great. All loved him. All mourned him. For he was a very perfect gentleman who practiced truth and honour and mercy; an unassuming and respectable man who loved laughter and gaiety and plain people.

He saw the conflict coming which must drench the land in blood and dry with fire the blackened cinders.

Torn betwixt loyalty to his King whom he had so tirelessly served, and loyalty to his country which he so passionately loved, it has been said that, rather than choose between King and Colony, he died by his own hand.

But those who knew him best know otherwise. Sir William died of a broken heart, in his great Hall at Johnstown, all alone.

His son, Sir John, killed a fine horse riding from Fort Johnson to the Hall. And arrived too late and all of a lather in the starlight.

And I have never ceased marvelling how such a man could have been the son of the great Sir William.

At the Hall the numerous household was all in a turmoil; and, besides Sir William's immediate family, there were a thousand guests – a thousand Iroquois Indians encamped around the Hall, with whom Sir William had been holding fire-council.

For he had determined to restrain his Mohawks, and to maintain tranquillity among all the fierce warriors of the Six Nations, and so pledge the entire Iroquois Confederacy to an absolute neutrality in the imminence of this war betwixt King and Colony, which now seemed to be coming so rapidly upon us that already its furnace breath was heating restless savages to a fever.

All that hot June day, though physically ill and mentally unhappy, – and under a vertical sun and with head uncovered, – Sir William had spoken to the Iroquois with belts.

The day's labour of that accursed council-fire ended at sunset; sachem and chief departed – tall spectres in the flaming west; there was a clash of steel at the guard-house as the guard presented arms; Mr. Duncan saluted the Confederacy with lifted claymore.

Then an old man, bareheaded, alone, turned away from the covered council-fire; and an officer, seeing how feebly he moved, flung an arm about his shoulders.

So Sir William came slowly to his great Hall, and slowly entered. And laid him down in his library on a sofa.

And slowly died there while the sun was going down.

Then the first star came out where, in the ashes of the June sunset, a pale rose tint still lingered.

But Sir William lay dead in his great Hall, all alone.

CHAPTER II

TWO PEERS SANS PEERAGE

Sir John had arrived and I caught sight of his heavy, expressionless face, which seemed more colourless than ever in the candle light.

Consternation reigned in the Hall, – a vast tumult of whispering and guarded gabble among servants, checked by sobs, – and I saw officers come and go, and the tall forms of Mohawks still as pines on a summer night.

The entire household was there – all excepting only Michael Cardigan and Felicity Warren.

The two score farm slaves were there huddled along the wall in dusky clusters, and their great, dark eyes wet with tears.

I saw Sir William's lawyer, Lafferty, come in with Flood, the Baronet's Bouw-Meester.¹

His blacksmith, his tailor, and his armourer were there; also his gardener; the German, Frank, his butler; Pontioch, his personal waiter; and those two uncanny and stunted servants, the Bartholomews, with their dead white faces and dwarfish dignity.

Also I saw poor Billy, Sir William's fiddler, gulping down the blubbers; and there was his personal physician, Doctor Daly, very grave; and the servile Wall, schoolmaster to Lady Molly's brood; and I saw Nicholas, his valet, and black Flora, his cook, both sobbing into the same bandanna.

The dark Lady Johnson was there, very quiet in her grief, slow-moving, still beautiful, having by the hands the two youngest girls and boy, while near her clustered the older children, fat Peter and Betsy and pretty Lana.

A great multitude of candles burned throughout the hall; Sir William's silver and mahogany sparkled everywhere; and so did the naked claymores of the Highlanders on guard where the dead man lay in his own chamber, done, at last, with all perplexity and grief.

In the morning came the quality in scores – all the landed gentry of Tryon County, Tory and Whig alike, to show their reverence: – old Colonel John Butler from his seat at Butlersbury near Caughnawaga, and his dark, graceful son Walter, – he of the melancholy golden eyes – an attorney then and sick of a wound which, some said, had been taken in a duel with Michael Cardigan near Fort Pitt.

Colonel Claus was there, too, son-in-law to Sir William, and battered much by frontier battles; and Guy Johnson, a cousin, and a son-in-law, too, had come from his fine seat at Guy Park to look upon a face as tranquil in death as a sleeping child's.

The McDonald, of damned memory, was there in his tartan and kilts and bonnet; and the Albany Patroon, very modest; and God knows how many others from far and near, all arrived to honour a man who had died very tired in the service of our Lord, who knows and pardons all.

The pretty lady of Sir John, who was Polly Watts of New York, came to me where I stood in the noon breeze near the lilacs; and I kissed her hand, and, straightening myself, retained it, looking into her woeful face of a child, all marred with tears.

"I had not thought to be mistress of the Hall for many years," said she, her lips a-tremble. "But yesterday, at this hour, he was living; and, today, in this hour, the heavy importunities of strange new duties are already crushing me... I count on you, Jack."

I made no answer.

"May we not count on you?" she said. "Sir John and I expect it."

¹ Farm overseer.

As I stood silent there in the breezy sunshine by the porch, there came across the grass Billy Alexander, who is Lord Stirling, a man much older than I, but who seemed young enough; and made his reverence to Lady Johnson, kissing the hand which I very gently released.

"Oh, Billy," says she, the tears starting again, "why should death take him at such a time, when God's wrath darkens all the world?"

"God's convenience is not always ours," he replied, looking at me sideways, with a certain curiosity which I understood if Lady Johnson did not.

She turned and gazed out across the sunny grass where, beyond the hedge fence, the primeval forest loomed like a dark cloud along the sky, far as the eye could see.

"Well," says she, half to herself, "the storm is bound to break, now. And we women of County Tryon may need your swords, gentlemen, before snow flies."

Lord Stirling stole another look at me. He knew as well as I how loosely in their scabbards lay our two swords. He knew, also, as well as I, in which cause would flash the swords of the landed gentry of County Tryon. And he knew, too, that his blade as well as mine must, one day, be unsheathed against them and against the stupid King they served.

Something of this Lady Johnson had long since suspected, I think; but Billy Alexander, for all his years, was a childhood friend; and I, too, a friend, although more recent.

She looked at my Lord Stirling with that troubled sweetness I have seen so often in her face, alas! and she said in a low voice:

"It would be unthinkable that Lord Stirling's sword could lay a-rusting when the Boston rabble break clear out o' bounds."

She turned to me, touched my arm confidingly, child that she seemed and was, God help her.

"A Stormont," she said, "should never entertain any doubts. And so I count on you, Lord Stormont, as I count upon my Lord Stirling –"

"I am not Lord Stormont," said I, striving to force a smile at the old and tiresome contention. "Lord Stormont is the King's Ambassador in Paris – if it please you to recollect –"

"You are as surely Viscount Stormont as is Billy Alexander, here, Lord Stirling – and as I am Lady Johnson," she said earnestly. "What do you care if your titles be disputed by a doddering committee on privileges in the House of Lords? What difference does it make if usurpers wear your honours as long as you know these same stolen titles are your own?"

"A pair o' peers *sans* peerage," quoth Billy Alexander, with that boyish grin I loved to see.

"I care nothing," said I, still smiling, "but Billy Alexander does – pardon! – my Lord Stirling, I should say."

Said he: "Sure I am Lord Stirling and no one else; and shall wear my title however they dispute it who deny me my proper seat in their rotten House of Lords!"

"I think you are very surely the true Lord Stirling," said I, "but I, on the other hand, most certainly am not a Stormont Murray. My name is John Drogue; and if I be truly also Viscount Stormont, it troubles me not at all, for my ambition is to be only American and to let the Stormonts glitter as they please and where."

Lady Johnson came close to me and laid both hands upon my shoulders.

"Jack," she pleaded, "be true to us. Be true to your gentle blood. Be true to your proper caste. God knows the King will have a very instant need of his gentlemen in America before we three see another summer here in County Tryon."

I made no reply. What could I say to her? And, indeed, the matter of the Stormont Viscounty was distasteful, stale, and wearisome to me, and I cared absolutely nothing about it, though the landed gentry of Tryon were ever at pains to place me where I belonged, – if some were right, – and where I did not belong if others were righter still.

For Lady Johnson, like many of her caste, believed that the second Viscount Stormont died without issue, – which was true, – and that the third Viscount had a son, – which is debatable.

At any rate, David Murray became the fourth Viscount, and the claims of my remote ancestor went a-glimmering for so many years that, in 1705, we resumed our family name of the Northesks, which is Drogue; and in this natural manner it became my proper name. God knows I found it good enough to eat and sleep with, so that my Lord Stormont's capers in Paris never disturbed my dreams. Thank Heaven for that, too; and it was a sad day for my Lord Stormont when he tried to bully Benjamin Franklin; for the whole world is not yet done a-laughing at him.

No, I have no desire to claim a Viscounty which our witty Franklin has made ridiculous with a single shaft of satire from his bristling repertoire.

Thinking now of this, and reddening a little at the thought, – for no Stormont even of remotest kinship to the family can truly relish Mr. Franklin's sauce, though it dressed an undoubted goose, – I become far more than reconciled to the decision rendered in the House of Lords.

Two people who had come from the house, and who were advancing slowly toward us across the clipped grass, now engaged our full attention.

The one we perceived to be Sir John Johnson himself; the other his lady's school friend and intimate companion, Claudia Swift, the toast of the British Army and of all respectable young Tories; and the "Sacharissa" of those verses made by the new and lively Adjutant General, Major André, who was then a captain.

For, though very young, our lovely Sacharissa had murdered many a gallant's peace of mind, leaving a trail of hearts bled white from New York to Boston, and from that afflicted city to Albany; where, it was whispered, her bright and merciless eyes had made the sad young Patroon much sadder, and his offered manor a more melancholy abode than usual.

She gave us, now, her dimpled hand to kiss. And, to Lady Johnson: "My dear," she said very tenderly, "how pale you seem! God sends us affliction as a precious gift and we must accept it with meekness," letting her eyes rest absently the while on Lord Stirling, and then on me.

Our Sacharissa might babble of meekness if she chose, but that virtue was not lodged within her, God knows, – nor many other virtues either.

Billy Alexander, old enough to be her parent, nevertheless had been her victim; and I also. It was our opinion that we had recovered. But, to be honest with myself, I could not avoid admitting that I had been very desperate sick o' love, and that even yet, at times – But no matter: others, stricken as deep as I, know well that Claudia Swift was not a maid that any man might easily forget, or, indeed, dismiss at will from his mind as long as she remained in his vicinity.

"Are you well, Billy, since we last met?" she asked Lord Stirling in that sweet, hesitating way of hers. And to me: "You have grown thin, Jack. Have you been in health?"

I said that I had been monstrous busy with my new glebe in the Sacandaga patent, and had swung an axe there with the best o' them until an express from Sir William summoned me to return to aid him with the Iroquois at the council-fire. At which explaining of my silence the jade smiled.

When I mentioned the Sacandaga patent and the glebe I had had of Sir William on too generous terms – he making all arrangements with Major Jelles Fonda through Mr. Lafferty – Sir John, who had been standing silent beside us, looked up at me in that cold and stealthy way of his.

"Do you mean your parcel at Fonda's Bush?" he inquired.

"Yes; I am clearing it."

"Why?"

"So that my land shall grow Indian corn, pardie!"

"Why clear it *now*?" he persisted in his deadened voice.

I could have answered very naturally that the land was of no value to anybody unless cleared of forest. But of course he knew this, too; so I did not evade the slyer intent of his question.

"I am clearing my land at Fonda's Bush," said I, "because, God willing, I mean to occupy it in proper person."

"And when, sir, is it your design to do this thing?"

"Do what, sir? Clear my glebe?"

"Remove thither – in *proper person*, Mr. Drogue?"

"As soon as may be, Sir John."

At that Lady Johnson gave me a quick look and Claudia said: "What! Would you bury yourself alive in that wilderness, Jack Drogue?"

I smiled. "But I must hew out for myself a career in the world some day, Sacharissa. So why not begin now?"

"Then in Heaven's name," she exclaimed impatiently, "go somewhere among men and not among the wild beasts of the forest! Why, a young man is like to perish of loneliness in such a spot; is he not, Sir John?"

Sir John's inscrutable gaze remained fixed on me.

"In such times as these," said he, "it is better that men like ourselves continue to live together... To await events... And master them... And afterward, each to his vocation and his own tastes... It is my desire that you remain at the Hall," he added, looking steadily at me.

"I must decline, Sir John."

"Why?"

"I have already told you why."

"If your present position is irksome to you," he said, "you have merely to name a deputy and feel entirely at liberty to pursue your pleasure. Or – you are at least the Laird of Northesk if you are nothing greater. There is a commission in my Highlanders – if you desire it... And your salary, of course, continues also."

He looked hard at me: "Augmented by – half," he added in his slow, cold voice. "And this, with your income, should properly maintain a young man of your age and quality."

I had been Brent-Meester to Sir William, for lack of other employment; and had been glad to take the important office, loving as I do the open air. Also the addition of a salary to my slender means had been acceptable. But it was one matter to serve Sir William as Brent-Meester, and another to serve Sir John in any capacity whatsoever. And as for the remainder of the family, – Guy Johnson and Colonel Claus – and their intimates the Butlers, I had now had more than enough of them, having endured these uncongenial people only because I had loved Sir William. Yet, for his father's sake, I now spoke to Sir John politely, using him most kindly because I both liked and pitied his lady, too.

Said I: "My desire is to become a Tryon County farmer, Sir John; and to that end I happily became possessed of the parcel at Fonda's Bush. For that reason I am clearing it. And so I must beg of you to accept my resignation as Brent-Meester at the Hall, for I mean to start as soon as convenient to occupy my glebe."

There was a silence; Sacharissa gazed at me in pity, astonishment, and unfeigned horror; Lady Johnson gave me an odd, unhappy look; and Billy Alexander a meaning one, half grin.

Then Sir John's slow and heavy voice invaded the momentary silence: "As my father's Brent-Meester, only an Indian or a Forest Runner knows the wilderness as do you. And we shall have great need of such forest knowledge as you possess, Mr. Drogue."

I think we all understood the Baronet's meaning.

I considered a moment, then replied very quietly that in time of stress no just cause would find me skulking to avoid duty.

I think my manner and tone, as well as what I said, combined to stop Sir John's mouth. For nobody could question such respectable sentiments unless, indeed, a quarrel was meant.

But Sir John Johnson, in his way, was as slow to mortal quarrel as was I in mine. And whatever suspicion of me he might nurse in his secret mind he now made no outward sign of it.

Also, other people were coming across the grass to join us; and presently grave greetings were exchanged in sober voices suitable to the occasion when a considerable company of ladies and gentlemen are gathered at a house of mourning.

Turning away, I noticed Mr. Duncan and the Highland officers at the magazine, all wearing their black badges of respect and a knot of crape on the basket-hilts of their claymores; and young Walter Butler, still stiff in his bandages, gazing up at the June sky out of melancholy eyes, like a damned man striving to see God.

Sir John had now given his arm to his lady. His left hand rested on his sword-hilt – the same left hand he had offered to poor Claire Putnam – and to which the child still clung, they said.

Claudia turned from Billy Alexander and came toward me. Her face was serious, but I saw the devil looking out of her blue eyes.

Nature had given this maid most lovely proportions – that charming slenderness which is plumply moulded – and she stood straight, and tall enough, too, to meet on a level the love-sick gaze of any stout young man she had bedevilled; and she wore a most bewitching countenance – short-nosed, red-lipped, a skin as white as a water-lily, and thick soft hair as black as night, which she wore unpowdered – the dangerous jade!

"Jack," says she in honeyed tones, "are you truly designing to become a hermit?"

"Oh, no," said I, smilingly, "only a farmer, Claudia."

"Why?"

"Because I am a poor man and must feed and clothe myself."

"There is a commission from Sir John in the Scotch regiment – "

"I'm Scotch enough without that," said I.

"Jack?"

"Yes, Madam?"

"Are you a little angry with me?"

"No," said I, feeling uncomfortable and concluding to beware of her, for she stood now close to me, and the scent of her warm breath troubled me.

"Why are you angry with me, Jack?" she asked sorrowfully. And took one step nearer.

"I am not," said I.

"Am – am I driving you into the wilderness?" she inquired.

"That, also, is absurd," I replied impatiently. "No woman could ever boast of driving me, though some may once have led me."

"Oh, I feared that I had sapped, perhaps, your faith in women, John."

I forced a laugh: "Why, Claudia? Because I lately – and vainly – was enamoured of you?"

"*Lately?*"

"Yes. I did love you, once."

"*Did* love?" she breathed. "Do you not love me any more, Jack?"

"I think not," said I, very cheerfully.

"And why? Sure I used you kindly, Jack. Did I not so?"

"You conducted as is the privilege of maid with man, Sacharissa," said I uneasily. "And that is all I have to say."

"How so did I conduct, Jack?"

"Sweetly – to my undoing."

"Try me again," she said, looking up at me, and the devil in her eyes.

But already I was becoming sensible of the ever-living enchantment of this young thing, so wise in stratagems and spoils of Love, and I chose to leave my scalp hang drying at her lodge door beside the scunter pole of Billy Alexander.

For God knows this vixen-virgin spared neither young nor old, but shot them through and through at sight with those heavenly darts from her twin eyes.

And no man, so far, could boast of obtaining from Mistress Swift the least token or any serious guerdon that his quest might lead him by a single step toward Hymen's altar, but only to that cruel

arena where all her victims agonized under the mocking sweetness of her smile, and her pretty, down-turned and merciless thumbs – the little Vestal villain!

"No, Claudia," quoth I, "you have taken my bow and spear, and shorn me of my thatch like any Mohawk. No; I go to Fonda's Bush – " I smiled, " – to heal, perhaps, my heart, as you say; but, anyhow, to consult my soul, and armour it in a wilderness."

"A hermit!" she exclaimed scornfully, " – and afeard of a maid armed only with two matched eyes, a nose, a mouth and thirty teeth!"

"Afeard of a monster more frightful than that," said I, laughing.

"Of what monster, John Drogue?"

"Of that red monster that is surely, surely creeping northward to surprise and rend us all," said I in a low voice. "And so I shall retire to question my secret soul, and arm it cap-à-pie as God directs."

She was looking at me intently. After a silence she said:

"I do love you; and Billy Alexander; and all gay and brave young men whose unstained swords hedge the women of County Tryon from this same red monster that you mention." And watched me to see how I swallowed this.

I said warily: "Surely, Claudia, all women command our swords ... no matter *which cause we espouse*."

"Jack!"

"I hear you, Claudia."

But, "Oh, my God!" she breathed; and put her hands to her face. A moment she stood so, then, eyes still covered by one hand, extended the other to me. I kissed it lightly; then kissed it again.

"Do you leave us, Jack?"

I understood.

"It is you who leave me, Claudia."

She, too, understood. It was my first confession that all was not right betwixt my conscience and my King. For that was the only thing I was certain about concerning her: she never betrayed a confidence, whatever else she did. And so I made plain to her where my heart and honour lay – not with the King's men in this coming struggle – but with my own people.

I think she knew, too, that I had never before confessed as much to any living soul, for she took her other hand from her eyes and looked at me as though something had happened in which she took a sorrowful pride.

Then I kissed her hand for the third time, and let it free. And, going:

"God be with you," she said with a slight smile; "you are my dear friend, John Drogue."

At the Hall porch she turned, the mischief glimmering in her eyes: " – And so is Billy Alexander," quoth she.

So she went into the darkened Hall.

It was many months before I saw our Sacharissa again – not until Major André had made many another verse for many another inamorata, and his soldier-actors had played more than one of his farces in besieged Boston to the loud orchestra of His Excellency's rebel cannon.

CHAPTER III

THE POT BOILS

Sir William died on the 24th of June in the year 1774; which was the twentieth year of my life.

On the day after he was buried in Saint John's Church in Johnstown, which he had built, I left the Hall for Fonda's Bush, which was a wilderness and which lay some nine miles distant in the Mohawk country, along the little river called Kenneyetto.

I speak of Fonda's Bush as a wilderness; but it was not entirely so, because already old Henry Stoner, the trapper who wore two gold rings in his ears, had built him a house near the Kenneyetto and had taken up his abode there with his stalwart and handsome sons, Nicholas and John, and a little daughter, Barbara.

Besides this family, who were the pioneers in that vast forest where the three patents² met, others now began settling upon the pretty little river in the wilderness, which made a thousand and most amazing windings through the Bush of Major Fonda.

There came, now, to the Kenneyetto, the family of one De Silver; also the numerous families of John Homan, and Elias Cady; then the Salisburys, Putnams, Bowmans, and Helmers arrived. And Benjamin De Luysnes followed with Joseph Scott where the Frenchman, De Golyer, had built a house and a mill on the trout brook north of us. There was also a dour Scotchman come thither – a grim and decent man with long, thin shanks under his kilts, who roved the Bush like a weird and presently went away again.

But before he took himself elsewhere he marked some gigantic trees with his axe and tied a rag of tartan to a branch.

And, "Fonda's Bush is no name," quoth he. "Where a McIntyre sets his mark he returns to set his foot. And where he sets foot shall be called Broadalbin, or I am a great liar!"

And he went away, God knows where. But what he said has become true; for when again he set his foot among the dead ashes of Fonda's Bush, it became Broadalbin. And the clans came with him, too; and they peppered the wilderness with their Scottish names, – Perth, Galway, Scotch Bush, Scotch Church, Broadalbin, – but my memory runs too fast, like a young hound giving tongue where the scent grows hotter! – for the quarry is not yet in sight, nor like to be for many a bloody day, alas! —

There was a forest road to the Bush, passable for waggons, and used sometimes by Sir William when he went a-fishing in the Kenneyetto.

It was by this road I travelled thither, well-horsed, and had borrowed the farm oxen to carry all my worldly goods.

I had clothing, a clock, some books, bedding of my own, and sufficient pewter.

I had my own rifle, a fowling piece, two pistols, and sufficient ammunition.

And with these, and, as I say, well horsed, I rode out of Johnstown on a June morning, all alone, my heart still heavy with grief for Sir William, and deeply troubled for my country.

For the provinces, now, were slowly kindling, warmed with those pure flames that purge the human soul; and already the fire had caught and was burning fiercely in Massachusetts Bay, where John Hancock fed the flames, daintily, cleverly, with all the circumstance, impudence, and grace of your veritable macaroni who will not let an inferior outdo him in a bow, but who is sometimes insolent to kings.

Well, I was for the forest, now, to wrest from a sunless land a mouthful o' corn to stop the stomach's mutiny.

² The Three Patents were Sacandaga, Kayaderosseras, and Stones.

And if the Northland caught fire some day – well, I was as inflammable as the next man, who will not suffer violation of house or land or honour.

As Brent-Meester to Sir William, my duties took me everywhere. I knew old man Stoner, and Nick had become already my warm friend, though I was now a grown man of more than twenty and he still of boy's age. Yet, in many ways, he seemed more mature than I.

I think Nick Stoner was the most mischievous lad I ever knew – and admired. He sometimes said the same of me, though I was not, I think, by nature, designed for a scapegrace. However, two years in the wilderness will undermine the grace of saint or sinner in some degree. And if, when during those two hard years I went to Johnstown for a breath of civilization – or to Schenectady, or, rarely, to Albany – I frequented a few good taverns, there was little harm done, and nothing malicious.

True, disputes with Tories sometimes led to blows, and mayhap some Albany watchman's Dutch noddle needed vinegar to soothe the flammings drummed upon it by a stout stick or ramrod resembling mine.

True, the humming ale at the Admiral Warren Tavern may sometimes have made my own young noddle hum, and Nick Stoner's, too; but there came no harm of it, unless there be harm in bussing a fresh and rosy wench or two; or singing loudly in the tap-room and timing each catch to the hammering of our empty leather jacks on long hickory tables wet with malt.

But why so sad, brother Broadbrim? Youth is not to be denied. No! And youth that sets its sinews against an iron wilderness to conquer it, – youth that wields its puny axe against giant trees, – youth that pulls with the oxen to uproot enormous stumps so that when the sun is let in there will be a soil to grow corn enough to defy starvation, – youth that toils from sun-up to dark, hewing, burning, sawing, delving, plowing, harrowing day after day, month after month, pausing only to kill the wild meat craved or snatch a fish from some forest fount, – such youth cannot be decently denied, brother Broadbrim!

But if Nick and I were truly as graceless as some stiff-necked folk pretended, always there was laughter in our scrapes, even when hot blood boiled at the Admiral Warren, and Tory and Rebel drummed one another's hides to the outrage of law and order and the mortification of His Majesty's magistrates in County Tryon.

Even in Fonda's Bush the universal fire had begun to smoulder; the names Rebel and Tory were whispered; the families of Philip Helmer and Elias Cady talked very loudly of the King and of Sir John, and how a hempen rope was the fittest cravat for such Boston men as bragged too freely.

But what most of all was in my thoughts, as I swung my axe there in the immemorial twilight of the woods, concerned the Indians of the great Iroquois Confederacy.

What would these savages do when the storm broke? What would happen to this frontier? What would happen to the solitary settlers, to such hamlets as Fonda's Bush, to Johnstown, to Schenectady – nay, to Albany itself?

Sir William was no more. Guy Johnson had become his Majesty's Superintendent for Indian affairs. He was most violently a King's man – a member of the most important family in all the Northland, and master of six separate nations of savages, which formed the Iroquois Confederacy.

What would Guy Johnson do with the warriors of these six nations that bordered our New York frontier?

Always these questions were seething in my mind as I swung my axe or plowed or harrowed. I thought about them as I sat at eventide by the door of my new log house. I considered them as I lay abed, watching the moonlight crawl across the puncheon floor.

As Brent-Meester to Sir William, I knew Indians, and how to conduct when I encountered them in the forest, in their own castles, or when they visited the Hall.

I had no love for them and no dislike, but treated them always with the consideration due from one white man to another.

I was not conscious of making any friends among them, nor of making any enemies either. To me they were a natural part of the wilderness, like the trees, rivers, hills, and wild game, belonging there and not wantonly to be molested.

Others thought differently; trappers, forest runners, *coureurs-du-bois* often hated them, and lost no opportunity to display their animosity or to do them a harm.

But it was not in me to feel that way toward any living creature whom God had fashioned in His own image if not in His own colour. And who is so sure, even concerning the complexion of the Most High?

Also, Sir William's kindly example affected my sentiments toward these red men of the forest. I learned enough of their language to suit my requirements; I was courteous to their men, young and old; and considerate toward their women. Otherwise, I remained indifferent.

Now, during these first two years of my life in Fonda's Bush, events in the outer world were piling higher than those black thunder-clouds that roll up behind the Mayfield hills and climb toward mid-heaven. Already the dull glare of lightning lit them redly, though the thunder was, as yet, inaudible.

In April of my first year in Fonda's Bush a runner came to the Kenyetto with the news of Lexington, and carried it up and down the wilderness from the great Vlaie and Maxon Ridge to Frenchman's Creek and Fonda's Bush.

This news came to us just as we learned that our Continental Congress was about to reassemble; and it left our settlement very still and sober, and a loaded rifle within reach of every man who went grimly about his spring plowing.

But the news of open rebellion in Massachusetts Bay maddened our Tory gentry of County Tryon; and they became further so enraged when the Continental Congress met that they contrived a counter demonstration, and, indeed, seized upon a pretty opportunity to carry it with a high hand.

For there was a Court holden in Johnstown, and a great concourse of Tryon loyalists; and our Tory hatch-mischiefs did by arts and guile and persuasions obtain signatures from the majority of the Grand Jurors and the County Magistracy.

Which, when known and flaunted in the faces of the plainer folk of Tryon County, presently produced in all that slow, deep anger with which it is not well to trifle – neither safe for kings nor lesser fry.

In the five districts, committees were appointed to discuss what was to be the attitude of our own people and to erect a liberty pole in every hamlet.

The Mohawk district began this business, which, I think, was truly the beginning of the Revolution in the great Province of New York. The Canajoharie district, the Palatine, the Flatts, the Kingsland followed.

And, at the Mohawk district meeting, who should arrive but Sir John, unannounced, uninvited; and with him the entire company of Tory big-wigs – Colonels Claus, Guy Johnson, and John Butler, and a heavily armed escort from the Hall.

Then Guy Johnson climbed up onto a high stoop and began to harangue our unarmed people, warning them of offending Majesty, abusing them for dolts and knaves and traitors to their King, until Jacob Sammons, unable to stomach such abuse, shook his fist at the Intendant. And, said he: "Guy Johnson, you are a liar and a villain! You may go to hell, sir, and take your Indians, too!"

But Guy Johnson took him by the throat and called him a damned villain in return. Then the armed guard came at Sammons and knocked him down with their pistol-butts, and a servant of Sir John sat astride his body and beat him.

There was a vast uproar then; but our people were unarmed, and presently took Sammons and went off.

But, as they left the street, many of them called out to Sir John that it were best for him to fortify his Baronial Hall, because the day drew near when he would be more in need of swivel guns than of congratulations from his Royal Master.

Sure, now, the fire blazing so prettily in Boston was already running north along the Hudson; and Tryon had begun to smoke.

Now there was, in County Tryon, a number of militia regiments of which, when brigaded, Sir William had been our General.

Guy Johnson, also, was Colonel of the Mohawk regiment. But the Mohawk regiment had naturally split in two.

Nevertheless he paraded the Tory remainder of it, doubtless with the intention of awing the entire county.

It did awe us who were unorganized, had no powder, and whose messengers to Albany in quest of ammunition were now stopped and searched by Sir John's men.

For the Baronet, also, seemed alarmed; and, with his battalion of Highlanders, his Tory militia, his swivels, and his armed retainers, could muster five hundred men and no mean artillery to hold the Hall if threatened.

But this is not what really troubled the plain people of Tryon. Guy Johnson controlled thousands of savage Iroquois. Their war chief was Sir William's brother-in-law, brother to the dark Lady Johnson, Joseph Brant, called Thayendanegea, – the greatest Mohawk who ever lived, – perhaps the greatest of all Iroquois. And I think that Hiawatha alone was greater in North America.

Brave, witty, intelligent, intellectual, having a very genius for war and stratagems, educated like any gentleman of the day and having served Sir William as secretary, Brant, in the conventional garments of civilization, presented a charming and perfectly agreeable appearance.

Accustomed to the society of Sir William's drawing room, this Canienga Chief was utterly conversant with polite usage, and entirely qualified to maintain any conversation addressed to him. Always he had been made much of by ladies – always, when it did not too greatly weary him, was he the centre of batteries of bright eyes and the object of gayest solicitation amid those respectable gatherings for which, in Sir William's day, the Hall was so justly celebrated.

That was the modest and civil student and gentleman, Joseph Brant.

But in the forest he was a painted spectre; in battle a flame! He was a war chief: he never became Royaneh;³ but he possessed the wisdom of Hendrik, the eloquence of Red Jacket, the terrific energy of Hiakatoo.

We, of Tryon, were aware of all these things. Our ears were listening for the dread wolf cry of the Iroquois in their paint; our eyes were turned in dumb expectation toward our Provincial Congress of New York; toward our dear General Schuyler in Albany; toward the Continental Congress now in solemn session; toward our new and distant hope shining clearer, brighter as each day ended – His Excellency the Virginian.

How long were Sir John and his people to be left here in County Tryon to terrorize all friends to liberty, – to fortify Johnstown, to stop us about our business on the King's highway, to intrigue with the Mohawks, the Oneidas, the Cayugas, the Onondagas, the Senecas, the Tuscaroras?

Guy Johnson tampered with the River Indians at Poughkeepsie, and we knew it. He sent belts to the Shawanese, to the Wyandottes, to the Mohicans. We knew it. He met the Delaware Sachems at a mongrel fire – God knows where and by what authority, for the Federal Council never gave it! – and we stopped one of his runners in the Bush with his pouch full o' belts and strings; and we took every inch of wampum without leave of Sir John, and bade the runner tell him what we did.

³ Sachem: the Canienga term.

We wrote to Albany; Albany made representations to Sir John, and the Baronet replied that his show of armed force at the Hall was solely for the reason that he had been warned that the Boston people were laying plans to invade Tryon and make of him a prisoner.

I think this silly lie was too much for Schuyler, for all now knew that war must come. Twelve Colonies, in Congress assembled, had announced that they had rather die as free people than continue to live as slaves. Very fine indeed! But what was of more interest to us at Fonda's Bush, this Congress commissioned George Washington as Commander in Chief of a Colonial Army of 20,000 men, and prepared to raise three millions on bills of credit *for the prosecution of the war!*

Now, at last, the cleavage had come. Now, at last, Sir John was forced into the open.

He swore by Almighty God that he had had no hand in intriguing against the plain people of Tryon: and while he was making this oath, Guy Johnson was raising the Iroquois against us at Oswego; he was plotting with Carleton and Haldimand at Montreal; he had arranged for the departure of Brant with the great bulk of the Mohawk nation, and, with them, the fighting men of the Iroquois Confederacy. Only the Western Gate Keepers remained, – the fierce Senecas.

And so, except for a few Tuscaroras, a few lukewarm Onondagas, a few of the Lenape, and perhaps half – possibly two-thirds of the Oneida nation, Guy Johnson already had swung the terrible Iroquois to the King.

And now, secretly, the rats began to leave for the North, where, behind the Canada border, savage hordes were gathering by clans, red and white alike.

Guy Johnson went on pretense of Indian business; and none dare stop the Superintendent for Indian affairs on a mission requiring, as he stated, his personal appearance at Oswego.

But once there he slipped quietly over into Canada; and Brant joined him.

Colonel Claus sneaked North; old John Butler went in the night with a horde of Johnstown and Caughnawaga Tories. McDonald followed, accompanied by some scores of bare-shinned Tory Mc's. Walter Butler disappeared like a phantom.

But Sir John remained behind his stockade and swivels at the Hall, vowing and declaring that he meditated no mischief – no, none at all.

Then, in a fracas in Johnstown, that villain sheriff, Alexander White, fired upon Sammons, and the friends to liberty went to take the murderous Tory at the jail.

Frey was made sheriff, which infuriated Sir John; but Governor Tryon deposed him and reappointed White, so the plain people went again to do him a harm; and he fled the district to the mortification of the Baronet.

But Sir John's course was nearly at an end: and events in the outer world set the sands in his cloudy glass running very swiftly. Schuyler and Montgomery were directing a force of troops against Montreal and Quebec, and Sir Guy Carleton, Governor General of Canada, was shrieking for help.

St. John's surrendered, and *the Mohawk Indians began fighting!*

Here was a pretty pickle for Sir John to explain.

Suddenly we had news of the burning of Falmouth.

On a bitter day in early winter, an Express passed through Fonda's Bush on snow-shoes, calling out a squad of the Mohawk Regiment of District Militia.

Nick Stoner, Andrew Bowman, Joe Scott, and I answered the summons.

Snow-shoeing was good – a light fall on the crust – and we pulled foot for the Kingsborough trail, where we met up with a squad from the Palatine Regiment and another from the Flatts.

But scarce were we in sight of Johnstown steeples when the drums of an Albany battalion were heard; and we saw, across the snow, their long brown muskets slanting, and heard their bugle-horn on the Johnstown road.

I saw nothing of the affair at the Hall, being on guard at St. John's Church, lower down in the town. But I saw our General Schuyler ride up the street with his officers; and so knew that all would go well.

All went well enough, they say. For when again the General rode past the church, I saw waggons under our escort piled with the muskets of the Highland Battalion, and others heaped high with broadswords, pistols, swivels, and pikes. And on Saturday, the twentieth of January, when our tour of duty ended, and our squads were dismissed, each to its proper district, all people knew that Sir John Johnson had given his parole of honor not to take up arms against America; not to communicate with the Royalists in Canada; not to oppose the friends of liberty at home; nor to stir from his Baronial Hall to go to Canada or to the sea, but with liberty to transact such business as might be necessary in other parts of this colony.

And I, for one, never doubted that a son of the great Sir William would keep his word and sacred parole of honour.

CHAPTER IV

TWO COUNTRY MICE

It was late in April, and I had boiled my sap and had done with my sugar bush for another year. The snow was gone; the Kenneytto roared amber brilliant through banks of melting ice, and a sweet odour of arbutus filled all the woods.

Spring was in the land and in my heart, too, and when Nick Stoner galloped to my door in his new forest dress, very fine, I, nothing loath, did hasten to dress me in my new doe-skins, not less fine than Nick's and lately made for me by a tailor-woman in Kingsborough who was part Oneida and part Dutch.

That day I wore a light, round cap of silver mole fur with my unshorn hair, all innocent of queue or powder, curling crisp like a woman's. Of which I was ashamed and eager to visit Toby Tice, our Johnstown barber, and be trimmed.

My new forest dress, as I say, was of doe-skin – a laced shirt belted in, shoulder-caped, cut round the neck to leave my throat free, and with long thrums on sleeve and skirt against need.

Trews shaped to fit my legs close; and thigh moccasins, very deep with undyed fringe, but ornamented by an infinite pattern of little green vines, made me brave in my small mirror. And my ankle moccasins were gay with Oneida devices wrought out of porcupine quills and beads, scarlet, green, purple, and orange, and laid open at the instep by two beaded flaps.

I saddled my mare, Kaya, in her stall, which was a log wing to my house, and presently mounted and rode around to where Nick sat his saddle a-playing on his fife, which he carried everywhere with him, he loving music but obliged to make his own.

"Lord Harry!" cried he on seeing me so fine. "If you are not truly a Viscount then you look one!"

"I would not change my name and health and content," said I, "for a king's gold crown today." And I clinked the silver coins in my pouch and laughed. And so we rode away along the Johnstown road.

He also, I think, was dying for a frolic. Young minds in trouble as well as hard-worked bodies need a holiday now and then. He winked at me and chinked the shillings in his bullet-pouch.

"We shall see all the sights," quoth he, "and the Kenneytto could not quench my thirst today, nor our two horses eat as much, nor since time began could all the lovers in history love as much as could I this April day... Were there some pretty wench of my own mind to use me kindly... Like that one who smiled at us – do you remember?"

"At Christmas?"

"That's the one!" he exclaimed. "Lord! but she was handsome in her sledge! – and her sister, too, Jack."

"I forget their names," said I.

"Browse," he said, " – Jessica and Betsy. And they live at Pigeon-Wood near Mayfield."

"Oho!" said I, "you have made their acquaintance!"

He laughed and we galloped on.

Nick sang in his saddle, beating time upon his thigh with his fife:

Flammadiddle!
Paddadiddle!
Flammadiddle dandy!
My Love's kisses
Are sweet as sugar-candy!
Flammadiddle!
Paddadiddle!

Flammadiddle dandy!
She makes fun o' me
Because my legs are bandy – "

He checked his gay refrain:

"Speaking of flamms," said he, "my brother John desires to be a drummer in the Continental Line."

"He is only fourteen," said I, laughing.

"I know. But he is a tall lad and stout enough. What will be your regiment, Jack?"

"I like Colonel Livingston's," said I, "but nobody yet knows what is to be the fate of the district militia and whether the Mohawk regiment, the Palatine, and the other three are to be recruited to replace the Tory deserters, or what is to be done."

Nick flourished his flute: "All I know," he said, "is that my father and brother and I mean to march."

"I also," said I.

"Then it's in God's hands," he remarked cheerfully, "and I mean to use my ears and eyes in Johnstown today."

We put our horses to a gallop.

We rode into Johnstown and through the village, very pleased to be in civilization again, and saluting many wayfarers whom we recognized, Tory and Whig alike. Some gave us but a cold good-day and looked sideways at our forest dress; others were marked in cordiality, – men like our new Sheriff, Frey, and the two Sammonses and Jacob Shew.

We met none of the Hall people except the Bouw-Meester, riding beside five yoke of beautiful oxen, who drew bridle to exchange a mouthful of farm gossip with me while the grinning slaves waited on the footway, goads in hand.

Also, I saw out o' the tail of my eye the two Bartholomews passing, white and stunted and uncanny as ever, but pretended not to notice them, for I had always felt a shiver when they squeaked good-day at me, and when they doffed hats the tops of their heads had blue marbling on the scalp under their scant dry hair. Which did not please me.

Whilst I chattered with the Bouw-Meester of seeds and plowing, Nick, who had no love for husbandry, practiced upon his fife so windily and with such enthusiasm that we three horsemen were soon ringed round by urchins of the town on their reluctant way to school.

"How's old Wall?" cried Nick, resting his puckered lips and wiping his fife. "There's a schoolmaster for pickled rods, I warrant. Eh, boys? Am I right?"

Lads and lassies giggled, some sucked thumbs and others hung their heads.

"Come, then," cried Nick, "he's a good fellow, after all! And so am I – when I'm asleep!"

Whereat all the children giggled again and Nick fished a great cake of maple sugar from his Indian pouch, drew his war-hatchet, broke the lump, and passed around the fragments. And many a childish face, which had been bright and clean with scrubbing, continued schoolward as sticky as a bear cub in a bee-tree.

And now the Bouw-Meester and his oxen and the grinning slaves had gone their way; so Nick and I went ours.

There were taverns enough in the town. We stopped at one or two for a long pull and a dish of meat.

Out of the window I could see something of the town and it seemed changed; the Court House deserted; the jail walled in by a new palisade; fewer people on the street, and little traffic. Nor did I perceive any red-coats ruffling it as of old; the Highlanders who passed wore no side-arms, – excepting the officers. And I thought every Scot looked glum as a stray dog in a new village, where every tyke moves stiffly as he passes and follows his course with evil eyes.

We had silver in our bullet pouches. We visited every shop, but purchased nothing useful; for Nick bought sweets and a mouse-trap and some alley-taws for his brother John – who wished to go to war! Oh, Lord! – and for his mother he found skeins of brightly-coloured wool; and for his father a Barlow jack-knife.

I bought some sucketts and fish-hooks and a fiddle, – God knows why, for I can not play on it, nor desire to! – and I further purchased two books, "Lives of Great Philosophers," by Rudd, and a witty poem by Peter Pindar, called "The Lousiad" – a bold and mirthful lampoon on the British King.

These packets we stowed in our saddle-bags, and after that we knew not what to do save to seek another tavern.

But Nick was no toss-pot, nor was I. And having no malt-thirst, we remained standing in the street beside our horses, debating whether to go home or no.

"Shall you pay respects at the Hall?" he asked seriously.

But I saw no reason to go, owing no duty; and the visit certain to prove awkward, if, indeed, it aroused in Sir John no more violent emotion than pain at sight of me.

With our bridles over our arms, still debating, we walked along the street until we came to the Johnson Arms Tavern, – a Tory rendezvous not now frequented by friends of liberty.

It was so dull in Johnstown that we tied our horses and went into the Johnson Arms, hoping, I fear, to stir up a mischief inside.

Their brew was poor; and the spirits of the dozen odd Tories who sat over chess or draughts, or whispered behind soiled gazettes, was poorer still.

All looked up indifferently as we entered and saluted them.

"Ah, gentlemen," says Nick, "this is a glorious April day, is it not?"

"It's well enough," said a surly man in horn spectacles, "but I should be vastly obliged, sir, if you would shut the door, which you have left swinging in the wind."

"Sir," says Nick, "I fear you are no friend to God's free winds. Free winds, free sunshine, free speech, these suit my fancy. Freedom, sir, in her every phase – and Liberty – the glorious jade! Ah, gentlemen, there's a sweetheart you can never tire of. Take my advice and woo her, and you'll never again complain of a breeze on your shins!"

"If you are so ardent, sir," retorted another man in a sneering voice, "why do you not go courting your jade in Massachusetts Bay?"

"Because, sir," said I, "our sweetheart, Mistress Liberty, is already on her joyous way to Johnstown. It is a rendezvous, gentlemen. Will it please you to join us in receiving her?"

One man got up, overturning the draught board, paid his reckoning, and went out muttering and gesticulating.

"A married man," quoth Nick, "and wedded to that old hag, Tyranny. It irks him to hear of fresh young jades, knowing only too well what old sour-face awaits him at home with the bald end of a broom."

The dark looks cast at us signalled storms; but none came, so poor the spirit of the company.

"Gentlemen, you seem melancholy and distraight," said I. "Are you so pensive because my Lord Dunmore has burned our pleasant city of Norfolk? Is it that which weighs upon your minds? Or is the sad plight of Tommy Gage distressing you? Or the several pickles in which Sir Guy Carleton, General Burgoyne, and General Howe find themselves?"

"Possibly," quoth Nick, "a short poem on these three British warriors may enliven you:

"Carleton, Burgoyne, Howe,
"Bow-wow-wow!"

But there was nothing to be hoped of these sullen Tories, for they took our laughter scowling, but budged not an inch. A pity, for it was come to a pretty pass in Johnstown when two honest farmers must go home for lack of a rogue or two of sufficient spirit to liven a dull day withal.

We stopped at the White Doe Tavern, and Nick gave the company another poem, which he said was writ by my Lord North:

"O Boston wives and maids draw near and see
Our delicate Souchong and Hyson tea;
Buy it, my charming girls, fair, black, or brown;
If not, we'll cut your throats and burn your town!"

Whereat all the company laughed and applauded; and there was no hope of any sport to be had there, either.

"Well," said Nick, sighing, "the war seems to be done ere it begun. What's in those whelps at the Johnson Arms, that they stomach such jests as we cook for them? Time was when I knew where I could depend upon a broken head in Johnstown – mine own or another's."

We had it in mind to dine at the Doe, planning, as we sat on the stoop, bridles in hand, to ride back to the Bush by new moonlight.

"If a pretty wench were as rare as a broken head in Johnstown," he muttered, "I'd be undone, indeed. Come, Jack; shall we ride that way homeward?"

"Which way?"

"By Pigeon-Wood."

"By Mayfield?"

"Aye."

"You have a sweetheart there, you say?"

"And so, perhaps, might you, for the pain of passing by."

"No," said I, "I want no sweetheart. To clip a lip en passant, if the lip be warm and willing, – that is one thing. A blush and a laugh and 'tis over. But to journey in quest of gallantries with malice aforethought – no."

"I saw her in a sledge," sighed Nick, sucking his empty pipe. "And followed. Lord, but she is handsome, – Betsy Browse! – and looked at me kindly, I thought... We had a fight."

"What?"

"Her father and I. For an hour the old man nigh twisted his head off turning around to see what sledge was following his. Then he shouts, 'Whoa!' and out he bounces into the snow; and I out o' my sledge to see what it was he wanted.

"He wanted my scalp, I think, for when I named myself and said I lived at Fonda's Bush, he fetched me a knock with his frozen mittens, – Lord, Jack, I saw a star or two, I warrant you; and a gay stream squirted from my nose upon the snow and presently the whole wintry world looked red to me, so I let fly a fist or two at the old man, and he let fly a few more at me.

"'Dammy!' says he, 'I'll learn ye to foller my darters, you poor dum Boston critter! I'll drum your hide from Fundy's Bush to Canady!'

"But after I had rolled him in the snow till his scratch-wig fell off, he became more civil – quite polite for a Tory with his mouth full o' snow.

"So I went with him to his sledge and made a polite bow to the ladies – who looked excited but seemed inclined to smile when I promised to pass by Pigeon-Wood some day."

"A rough wooing," said I, laughing.

"Rough on old man Browse. But he's gone with Guy Johnson."

"What! To Canada? The beast!"

"Aye. So I thought to stop some day at Pigeon-Wood to see if the cote were entirely empty or no. Lord, what a fight we had, old Browse and I, there in the snow of the Mayfield road! And he burly as an October bear – a man all knotted over with muscles, and two fists that slapped you like

the front kick of a moose! Oh, Lordy! Lordy! What a battle was there... What bright eyes hath that little jade Betsy, of Pigeon-Wood!"

Now, as he spoke, I had a mind to see this same Tory girl of Pigeon-Wood; and presently admitted to him my curiosity.

And then, just as we had mounted and were gathering bridles and searching for our stirrups with moccasined toes, comes a galloper in scarlet jacket and breeks, with a sealed letter waved high to halt me.

Sitting my horse in the street, I broke the seal and read what was written to me.

The declining sun sent its rosy shafts through the still village now, painting every house and setting glazed windows a-glitter.

I looked around me, soberly, at the old and familiar town; I glanced at Nick; I gazed coldly upon the galloper, – a cornet of Border Horse, and as solemn as he was young.

"Sir," said I, "pray present to Lady Johnson my duties and my compliments, and say that I am honoured by her ladyship's commands, and shall be – happy – to present myself at Johnson Hall within the hour."

Young galloper salutes; I outdo him in exact and scrupulous courtesy, mole-skin cap in hand; and 'round he wheels and away he tears like the celebrated Tory in the song, Jock Gallopaway.

"Here's a kettle o' fish," remarked Nick in disgust.

"Were it not Lady Johnson," muttered I, but checked myself. After all, it seemed ungenerous that I should decline to see even Sir John, who now was virtually a prisoner of my own party, penned here within that magnificent domain of which his great father had been creator and absolute lord.

"I must go, Nick," I said in a low voice.

He said with a slight sneer, "Noblesse oblige – " and then, sorry, laid a quick hand on my arm.

"Forgive me, Jack. My father wears two gold rings in his ears. Your father wore them on his fingers. I know I am a boor until your kindness makes me forget it."

I said quietly: "We are two comrades and friends to liberty. It is not what we are born to but what we are that matters a copper penny in the world."

"It is easy for you to say so."

"It is important for you to believe so. As I do."

"Do you really so?" he asked with that winning upward glance that revealed his boyish faith in me.

"I really do, Nick; else, perhaps, I had been with Guy Johnson in Canada long ago."

"Then I shall try to believe it, too," he murmured, " – whether ears or fingers or toes wear the rings."

We laughed.

"How long?" he inquired bluntly.

"To sup, I think. I must remain if Lady Johnson requests it of me."

"And afterward. Will you ride home by way of Pigeon-Wood?"

"Will you still be lingering there?" I asked with a smile.

"Whether the pigeon-cote be empty or full, I shall await you there."

I nodded. We smiled at each other and wheeled our horses in opposite directions.

CHAPTER V

A SUPPER

Now, what seemed strange to me at the Hall was the cheerfulness of all under circumstances which must have mortified any Royalist, and, in particular, the principal family in North America of that political complexion.

Even Sir John, habitually cold and reserved, appeared to be in most excellent spirits for such a man, and his wintry smile shed its faint pale gleam more than once upon the company assembled at supper.

On my arrival there seemed to be nobody there except the groom, who took my mare, Kaya, and Frank, Sir William's butler, who ushered me and seemed friendly.

Into the drawing room came black Flora, all smiles, to say that the gentlemen were dressing but that Lady Johnson would receive me.

She was seated before her glass in her chamber, and the red-cheeked Irish maid she had brought from New York was exceedingly busy curling her hair.

"Oh, Jack!" said Lady Johnson softly, and holding out to me one hand to be saluted, "they told me you were in the village. Has it become necessary that I must send for an old friend who should have come of his own free will?"

"I thought perhaps you and Sir John might not take pleasure in a visit from me," I replied, honestly enough.

"Why? Because last winter you answered the district summons and were on guard at the church with the Rebel Mohawk company?"

So she knew that, too. But I had scarcely expected otherwise. And it came into my thought that the dwarfish Bartholomews had given her news of my doings and my whereabouts.

"Come," said she in her lively manner, "a good soldier obeys his colonel, whoever that officer may chance to be —*for the moment*. And, were you even otherwise inclined, Jack, of what use would it have been to disobey after Philip Schuyler disarmed our poor Scots?"

"If Sir John feels as you do, it makes my visit easier for all," said I.

"Sir John," she replied, "is not a whit concerned. We here at the Hall have laid down our arms; we are peaceably disposed; farm duties begin; a multitude of affairs preoccupy us; so let who will fight out this quarrel in Massachusetts Bay, so only that we have tranquillity and peace in County Tryon."

I listened, amazed, to this school-girl chatter, marvelling that she herself believed such pitiable nonsense.

Yet, that she did believe it I was assured, because in my Lady Johnson there was nothing false, no treachery or lies or cunning.

Somebody sure had filled her immature mind with this jargon, which now she repeated to me. And in it I vaguely perceived the duplicity and ingenious manœuvring of wills and minds more experienced than her own.

But I said only that I hoped this county might escape the conflagration now roaring through all New England and burning very fiercely in Virginia and the Carolinas. Then, smiling, I made her a compliment on her hair, which her Irish maid was dressing very prettily, and laughed at her man's banyan which she so saucily wore in place of a levete. Only a young and pretty woman could presume to wear a flowered silk banyan at her toilet; but it mightily became Polly Johnson.

"Claudia is here," she remarked with a kindly malice perfectly transparent.

I took the news in excellent part, and played the hopeless swain for a while, to amuse her, and so cunningly, too, that presently the charming child felt bound to comfort me.

"Claudia is a witch," says she, "and does vast damage to no purpose but that it feeds her vanity. And this I have said frequently to her very face, and shall continue until she chooses to refrain from such harmful coquetry, and seems inclined to a more serious consideration of life and duty."

"Claudia serious!" I exclaimed. "When Claudia becomes pensive, beware of her!"

"Claudia should marry early – as I did," said she. But her features grew graver as she said it, and I saw not in them that inner light which makes delicately radiant the face of happy wifehood.

I thought, "God pity her," but I said gaily enough that retribution must one day seize Claudia's dimpled hand and place it in the grasp of some gentleman fitly fashioned to school her.

We both laughed; then she being ready for her stays and gown, I retired to the library below, where, to my chagrin, who should be lounging but Hiakatoo, war chief of the Senecas, in all his ceremonial finery. Despite what dear Mary Jamison has written of him, nor doubting that pure soul's testimony, I knew Hiakatoo to be a savage beast and a very devil, the more to be suspected because of his terrible intelligence.

With him was a Mr. Hare, sometime Lieutenant in the Mohawk Regiment, with whom I had a slight acquaintance. I knew him to be Tory to the bone, a deputy of Guy Johnson for Indian affairs, and a very shifty character though an able officer of county militia and a scout of no mean ability.

Hare gave me good evening with much courtesy and self-possession. Hiakatoo, also, extended a muscular hand, which I was obliged to take or be outdone in civilized usage by a savage.

"Well, sir," says Hare in his frank, misleading manner, "the last o' the sugar is a-boiling, I hear, and spring plowing should begin this week."

Neither he nor Hiakatoo had as much interest in husbandry as two hoot-owls, nor had they any knowledge of it, either; but I replied politely, and, at their request, gave an account of my glebe at Fonda's Bush.

"There is game in that country," remarked Hiakatoo in the Seneca dialect.

Instantly it entered my head that his remark had two interpretations, and one very sinister; but his painted features remained calmly inscrutable and perhaps I had merely imagined the dull, hot gleam that I thought had animated his sombre eyes.

"There is game in the Bush," said I, pleasantly, – "deer, *bear*, turkeys, and partridges a-drumming *the long roll* all day long. And I have seen a moose near Lake Desolation."

Now I had replied to the Seneca in the Canienga dialect; and he might interpret in two ways my reference to *bears*, and also what I said concerning the *drumming* of the partridges.

But his countenance did not change a muscle, nor did his eyes. And as for Hare, he might not have understood my play upon words, for he seemed interested merely in a literal interpretation, and appeared eager to hear about the moose I had seen near Lake Desolation.

So I told him I had watched two bulls fighting in the swamp until the older beast had been driven off.

"Civilization, too, will soon drive away the last of the moose from Tryon," quoth Hare.

"How many families at Fonda's Bush?" asked Hiakatoo abruptly.

I was about to reply, telling him the truth, and checked myself with lips already parted to speak.

There ensued a polite silence, but in that brief moment I was convinced that they realized I suddenly suspected them.

What I might have answered the Seneca I do not exactly know, for the next instant Sir John entered the room with Ensign Moucher, of the old Mohawk Regiment, and young Captain Watts from New York, brother to Polly, Lady Johnson, a handsome, dissipated, careless lad, inclined to peevishness when thwarted, and marred, perhaps, by too much adulation.

Scarce had compliments been exchanged with snuff when Lady Johnson entered the room with Claudia Swift, and I thought I had seldom beheld two lovelier ladies in their silks and powder, who curtsied low on the threshold to our profound bows.

As I saluted Lady Johnson's hand again, she said: "This is most kind of you, Jack, because I know that all farmers now have little time to waste."

"Like Cincinnatus," said I, smilingly, "I leave my plow in the furrow at the call of danger, and hasten to brave the deadly battery of your bright eyes."

Whereupon she laughed that sad little laugh which I knew so well, and which seemed her manner of forcing mirth when Sir John was present.

I took her out at her request. Sir John led Claudia; the others paired gravely, Hare walking with the Seneca and whispering in his ear.

Candles seemed fewer than usual in the dining hall, but were sufficient to display the late Sir William's plate and glass.

The scented wind from Claudia's fan stirred my hair, and I remembered it was still the hair of a forest runner, neither short nor sufficiently long for the queue, and powdered not a trace.

I looked around at Claudia's bright face, more brilliant for the saucy patches and newly powdered hair.

"La," said she, "you vie with Hiakatoo yonder in Mohawk finery, Jack, – all beads and thrums and wampum. And yet you have a pretty leg for a silken stocking, too."

"In the Bush," said I, "the backwoods aristocracy make little of your silk hosen, Claudia. Our stockings are leather and our powder black, and our patches are of buckskin and are sewed on elbow and knee with pack-thread or sinew. Or we use them, too, for wadding."

"It is a fashion like another," she remarked with a shrug, but watching me intently over her fan's painted edge.

"The mode is a tyrant," said I, "and knows neither pity nor good taste."

"How so?"

"Why, Hiakatoo also wears paint, Claudia."

"Meaning that I wear lip-rouge and lily-balm? Well, I do, my impertinent friend."

"Who could suspect it?" I protested, mockingly.

"You might have suspected it long since had you been sufficiently adventurous."

"How so?" I inquired in my turn.

"By kissing me, pardieu! But you always were a timid youth, Jack Drogue, and a woman's 'No,' with the proper stare of indignation, always was sufficient to route you utterly."

In spite of myself I reddened under the smiling torment.

"And if any man has had that much of you," said I, "then I for one will believe it only when I see your lip-rouge on his lips!"

"Court me again and then look into your mirror," she retorted calmly.

"What in the world are you saying to each other?" exclaimed Lady Johnson, tapping me with her fan. "Why, you are red as a squaw-berry, Jack, and your wine scarce tasted."

Claudia said: "I but ask him to try his fortune, and he blushes like a silly."

"Shame," returned Lady Johnson, laughing; "and you have Mr. Hare's scalp fresh at your belt!"

Hare heard it, and laughed in his frank way, which instantly disarmed most people who had not too often heard it.

"I admit," said he, "that I shall presently perish unless this cruel lady proves kinder, or restores to me my hair."

"It were more merciful," quoth Ensign Moucher, "to slay outright with a single glance. I myself am long since doubly dead," he added with his mealy-mouthed laugh, and his mean reddish eyes a-flickering at Lady Johnson.

Sir John, who was carving a roast of butcher's meat, carved on, though his young wife ventured a glance at him – a sad, timid look as though hopeful that her husband might betray some interest when other men said gallant things to her.

I asked Sir John's permission to offer a toast, and he gave it with cold politeness.

"To the two cruellest and loveliest creatures alive in a love-stricken world," said I. "Gentlemen, I offer you our charming tyrants. And may our heads remain ever in the dust and their silken shoon upon our necks!"

All drank standing. The Seneca gulped his Madeira like a slobbering dog, noticing nobody, and then fell fiercely to cutting up his meat, until, his knife being in the way, he took the flesh in his two fists and gnawed it.

But nobody appeared to notice the Seneca's beastly manners; and such general complaisance preoccupied me, because Hiakatoo knew better, and it seemed as though he considered himself in a position where he might disdain to conduct suitably amid a company which, possibly, stood in need of his good will.

Nobody spoke of politics, nor did I care to introduce such a subject. Conversation was general; matters concerning the town, the Hall, were mentioned, together with such topics as are usually discussed among land owners in time of peace.

And it seemed to me that Sir John, who had, as usual, remained coldly reticent among his guests, became of a sudden conversational with a sort of forced animation, like a man who recollects that he has a part to play and who unwillingly attempts it.

He spoke of the Hall farm, and of how he meant to do this with this part and that with that part; and how the herd bulls were now become useless and he must send to the Patroon for new blood, – all a mere toneless and mechanical babble, it seemed to me, and without interest or sincerity.

Once, sipping my claret, I thought I heard a faint clash of arms outside and in the direction of the guard-house.

And another time it seemed to me that many horses were stirring somewhere outside in the darkness.

I could not conceive of anything being afoot, because of Sir John's parole, and so presently dismissed the incidents from my mind.

The wine had somewhat heated the men; laughter was louder, speech less guarded. Young Watts spoke boldly of Haldimand and Guy Carleton, naming them as the two most efficient servants that his Majesty had in Canada.

Nobody, however, had the effrontery to mention Guy Johnson in my presence, but Ensign Moucher pretended to discuss a probable return of old John Butler and of his son Walter to our neighborhood, – to hoodwink me, I think, – but his mealy manner and the false face he pulled made me the more wary.

The wine burned in Hiakatoo, but he never looked toward me nor directly at anybody out of his blank red eyes of a panther.

Sir John had become a little drunk and slopped his wine-glass, but the wintry smile glimmered on his thin lips as though some secret thought contented him, and he was ever whispering with Captain Watts.

But he spoke always of the coming summer and of his cattle and fields and the pursuits of peace, saying that he had no interest in Haldimand nor in any kinsmen who had fled Tryon; and that all he desired was to be let alone at the Hall, and not bothered by Phil Schuyler.

"For," says he, emptying his glass with unsteady hand, "I've enough to do to feed my family and my servants and collect my rents; and I'm damned if I can do it unless those excitable gentlemen in Albany mind their own business as diligently as I wish to mind mine."

"Surely, Sir John," said I, "nobody wishes to annoy you, because it is the universal desire that you remain. And, as you have pledged your honour to do so, only a fool would attempt to make more difficult your position among us."

"Oh, there are fools, too," said he in his slow voice. "There were fools who supposed that the Six Nations would not resent ill treatment meted out to Guy Johnson." His cold gaze rested for a second upon Hiakatoo, then swept elsewhere.

Preoccupied, I heard Claudia's voice in my ear:

"Do you take no pleasure any longer in looking at me, Jack! You have paid me very scant notice tonight."

I turned, smilingly made her a compliment, and she was now gazing into the little looking-glass set in the handle of her French fan, and her dimpled hand busy with her hair.

"Polly's Irish maid dressed my hair," she remarked. "I would to God I had as clever a wench. Could you discover one to wait on me?"

Hare, who had no warrant for familiarity, as far as I was concerned, nevertheless called out with a laugh that I knew every wench in the countryside and should find a pretty one very easily to serve Claudia.

Which pleasantry did not please me; but Ensign Moucher and young Watts bore him out, and they all fell a-laughing, discussing with little decency such wenches as the two Wormwood girls near Fish House, and Betsy and Jessica Browse – maids who were pretty and full of gaiety at dance or frolic, and perhaps a trifle free in manners, but of whom I knew no evil and believed none whatever the malicious gossip concerning them.

The gallantries of such men as Sir John and Walter Butler were known to everybody in the country; and so were the carryings on of all the younger gentry and the officers from Johnstown to Albany. Young girls' names – the daughters of tenants, settlers, farmers, were bandied about carelessly enough; and the names of those famed for beauty, or a lively disposition, had become more or less familiar to me.

Yet, for myself, my escapades had been harmless enough – a pretty maid kissed at a quilting, perhaps; another courted lightly at a barn-romp; a laughing tavern wench caressed en passant, but no evil thought of it and nothing to regret – no need to remember aught that could start a tear in any woman's eyes.

Watts said to Claudia: "There is a maid at Caughnawaga who serves old Douw Fonda – a Scotch girl, who might serve you as well as Flora cares for my sister."

"Penelope Grant!" exclaims Hare with an oath. Whereat these three young men fell a-laughing, and even Sir John leered.

I had heard her name and that the careless young gallants of the country were all after this young Scotch girl, servant to Douw Fonda – but I had never seen her.

"She lives with the old gentleman, does she not?" inquired Claudia with a shrug.

"She cares for him, dresses him, cooks for him, reads to him, sews, mends, lights him to bed and tucks him in," said Hare. "My God, what a wife she'd make for a farmer! Or a mistress for a gentleman."

"A wench I would employ very gladly," quoth Claudia, frowning. "Could you get her ear, Jack, and fetch her?"

"Take her from Douw Fonda?" I exclaimed in surprise.

"The old man is like to die any moment," remarked Watts.

"Besides," said Moucher, "he has scores of kinsmen and their women to take him in charge."

"She's a pretty bit o' baggage," said Sir John drunkenly. "If you but kiss the little slut she looks at you like a silly kitten, and, I think, with no more sense or comprehension."

Captain Watts darted an angry look at his brother-in-law but said nothing.

Lady Johnson's features were burning and her lip quivered, but she forced a laugh, saying that her husband could have judged only by hearsay, and that the Scotch girl's reputation was still very good in the country.

"Somebody'll get her," retorted Sir John, thickly, "for they're all a-pestering – Walter Butler, too, when he was here, – and your brother, and Hare and Moucher yonder. The little slut has yellow hair, but she's too damned thin! –" he hiccupped and upset his wine; and a servant wiped his neck-

cloth and his silk and silver waistcoat while he, with wagging and unsteady head, gazed gravely down at the damage done.

Claudia set her lips to my ear: "The beast! – to affront his wife!" she whispered. "Tell me, do you, also, go about your rustic gallantries in the shameful manner of these educated and Christian gentlemen?"

"I seek no woman's destruction," said I drily.

"Not even mine?" She laughed as I reddened, and tapped me with her fan.

"If our young men do not turn this Scotch girl's head with their philandering, send her to me and I will use her kindly."

"You would not seduce her from an old and almost helpless man who needs her?" I demanded.

"I find my servants where I can in such days as these," said she coolly. "And there are plenty to care for old Douw Fonda in Caughnawaga, but only an accomplished wench like Penelope Grant would I trust to do my hair and lace me. Will you send this girl to me?"

"No, I won't," said I bluntly. "I shall not charge myself with such an errand, even for you. It is not a decent thing you ask of me or of the wench, either."

"It is decent," retorted Claudia pettishly. "If she's as pretty a baggage as is reported, some of our young fools will never let her alone until one among them turns her silly head. Whereas the girl would be safe with me."

"That is not my affair," I remarked.

"Do you wish her harm?"

"I tell you she is no concern of mine. And if she's not a hopeless fool she'll know how to trust the gentry of County Tryon."

"You are of them, too, Jack," she said maliciously.

"I am a plain farmer and I trouble no woman."

"You trouble me," she insisted sweetly.

I laughed, not agreeably.

"You do so," she repeated. "I would you had courage to court me again."

"Do you mean courage or inclination, Claudia?"

She gave me a melting look, very sweet, and a trifle sad.

"With patience," she murmured, "you might awaken both our hearts."

"I know well what I'd awaken in you," said I; "I'd awaken the devil. No; I've had my chance."

She sighed, still looking at me, and I awaited her further assault, grimly armed with memories.

But ere she could speak, Hiakatoo lurched to his feet and stood towering there unsteadily, his burning gaze fixed on space.

Whereat Sir John, now very tight and very drowsy, opened owlsh eyes; and Hare took the Seneca by the arm.

"If you desire to go," said he, "here are three of us ready to ride beside you."

Moucher, too, stood up, and so did Captain Watts; but they were not in their cups. Watts took Hiakatoo's blanket from a servant and cast it over the tall warrior's shoulders.

"The Western Gate of the Confederacy lies unguarded," explained Hare to us all, in his frank, amiable manner. "The great Gate Keeper, Hiakatoo, bids you all farewell. Duty calls him toward the setting sun."

All had now risen from the table. Hiakatoo lurched past us and out into the hallway; Hare and Moucher and Watts took smiling leave of Sir John; the ladies gave them all a courteous farewell. Hare, passing, said to me:

"To any who enquire you can answer pat enough to make an end to foolish rumours concerning any meditated flight of this family."

"My answer," said I quietly, "is always the same: Sir William's son has given his parole."

They went out after their Indian, which disturbed me greatly, as I could not account for Hiakattoo's presence at Johnstown, and I was ill at ease seeing him so apparently in charge of three known Tories, and one of them a deputy of Guy Johnson.

However, I took my leave of Sir John, who gave me a wavering hand and stared at me blankly. Then I kissed the ladies' hands and went out to the porch where Billy waited with my mare, Kaya.

Lady Johnson came to the door as I mounted.

"Don't forget us when again you are in Johnstown," she said.

Claudia, too, appeared and stepped daintily out on the dewy grass, lifting her petticoat.

"What a witching night," she exclaimed mischievously, " – what a night for love! Do you mark the young moon, Jack, and how all the dark is saturated with a sweet smell of new buds?"

"I mark it all," said I, laughing, "and, as for love, why, I love it all, Claudia, – moon, darkness, scent of young leaves, the far forest still as death, and the noise of the brook yonder."

"I meant a sweeter love," quoth she, coming to my stirrup and laying both hands upon my saddle.

"There is no sweeter love," said I, still laughing, " – none happier than the love of this silvery world of night which God made to heal us of the blows of day."

"Whither do you ride, Jack?"

"Homeward."

"To Fonda's Bush?"

"Yes."

"Directly home?"

"I have a comrade – " said I. "He awaits me on the Mayfield Road."

"Why do you ride by Mayfield?"

"Because he waits for me there."

"Why, Jack?"

"He has friends to visit – "

"At Mayfield?"

"At Pigeon-Wood," I muttered.

"More gallantry!" she said, tossing her head. "But young men must have their fling, and I am not jealous of Betsy Browse or of her pretty sister, so that you ride not toward Caughnawaga – "

"What?"

"To see this rustic beauty, Penelope Grant – "

"Have I not refused to seek her for you?" I demanded.

"Yes, but not for yourself, Jack! Curiosity killed a cat and started a young man on his travels!"

Exasperated by her malice I struck my mare's flanks with moccasined heels; and as I rode out into the darkness Claudia's gaily mocking laugh floated after me on the still, sweet air.

CHAPTER VI

RUSTIC GALLANTRY

There were few lanterns and fewer candle lights in Johnstown; sober folk seemed to be already abed; only a constable, Hugh McMonts, stood in the main street, leaning upon his pike as I followed the new moon out of town and down into a dark and lovely land where all was still and fragrant and dim as the dreams of those who lie down contented with the world.

Now, as I jogged along on my mare, Kaya, over a well-levelled road, my mind was very full of what I had seen and heard at Johnson Hall.

One thing seemed clear to me; there could be no foundation for any untoward rumours regarding Sir John, – no fear that he meant to shame his honoured name and flee to Canada to join Guy Johnson and his Indians and the Tryon County Tories who already had fled.

No; Sir John was quietly planning his summer farming. All seemed tranquil at the Hall. And I could not find it in my nature to doubt his pledged word, nor believe that he was plotting mischief.

Still, it had staggered me somewhat to see Hiakattoo there in his ceremonial paint, as though the fire were still burning at Onondaga. But I concluded that the Seneca War Chief had come on some private affair and not for his nation, because a chief does not travel alone upon a ceremonial mission. No; this Indian had arrived to talk privately with Hare, who, no doubt, now represented Guy Johnson's late authority among the Johnstown Tories.

Thinking over these matters, I jogged into the Mayfield road; and as I passed in between the tall wayside bushes, without any warning at all two shadowy horsemen rode out in front of me and threw their horses across my path, blocking it.

Instantly my hand flew to my hatchet, but at that same moment one of the tall riders laughed, and I let go my war-axe, ashamed.

"It's John Drogue!" said a voice I recognized, as I pushed my mare close to them and peered into their faces; and I discovered that these riders were two neighbors of mine, Godfrey Shew of Fish House, and Joe de Golyer of Varick's.

"What frolic is this?" I demanded, annoyed to see their big pistols resting on their thighs and their belted hatchets loosened from the fringed sheaths.

"No frolic," answered Shew soberly, "though Joe may find it a matter for his French mirth."

"Why do you stop folk at night on the King's highway?" I inquired curiously of de Golyer.

"Voyons, l'ami Jean," he replied gaily, "Sir Johnson and his Scottish bare-shanks, they have long time stop us on their sacré King's highway. Now, in our turn, we stop them, by gar! Oui, nom de dieu! And we shall see what we shall see, and we shall catch in our little trap what shall step into it, pardieu!"

Shew said in his heavy voice: "Our authorities in Albany have concluded to watch, for smuggled arms, the roads leading to Johnstown, Mr. Drogue."

"Do they fear treachery at the Hall?"

"They do not know what is going on at the Hall. But there are rumours abroad concerning the running in of arms for the Highlanders, and the constant passing of messengers between Canada and Johnstown."

"I have but left the Hall," said I. "I saw nothing to warrant suspicion." And I told them who were there and how they conducted at supper.

Shew said with an oath that Lieutenant Hare was a dangerous man, and that he hoped a warrant for him would be issued.

"As for the Indian, Hiakatoo," he went on, "he's a surly and cunning animal, and a fierce one as are all Senecas. I do not know what has brought him to Johnstown, nor why Moucher was there, nor Steve Watts."

"Young Watts, no doubt, came to visit his sister," said I. "That is natural, Mr. Shew."

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt," grumbled Shew. "You, Mr. Drogue, are one of those gentlemen who seem trustful of the honour of all gentlemen. And for every gentleman who *is* one, the next is a blackguard. I do not contradict you. No, sir. But we plain folk of Tryon think it wisdom to watch gentlemen like Sir John Johnson."

"I am as plain a man as you are," said I, "but I am not able to doubt the word of honour given by the son of Sir William Johnson."

De Golyer laughed and asked me which way I rode, and I told him.

"Nick Stoner also went Mayfield way," said Shew with a shrug. "I think he unsaddled at Pigeon-Wood."

They wheeled their horses into the bushes with gestures of adieu; I shook my bridle, and my mare galloped out into the sandy road again.

The sky was very bright with that sweet springtime lustre which comes not alone from the moon but also from a million million unseen stars, all a-shining behind the purple veil of night.

Presently I heard the Mayfield creek babbling like a dozen laughing lasses, and rode along the bushy banks looking up at the mountains to the north.

They are friendly little mountains which we call the Mayfield Hills, all rising into purple points against the sky, like the waves on Lake Ontario, and so tumbling northward into the grim jaws of the Adirondacks, which are different – not sinister, perhaps, but grim and stolid peaks, ever on guard along the Northern wilderness.

Long, still reaches of the creek stretched away, unstarred by rising trout because of the lateness of the night. Only a heron's croak sounded in the darkness; there were no lights where I knew the Mayfield settlement to be.

Already I saw the grist mill, with its dusky wheel motionless; and, to the left, a frame house or two and several log-houses set in cleared meadows, where the vast ramparts of the forest had been cut away.

Now, there was a mile to gallop eastward along a wet path toward Summer House Point; and in a little while I saw the long, low house called Pigeon-Wood, which sat astride o' the old Iroquois war trail to the Sacandaga and the Canadas.

It was a heavy house of hewn timber and smoothed with our blue clay, which cuts the sandy loam of Tryon in great streaks.

There was no light in the windows, but the milky lustre of the heavens flooded all, and there, upon the rail fence, I did see Nick Stoner a-kissing of Betsy Browse.

They heard my horse and fluttered down from the fence like two robins, as I pulled up and dismounted.

"Hush!" said the girl, who was bare of feet and her gingham scarce pinned decently; and laid her finger on her lips as she glanced toward the house.

"The old man is back," quoth Nick, sliding a graceless arm around her. "But he sleeps like an ox." And, to Betsy, "Whistle thy little sister from her nest, sweetheart. For there are no gallants in Tryon to match with my comrade, John Drogue!"

Which did not please me to hear, for I had small mind for rustic gallantry; but Martha pursed her lips and whistled thrice; and presently the house door opened without any noise.

She was a healthy, glowing wench, half confident, half coquette, like a playful forest thing in springtime, when all things mate.

And her sister, Jessica, was like her, only slimmer, who came across the starlit grass rubbing both eyes with her little fists, like a child roused from sleep, – a shy, smiling, red-lipped thing, who gave me her hand and yawned.

And presently went to where my mare stood to pet her and pull the new, wet grass and feed her tid-bits.

I did not feel awkward, yet knew not how to conduct or what might be expected of me at this star-dim rendezvous with a sleepy, woodland beauty.

But she seemed in nowise disconcerted after a word or two; drew my arm about her; put up her red mouth to be kissed, and then begged to be lifted to my saddle.

Here she sat astride and laughed down at me through her tangled hair. And:

"I have a mind to gallop to Fish House," said she, "only that it might prove a lonely jaunt."

"Shall I come, Jessica?"

"Will you do so?"

I waited till the blood cooled in my veins; and by that time she had forgotten what she had been about – like any other forest bird.

"You have a fine mare, Mr. Drogue," said she, gently caressing Kaya with her naked heels. "No rider better mounted passes Pigeon-Wood."

"Do many riders pass, Jessica?"

"Sir John's company between Fish House and the Hall."

"Any others lately?"

"Yes, there are horsemen who ride swiftly at night. We hear them."

"Who may they be?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Sir John's people?"

"Very like."

"Coming from the North?"

"Yes, from the North."

"Have they waggons to escort?"

"I have heard waggons, too."

"Lately?"

"Yes." She leaned down from the saddle and rested both hands on my shoulders:

"Have you no better way to please than in catechizing me, John Drogue?" she laughed. "Do you know what lips were fashioned for except words?"

I kissed her, and, still resting her hands on my shoulders, she looked down into my eyes.

"Are you of Sir John's people?" she asked.

"Of them, perhaps, but not now with them, Jessica."

"Oh. The other party?"

"Yes."

"You! A Boston man?"

"Nick and I, both."

"Why?"

"Because we design to live as free as God made us, and not as king-fashioned slaves."

"Oh, la!" quoth she, opening her eyes wide, "you use very mighty words to me, Mr. Drogue. There are young men in red coats and gilt lace on their hats who would call you rebel."

"I am."

"No," she whispered, putting both arms around my neck. "You are a pretty boy and no Yankee! I do not wish you to be a Boston rebel."

"Are all your lovers King's men?"

"My lovers?"

"Yes."

"Are you one?"

At which I laughed and lifted the saucy wench from my saddle, and stood so in the starlight, her arms still around my neck.

"No," said I, "I never had a sweetheart, and, indeed, would not know how to conduct – "

"We could learn."

But I only laughed, disengaging her arms, and passing my own around her supple waist.

"Listen," said I, "Nick and I mean no harm in a starlit frolic, where we tarry for a kiss from a pretty maid."

"No harm?"

"Neither that nor better, Jessica. Nor do you; and I know that very well. With me it's a laugh and a kiss and a laugh; and into my stirrups and off... And you are young and soft and sweet as new maple-sap in the snow. But if you dream like other little birds, of nesting – "

"May a lass not dream in springtime?"

"Surely. But let it end so, too."

"In dreams."

"It is wiser."

"There is no wisdom in me, pretty boy in buckskin. And I love thrums better than red-coats and lace."

"Love spinning better than either!"

"Oh, la! He preaches of wheels and spindles when my mouth aches for a kiss!"

"And mine," said I, " – but my legs ache more for my saddle; and I must go."

At that moment when I said adieu with my lips, and she did not mean to unlink her arms, came Nick on noiseless tread to twitch my arm. And, "Look," said he, pointing toward the long, low rampart of Maxon Ridge.

I turned, my hand still retaining Jessica's: and saw the Iroquois signal-flame mount thin and high, tremble, burn red against the stars, then die there in the darkness.

Northward another flame reddened on the hills, then another, fire answering fire.

"What the devil is this?" growled Nick. "These are no times for Indians to talk to one another with fire."

"Get into your saddle," said I, "and we shall ride by Varick's, for I've a mind to see what will-o'-the-wisps may be a-dancing over the great Vlaie!"

So the tall lad took his leave of his little pigeon of Pigeon-Wood, who seemed far from willing to let him loose; and I made my adieux to Jessica, who stood a-pouting; and we mounted and set off at a gallop for Varick's, by way of Summer House Point.

I could not be certain, but it seemed to me that there was a light at the Point, which came through the crescents from behind closed shutters; but that was within reason, Sir John being at liberty to keep open the hunting lodge if he chose.

As for the Drowned Lands, as far as we could see through the night there was not a spark over that desolate wilderness.

The Mohawk fires on the hills, too, had died out. Fish House, if still burning candles, was too far away to see; we galloped through Varick's, past the mill where, from its rocky walls, Frenchman's Creek roared under the stars; then turned west along the Brent-Meester's trail toward Fonda's Bush and home.

"Those Iroquois fires trouble me mightily," quoth Nick, pushing his lank horse forward beside my mare.

"And me," said I.

"Why should they talk with fire on the night Hiakatoo comes to the Hall?"

"I do not know," said I. "But when I am home I shall write it in a letter to Albany that this night the Mohawks have talked among themselves with fire, and that a Seneca was present."

"And that mealy-mouthed Ensign, Moucher; and Hare and Steve Watts!"

"I shall so write it," said I, very seriously.

"Good!" cried he with a jolly slap on his horse's neck. "But the sweeter part of this night's frolic you and I shall carry locked in our breasts. Eh, John? By heaven, is she not fresh and pink as a dewy strawberry in June – my pretty little wench? Is she not apt as a school-learned lass with any new lesson a man chooses to teach?"

"Yes, too apt, perhaps," said I, shaking my head but laughing. "But I think they have had already a lesson or two in such frolics, less innocent, perhaps, than the lesson we gave."

"I'll break the back of any red-coat who stops at Pigeon-Wood!" cried Nick Stoner with an oath. "Yes, red-coat or any other colour, either!"

"You would not take our frolic seriously, would you, Nick?"

"I take all frolics seriously," said he with a gay laugh, smiting both thighs, and his bridle loose. "Where I place my mark with my proper lips, let roving gallants read and all roysterers beware! – even though I so mark a dozen pretty does!"

"A very Turk," said I.

"An antlered stag in the blue-coat that brooks no other near his herd!" cried he with a burst of laughter. And fell to smiting his thighs and tossing up both arms, riding like a very centaur there, with his hair flowing and his thrums streaming in the starlight.

And, "Lord God of Battles!" he cried out to the stars, stretching up his powerful young arms. "Thou knowest how I could love tonight; but dost Thou know, also, how I could fight if I had only a foe to destroy with these two empty hands!"

"Thou murderous Turk!" I cried in his ear. "Pray, rather, that there shall be no war, and no foe more deadly than the pretty wench of Pigeon-Wood!"

"Love or war, I care not!" he shouted in his spring-tide frenzy, galloping there unbridled, his lean young face in the wind. "But God send the one or the other to me very quickly – or love or war – for I need more than a plow or axe to content my soul afire!"

"Idiot!" said I, "have done a-yelling! You wake every owl in the bush!"

And above his youth-maddened laughter I heard the weird yelping of the forest owls as though the Six Nations already were in their paint, and blood fouled every trail.

So we galloped into Fonda's Bush, pulling up before my door; but Nick would not stay the night and must needs gallop on to his own log house, where he could blanket and stall his tired and sweating horse – I owning only the one warm stall.

"Well," says he, still slapping his thighs where he sat his saddle as I dismounted, and his young face still aglow in the dim, silvery light, " – well, John, I shall ride again, one day, to Pigeon-Wood. Will you ride with me?"

"I think not."

"And why?"

But, standing by my door, bridle in hand, I slowly shook my head.

"There is no prettier bit o' baggage in County Tryon than Jessica Browse," he insisted – "unless, perhaps, it be that Scotch girl at Caughnawaga, whom all the red-coats buzz about like sap flies around a pan."

"And who may this Scotch lassie be?" I asked with a smile, and busy, now, unsaddling.

"I mean the new servant to old Douw Fonda."

"I have not noticed her."

"You have not seen the Caughnawaga girl?"

"No. I remain incurious concerning servants," said I, drily.

"Is it so!" he laughed. "Well, then, – for all that they have a right to gold binding on their hats, – the gay youth of Johnstown, yes, and of Schenectady, too, have not remained indifferent to the Scotch girl of Douw Fonda, Penelope Grant!"

I shrugged and lifted my saddle.

"Every man to his taste," said I. "Some eat woodchucks, some porcupines, and others the tail of a beaver. Venison smacks sweeter to me."

Nick laughed again. "When she reads the old man to sleep and takes her knitting to the porch, you should see the ring of gallants every afternoon a-courting her! – and their horses tied to every tree around the house as at a quilting!

"But there's no quilting frolic; no supper; no dance; – nothing more than a yellow-haired slip of a wench busy knitting there in the sun, and looking at none o' them but intent on her needles and with that faint smile she wears – "

"Go court her," said I, laughing; and led my mare into her warm stall.

"You'll court her yourself, one day!" he shouted after me, as he gathered bridle. "And if you do, God help you, John Drogue, for they say she's a born disturber of quiet men's minds, and mistress of a very mischievous and deadly art!"

"What art?" I laughed.

"The art o' love!" he bawled as he rode off, slapping his thighs and setting the moonlit woods all a-ringing with his laughter.

CHAPTER VII

BEFORE THE STORM

Johnny Silver had ridden my mare to Varick's to be shod, the evening previous, and was to remain the night and return by noon to Fonda's Bush.

It was the first sunny May day of the year, murmurous with bees, and a sweet, warm smell from woods and cleared lands.

Already bluebirds were drifting from stump to stump, and robins, which had arrived in April before the snow melted, chirped in the furrows of last autumn's plowing.

Also were flying those frail little grass-green moths, earliest harbingers of vernal weather, so that observing folk, versed in the pretty signals which nature displays to acquaint us of her designs, might safely prophesy soft skies.

I was standing in my glebe just after sunrise, gazing across my great cleared field – I had but one then, all else being woods – and I was thinking about my crops, how that here should be sown buckwheat to break and mellow last year's sod; and here I should plant corn and Indian squashes, and yonder, God willing, potatoes and beans.

And I remember, now, that I presently fell to whistling the air of "The Little Red Foot," while I considered my future harvest; and was even planning to hire of Andrew Bowman his fine span of white oxen for my spring plowing; when, of a sudden, through the May woods there grew upon the air a trembling sound, distant and sad. Now it sounded louder as the breeze stirred; now fainter when it shifted, so that a mournful echo only throbbed in my ears.

It was the sound of the iron bell ringing on the new Block House at Mayfield.

The carelessly whistled tune died upon my lips; my heart almost ceased for a moment, then violently beat the alarm.

I ran to a hemlock stump in the field, where my loaded rifle rested, and took it up and looked at the priming powder, finding it dry and bright.

A strange stillness had fallen upon the forest; there was no sound save that creeping and melancholy quaver of the bell. The birds had become quiet; the breeze, too, died away; and it was as though each huge tree stood listening, and that no leaf dared stir.

As a dark cloud gliding between earth and sun quenches the sky's calm brightness, so the bell's tolling seemed to transform the scene about me to a sunless waste, through which the dread sound surged in waves, like the complaint of trees before a storm.

Standing where my potatoes had been hoed the year before, I listened a moment longer to the dreary mourning of the bell, my eyes roving along the edges of the forest which, like a high, green rampart, enclosed my cleared land on every side.

Then I turned and went swiftly to my house, snatched blanket from bed, spread it on the puncheon floor, laid upon it a sack of new bullets, a new canister of powder, a heap of buckskin scraps for wadding, a bag of salt, another of parched corn, a dozen strips of smoked venison.

Separately on the blanket beside these I placed two pair of woollen hose, two pair of new ankle moccasins, an extra pair of deer-skin leggins, two cotton shirts, a hunting shirt of doe-skin, and a fishing line and hooks. These things I rolled within my blanket, making of everything a strapped pack.

Then I pulled on my District Militia regimentals, which same was a hunting shirt of tow-cloth, spatter-dashes of the same, and a felt hat, cocked.

Across the breast of my tow-cloth hunting-shirt I slung a bullet-pouch, a powder-horn and a leather haversack; seized my light hatchet and hung it to my belt, hoisted the blanket pack to my shoulders and strapped it there; and, picking up rifle and hunting knife, I passed swiftly out of the

house, fastening the heavy oaken door behind me and wondering whether I should ever return to open it again.

The trodden forest trail, wide enough for a team to pass, lay straight before me due west, through heavy woods, to Andrew Bowman's farm.

When I came into the cleared land, I perceived Mrs. Bowman washing clothing in a spring near the door of her log house, and the wash a-bleaching in the early sun. When she saw me she called to me across the clearing:

"Have you news for me, John Drogue?"

"None," said I. "Where is your man, Martha?"

"Gone away to Stoner's with pack and rifle. He is but just departed. Is it only a drill call, or are the Indians out at the Lower Castle?"

"I know nothing," said I. "Are you alone in the house?"

"A young kinswoman, Penelope Grant, servant to old Douw Fonda, arrived late last night with my man from Caughnawaga, and is still asleep in the loft."

As she spoke a girl, clothed only in her shift, came to the open door of the log house. Her naked feet were snow-white; her hair, yellow as October-corn, seemed very thick and tangled.

She stood blinking as though dazzled, the glory of the rising sun in her face; then the tolling of the tocsin swam to her sleepy ears, and she started like a wild thing when a shot is fired very far away.

And, "What is that sound?" she exclaimed, staring about her; and I had never seen a woman's eyes so brown under such yellow hair.

She stepped out into the fresh grass and stood in the dew listening, now gazing at the woods, now at Martha Bowman, and now upon me.

Speech came to me with an odd sort of anger. I said to Mrs. Bowman, who stood gaping in the sunshine:

"Where are your wits? Take that child into the house and bar your shutters and draw water for your tubs. And keep your door bolted until some of the militia can return from Stoner's."

"Oh, my God," said she, and fell to snatching her wash from the bushes and grass.

At that, the girl Penelope turned and looked at me. And I thought she was badly frightened until she spoke.

"Young soldier," said she, "do you know if Sir John has fled?"

"I know nothing," said I, "and am like to learn less if you women do not instantly go in and bar your house."

"Are the Mohawks out?" she asked.

"Have I not said I do not know?"

"Yes, sir... But I should have escort by the shortest route to Cayadutta – "

"You talk like a child," said I, sharply. "And you seem scarcely more," I added, turning away. But I lingered still to see them safely bolted in before I departed.

"Soldier," she began timidly; but I interrupted:

"Go fill your tubs against fire-arrows," said I. "Why do you loiter?"

"Because I have great need to return to Caughnawaga. Will you guide me the shortest way by the woods?"

"Do you not hear that bell?" I demanded angrily.

"Yes, sir, I hear it. But I should go to Cayadutta – "

"And I should answer that militia call," said I impatiently. "Go in and lock the house, I tell you!"

Mrs. Bowman, her arms full of wet linen, ran into the house. The girl, Penelope, gazed at the woods.

"I am servant to a very old man," she said, twisting her linked fingers. "I can not abandon him! I can not let him remain all alone at Cayadutta Lodge. Will you take me to him?"

"And if I were free of duty," said I, "I would not take you or any other woman into those accursed woods!"

"Why not, sir?"

"Because I do not yet comprehend what that bell is telling me. And if it means that there is a painted war-party out between the Sacandaga and the Mohawk, I shall not take you to Caughnawaga when I return from Stoner's, and that's flat!"

"I am not afraid to go," said she. But I think I saw her shudder; and her face seemed very still and white. Then Mrs. Bowman ran out of the house and caught the girl by her homespun shift.

"Come indoors!" she cried shrilly, "or will you have us all pulling war arrows out of our bodies while you stand blinking at the woods and gossiping with Jack Drogue?"

The girl shook herself free, and asked me again to take her to Cayadutta Lodge.

But I had no more time to argue, and I flung my rifle to my shoulder and started out across the cleared land.

Once I looked back. And I saw her still standing there, the rising sun bright on her tangled hair, and her naked feet shining like silver in the dew-wet grass.

By a spring path I hastened to the house of John Putman, and found him already gone and his family drawing water and fastening shutters.

His wife, Deborah, called to me saying that the Salisburys should be warned, and I told her that I had already spoken to the Bowmans.

"Your labour for your pains, John Drogue!" cried she. "The Bowmans are King's people and need fear neither Tory nor Indian!"

"It is unjust to say so, Deborah," I retorted warmly. "Dries Bowman is already on his way to answer the militia call!"

"Watch him!" she said, slamming the shutters; and fell to scolding her children, who, poor things, were striving at the well with dripping bucket too heavy for their strength.

So I drew the water they might need if, indeed, it should prove true that Little Abe's Mohawks at the Lower Castle had painted themselves and were broken loose; and then I ran back along the spring path to the Salisbury's, and found them already well bolted in, and their man gone to Stoner's with rifle and pack.

And now comes Johnny Silver, who had ridden my mare from Varick's, but had no news, all being tranquil along Frenchman's Creek, and nobody able to say what the Block House bell was telling us.

"Did you stable Kaya?" I asked.

"Oui, mon garce! I have bolt her in tight!"

"Good heavens," said I, "she can not remain bolted in to starve if I am sent on to Canada! Get you forward to Stoner's house and say that I delay only to fetch my horse!"

The stout little French trapper flung his piece to his shoulder and broke into a dog-trot toward the west.

"Follow quickly, Sieur Jean!" he called gaily. "By gar, I have smell Iroquois war paint since ver' long time already, and now I smell him strong as old dog fox!"

I turned and started back through the woods as swiftly as I could stride.

As I came in sight of my log house, I was astounded to see my mare out and saddled, and a woman setting foot to stirrup. As I sprang out of the edge of the woods and ran toward her, she wheeled Kaya, and I saw that it was the Caughnawaga wench in *my* saddle and upon *my* horse – her yellow hair twisted up and shining like a Turk's gold turban above her bloodless face.

"What do you mean!" I cried in a fury. "Dismount instantly from that mare! Do you hear me?"

"I must ride to Caughnawaga!" she called out, and struck my mare with both heels so that the horse bounded away beyond my reach.

Exasperated, I knew not what to do, for I could not hope to overtake the mad wench afoot; and so could only shout after her.

However, she drew bridle and looked back; but I dared not advance from where I stood, lest she gallop out of hearing at the first step.

"This is madness!" I called to her across the field. "You do not know why that bell is ringing at Mayfield. A week since the Mohawks were talking to one another with fires on all these hills! There may be a war party in yonder woods! There may be more than one betwixt here and Caughnawaga!"

"I cannot desert Mr. Fonda at such a time," said she with that same pale and frightened obstinacy I had encountered at Bowman's.

"Do you wish to steal my horse!" I demanded.

"No, sir... It is not meant so. If some one would guide me afoot I would be glad to return to you your horse."

"Oh. And if not, then you mean to ride there in spite o' the devil. Is that the situation?"

"Yes, sir."

Had it been any man I would have put a bullet in him; and could have easily marked him where I pleased. Never had I been in colder rage; never had I felt so helpless. And every moment I was afeard the crazy girl would ride on.

"Will you parley?" I shouted.

"Parley?" she repeated. "How so, young soldier?"

"In this manner, then: I engage my honour not to seize your bridle or touch you or my horse if you will sit still till I come up with you."

She sat looking at me across the fallow field in silence.

"I shall not use violence," said I. "I shall try only to find some way to serve you, and yet to do my own duty, too."

"Soldier," she replied in a troubled voice, "is this the very truth you speak?"

"Have I not engaged my honour?" I retorted sharply.

She made no reply, but she did not stir as I advanced, though her brown eyes watched my every step.

When I stood at her stirrup she looked down at me intently, and I saw she was younger even than I had thought, and was made more like a smooth, slim boy than a woman.

"You are Penelope Grant, of Caughnawaga," I said.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know who I am?"

"No, sir."

I named myself, saying with a smile that none of my name had ever broken faith in word or deed.

"Now," I continued, "that bell calls me to duty as surely as drum or trumpet ever summoned soldier since there were wars on earth. I must go to Stoner's; I can not guide you to Caughnawaga through the woods or take you thither by road or trail. And yet, if I do not, you mean to take my horse."

"I must."

"And risk a Mohawk war party on the way?"

"I – must."

"That is very brave," said I, curbing my impatience, "but not wise. There are others of his kin to care for old Douw Fonda if war has truly come upon us here in Tryon County."

"Soldier," said she in her still voice, which I once thought had been made strange by fear, but now knew otherwise – "my honour, too, is engaged. Mr. Fonda, whom I serve, has made of me more than a servant. He uses me as a daughter; offers to adopt me; trusts his age and feebleness to me; looks to me for every need, every ministrations..."

"Soldier, I came to Dries Bowman's last night with his consent, and gave him my word to return within a week. I came to Fonda's Bush because Mr. Fonda desired me to visit the only family in America with whom I have the slightest tie of kinship – the Bowmans.

"But if war has come to us here in County Tryon, then instantly my duty is to this brave old gentleman who lives all alone in his house at Caughnawaga, and nobody except servants and black slaves to protect him if danger comes to the door."

What the girl said touched me; nor could I discern in her anything of the coquetry which Nick Stoner's story of her knitting and her ring of gallants had pictured for me.

Surely here was no rustic coquette to be flattered and courted and bedeviled by her betters – no country suck-thumb to sit a-giggling at her knitting, surfeited with honeyed words that meant destruction; – no wench to hang her head and twiddle apron while some pup of quality whispered in her ear temptations.

I said: "This is the better way. Listen. Ride my mare to Mayfield by the highway. If you learn there that the Lower Castle Indians have painted for war, there is no hope of winning through to Cayadutta Lodge. And of what use to Mr. Fonda would be a dead girl?"

"That is true," she whispered.

"Very well. And if the Mohawks are loose along the river, then you shall remain at the Block House until it becomes possible to go on. There is no other way. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you engage to do this thing? And to place my horse in safety at the Mayfield fort?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then," said I, "in my turn I promise to send aid to you at Mayfield, or come myself and take you to Cayadutta Lodge as soon as that proves possible. And I promise more; I shall endeavour to get word through to Mr. Fonda concerning your situation."

She thanked me in that odd, still voice of hers. Her eyes had the starry look of a child's – or of unshed tears.

"My mare will carry two," said I cheerfully. "Let me mount behind you and set you on the Mayfield road."

She made no reply. I mounted behind her, took the bridle from her chilled fingers, and spoke to Kaya very gaily. And so we rode across my sunlit glebe and across the sugar-bush, where the moist trail, full of ferns, stretched away toward Mayfield as straight as the bee flies.

I do not know whether it was because the wench was now fulfilling her duty, as she deemed it, and therefore had become contented in a measure, but when I dismounted she took the bridle with a glance that seemed near to a faint smile. But maybe it was her mouth that I thought fashioned in pleasant lines.

"Will you remember, soldier?" she asked, looking down at me from the saddle. "I shall wait some news of you at the Mayfield fort."

"I shall not let you remain there long abandoned," said I cheerily. "Be kind to Kaya. She has a tender mouth and an ear more sensitive still to a harsh word."

The girl laid a hand flat on my mare's neck and looked at me, the shy caress in her gesture and in her eyes.

Both were meant for my horse; and a quick kindness for this Scotch girl came into my heart.

"Take shelter at the Mayfield fort," said I, "and be very certain I shall not forget you. You may gallop all the way on this soft wood-road. Will you care for Kaya at the fort when she is unsaddled?"

A smile suddenly curved her lips.

"Yes, John Drogue," she answered, looking me in the eyes. And the next moment she was off at a gallop, her yellow hair loosened with the first bound of the horse, and flying all about her face and shoulders now, like sunshine flashing across windblown golden-rod.

Then, in her saddle, the girl turned and looked back at me, and sat so, still galloping, until she was out of sight.

And, as I stood there alone in the woodland road, I began to understand what Nick Stoner meant when he called this Scotch girl a disturber of men's minds and a mistress – all unconscious, perhaps – of a very deadly art.

CHAPTER VIII

SHEEP AND GOATS

Now, as I came again to the forest's edge and hastened along the wide logging road, to make up for moments wasted, I caught sight of two neighbors, John Putman and Herman Salisbury, walking ahead of me.

They wore the regimentals of our Mohawk Regiment of district militia, carried rifles and packs; and I smelled the tobacco from their pipes, which seemed pleasant though I had never learned to smoke.

I called to them; they heard me and waited.

"Well, John," says Putman, as I came up with them, "this is like to be a sorry business for farmers, what with plowing scarce begun and not a seed yet planted in all the Northland, barring winter wheat."

"You think we are to take the field in earnest this time?" I asked anxiously.

"It looks that way to me, Mr. Drogue. It's a long, long road to liberty, lad; and I'm thinking we're off at last."

"He believes," explained Salisbury, "that Little Abraham's Mohawks are leaving the Lower Castle – which God prevent! – but I think this business is liker to be some new deviltry of Sir John's."

"Sir John gave his parole to General Schuyler," said I, turning very red; for I was mortified that the honour of my caste should be so carelessly questioned.

"It is not unthinkable that Sir John might lie," retorted Salisbury bluntly. "I knew his father. Well and good. I know the son, also... But I suppose that gentlemen like yourself, Mr. Drogue, are ashamed to suspect the honour of any of their own class, – even an enemy."

But Putman was plainer spoken, saying that in his opinion any Tory was likely to attempt any business, however dirty, and rub up his tarnished honour afterward.

I made him no answer; and we marched swiftly forward, each engaged with a multitude of serious and sombre thoughts.

A few moments later, chancing to glance behind me, stirred by what instinct I know not, I espied two neighbors, young John, son of Philip Helmer, and Charles Cady, of Fonda's Bush, following us so stealthily and so closely that they might decently have hailed us had they been so minded.

Now, when they perceived that I had noticed them, they dodged into the bush, as though moved by some common impulse. Then they reappeared in the road. And, said I in a low voice to John Putman:

"Yonder comes slinking a proper pair o' tree-cats to sniff us to our destination. If these two be truly of the other party, then they have no business at John Stoner's."

Putman and Salisbury both looked back. Said the one, grimly:

"They are not coming to answer the militia call; they have rifles but neither regimentals nor packs."

Said the other: "I wish we were clean split at Fonda's Bush, so that an honest man might know when 'neighbor' spells 'traitor' in low Dutch."

"Some riddles are best solved by bullets," muttered the other. "Who argues with wolves or plays cat's-cradle with catamounts!"

Glancing again over my shoulder, I saw that the two behind us were mending their pace and must soon come up with us. And so they did, Putman giving them a civil good-day.

"Have you any news, John Drogue?" inquired young Helmer.

I replied that I had none to share with him, meaning only that I had no news at all. But Cady took it otherwise and his flat-featured face reddened violently, as though the pox were coming out on him.

And, "What the devil," says he, "does this young, forest-running cockerel mean? And why should he not share his news with John Helmer here, – yes, or with me, too, by God, or yet with any true man in County Tryon?"

I said that I had not intended any such meaning; that he mistook me; and that I had aimed at no discourtesy to anybody.

"And safer for you, too!" retorted Cady in a loud and threatening tone. "A boy's wisdom lies in his silence."

"Johnny Helmer asked a question of me," said I quietly. "I replied as best I knew how."

"Yes, and I'll ask a dozen questions if I like!" shouted Cady. "Don't think to bully me or cast aspersions on my political complexion!"

"If," said I, "your political complexion be no clearer than your natural one, God only can tell what ferments under your skin."

At which he seemed so taken aback that he answered nothing; but Helmer urgently demanded to know what political views I pretended to carry.

"I wear mine on my back," said I pleasantly, glancing around at both Helmer and Cady, who bore no packs on their backs in earnest of their readiness for service.

"You are a damned impudent boy!" retorted Cady, "whatever may be your politics or your complexion."

Salisbury and Putman looked around at him in troubled silence, and he said no more for the moment. But Helmer's handsome features darkened again: and, "I'll not be put upon," said he, "whatever Charlie Cady stomachs! Who is Jack Drogue to flaunt his pack and his politics under my nose!

"And," he added, looking angrily at me, "by every natural right a gentleman should be a King's man. So if your politics stink somewhat of Boston, you are doubly suspect as an ingrate to the one side and a favour-carrying servant to the other!"

I said: "Had Sir William lived to see this day in Tryon, I think he, also, would be wearing his regimentals as I do, and to the same purpose."

Cady burst into a jeering laugh: "Say as much to Sir John! Go to the Hall and say to Sir John that his father, had he lived, would this day be sending out a district militia call! Tell him that, young cockerel, if you desire a flogging at the guard-house."

"You know more of floggings than do I," said I quietly. Which stopt his mouth. For, despite my scarcity of years, I had given him a sound beating the year before, being so harassed and pestered by him because I had answered the militia-call on the day that General Schuyler marched up and disarmed Sir John's Highlanders at the Hall.

Putman, beside whom I was marching, turned to me and said, loud enough for all to hear: "You are only a lad, John Drogue, but I bear witness that you display the patience and good temper of a grown man. For if Charlie Cady, here, had picked on me as he has on you, he sure had tasted my rifle-butt before now!"

"Neighbors must bear with one another in such times," said I, "and help each other stamp down the earth where the war-axe lies buried."

And, "Damn you!" shouts Cady at a halt, "I shall not stir a step more to be insulted. I shall not budge one inch, bell or no bell, call or no call! – "

But Helmer dropped to the rear and got him by the elbow and pulled him forward; and I heard them whispering together behind us as we hastened on.

Herman Salisbury said: "A pair of real tree-cats, old Tom and little Kit! I'm in half a mind to turn them back!" And he swung his brown rifle from the shoulder and let it drop to the hollow of his left arm – an insult and a menace to any man.

"They but answer their nature, which is to nose about and smell out what's a-frying," growled Putman. "Shall we turn them back and be done with them? It will mean civil war in Fonda's Bush."

"Watched hens never lay," said I. "Let them come with us. While they remain under our eyes the stale old plan they brood will addle like a cluck-egg."

Salisbury nodded meaningly:

"So that I can see my enemy," growled he, "I have no care concerning him. But let him out o' sight and I fret like a chained beagle."

As he finished speaking we came into Stoner's clearing, which was but a thicket of dead weed-stalks in a fallow field fenced by split rails. Fallow, indeed, lay all the Stoner clearing, save for a patch o' hen-scratched garden at the log-cabin's dooryard; for old Henry Stoner and his forest-running sons were none too fond of dallying with plow and hoe while rifle and fish-pole rested across the stag-horn's crotch above the chimney-piece.

And if ever they fed upon anything other than fish and flesh, I do not know; for I never saw aught growing in their garden, save a dozen potato-vines and a stray corn-stalk full o' worms.

Around the log house in the clearing already were gathered a dozen or sixteen men, the greater number wearing the tow-cloth rifle-frock of the district militia.

Other men began to arrive as we came up. Everywhere great, sinewy hands were extended to greet us; old Henry Stoner, sprawling under an apple tree, saluted us with a harsh pleasantry; and I saw the gold rings shining in his ears.

Nick came over to where I stood, full of that devil's humour which so often urged him into – and led him safely out of – endless scrapes betwixt sun-up and moon-set every day in the year.

"It's Sir John we're to take, I hear," he said to me with a grin. "They say the lying louse of a Baronet has been secretly plotting with Guy Johnson and the Butlers in Canada. What wonder, then, that our Provincial Congress has its belly full of these same Johnstown Tories and must presently spew them up. And they say we are to march on the Hall at noon and hustle our merry Baronet into Johnstown jail."

I felt myself turning red.

"Is it not decent to give Sir John the benefit of doubt until we learn why that bell is ringing?" said I.

"There we go!" cried Nick Stoner. "Just because your father loved Sir William and you may wear gold lace on your hat, you feel an attachment to all quality. Hearken to me, John Drogue: Sir William is dead and the others are as honourable as a pack of Canada wolves." He climbed to the top of the rickety rail fence and squatted there. "The landed gentry of Tryon County are a pack of bloody wolves," said he, lighting his cob pipe; – "Guy Johnson, Colonel Claus, Walter Butler, every one of them – every one! – only excepting you, John Drogue! Look, now, where they're gathering in the Canadas – Johnsons, Butlers, McDonalds, – the whole Tory pack – with Brant and his Mohawks stole away, and Little Abraham like to follow with every warrior from the Lower Castle!

"And do you suppose that Sir John has no interest in all this Tory treachery? Do you suppose that this poisonous Baronet is not in constant and secret communication with Canada?"

I looked elsewhere sullenly. Nick took me by the arm and drew me up to a seat beside him on the rail fence.

"Let's view it soberly and fairly, Jack," says he, tapping his palm with the stem of his pipe, through which smoke oozed. "Let's view it from the start. Begin from the Boston business. Now, then! George the Virginian got the Red-coats cooped up in Boston. That's the Yankee answer to too much British tyranny.

"We, in the Northland, looked to our landed gentry to stand by us, lead us, and face the British King who aims to turn us into slaves.

"We called on our own governing class to protect us in our ancient liberties, – to arm us, lead us in our own defense! We begged Guy Johnson to hold back his savages so that the Iroquois Confederacy should remain passive and take neither the one side nor t'other.

"I grant you that Sir William in his day did loyally his uttermost to quiet the Iroquois and hold his own Mohawks tranquil when Cresap was betrayed by Dunmore, and the first breeze from this storm which is now upon us was already stirring the Six Nations into restlessness."

"Sir William," said I, "was the greatest and the best of all Americans."

He said gravely: "Sir William is dead. May God rest his soul. But this is the situation that confronts us here this day on the frontier: We appealed to the landed gentry of Tryon. They sneered at us, and spoke of us as rebels, and have used us very scornfully – all excepting yourself, John!

"They forced Alec White on us as Sheriff, and he broke up our meetings. They strove by colour of law and by illegal force to stamp out in Tryon County the last spark of liberty, of manhood among us. God knows what we have endured these last few years from the landed gentry of Tryon! – what we have put up with and stomached since the first shot was fired at Lexington!

"And what has become of our natural protectors and leaders! Where is the landed gentry of County Tryon at this very hour? Except you, John Drogue, where are our gentlemen of the Northland?"

"Gone," said I soberly.

"Gone to Canada with the murderous Indians they were supposed to hold neutral! Guy Park stands empty and locked. It is an accursed place! Guy Johnson is fled with every Tory desperado and every Indian he could muster! May God damn him!

"Old John Butler followed; and is brigading malcontents in Canada. Butlersbury stands deserted. May every devil in hell haunt that house! Young Walter Butler is gone with many of our old neighbors of Tryon; and at Niagara he is forming a merciless legion to return and cut our throats.

"And Colonel Claus is gone, and McDonald, the bloody thief! – with his kilted lunatics and all his Scotch banditti – "

"But Sir John remains," said I quietly.

"Jack! Are you truly so blinded by your caste! Did not you yourself answer the militia call last winter and march with our good General to disarm Sir John's popish Highlanders! And even then they lied – and Sir John lied – for they hid their broad-swords and pikes! and delivered them not when they paraded to ground their muskets!"

"Sir John has given his parole," I repeated stubbornly.

"Sir John breaks it every hour of the day!" cried Nick. "And he will break it again when we march to take him. Do you think he won't learn of our coming? Do you suppose he will stay at the Hall, which he has pledged his honour to do?"

"His lady is still there."

"With his lady I have no quarrel," rejoined Nick. "I know her to be a very young, very wilful, very bitter, and very unhappy Tory; and she treats us plain folk like dirt under her satin shoon. But for that I care nothing. I pity her because she is the wife of that cold, sleek beast, Sir John. I pity her because she is gently bred and frail and lonely and stuffed with childish pride o' race. I pity her lot there in the great Hall, with her girl companions and her servants and her slaves. And I pity her because everybody in County Tryon, excepting only herself, knows that Sir John cares nothing for her, and that Claire Putnam of Tribes Hill is Sir John's doxy! – and be damned to him! And you think such a man will not break his word?"

"He broke his vows to wife and mistress alike. Why should he keep his vows to men?" He slid to the ground as he spoke, and I followed, for our three drummers had formed rank and were drawing their sticks from their cross-belts. Our fifers, also, lined up behind them; and Nick and his young brother, John, took places with them.

"Fall in! Fall in!" cried Joe Scott, our captain; and everybody ran with their packs and rifles to form in double ranks of sixteen files front while the drums rolled like spring thunder, filling the woods with their hollow sound, and the fifes shrilled like the swish of rain through trees.

Standing at ease between Dries Bowman and Baltus Weed, I answered to the roll call. Some among us lighted pipes and leaned on our long rifles, chatting with neighbors; others tightened belts and straps, buttoned spatter-dashes, or placed a sprig of hemlock above the black and white cockades on their felt hats.

Balty Weed, who lived east of me, a thin fellow with red rims to his eyes and dry, sparse hair tied in a queue with a knot of buckskin, asked me in his stealthy way what I thought about our present business, and if our Provincial Congress had not, perhaps, unjustly misjudged Sir John.

I replied cautiously. I had never trusted Balty because he frequented taverns where few friends to liberty cared to assemble; and he was far too thick with Philip and John Helmer and with Charlie Cady to suit my taste.

We, in the little hamlet of Fonda's Bush, were scarce thirty families, all counted; and yet, even here in this trackless wilderness, out of which each man had hewed for himself a patch of garden and a stump pasture along the little river Kenneyto, the bitter quarrel had long smouldered betwixt Tory and Patriot – King's man and so-called Rebel.

And this was the Mohawk country. And the Mohawks stood for the King of England.

The road, I say, ended here; but there was a Mohawk path through twenty odd miles of untouched forest to those healing springs called Saratoga.

Except for this path and a deep worn war-trail north to the Sacandaga, which was the Iroquois road to Canada, and except for the wood road to Sir William's Mayfield and Fish House settlements, we of Fonda's Bush were utterly cut off. Also, save for the new Block House at Mayfield, we were unprotected in a vast wilderness which embodied the very centre of the Mohawk country.

True, north of us stood that little pleasure house built for his hour of leisure by Sir William, and called "The Summer House."

Painted white and green, it stood on a hard ridge jutting out into those dismal, drowned lands which we call the Great Vlaie. But it was not fortified.

Also, to the north, lay the Fish House, a hunting lodge of Sir William. But these places were no protection for us. On the other hand, they seemed a menace; for Tories, it had been rumoured, were ever skulking along the Vlaie and the Sacandaga; and for aught we knew, these buildings were already designed to be made into block-houses and to be garrisoned by our enemies as soon as the first rifle-shot cracked out in the cause of liberty.

Our company of the Mohawk Regiment numbered thirty-six rifles – all that now remained of the old company, three-fourths of which had already deserted to the Canadas with Butler. All our officers had fled; Joe Scott of Maxon, formerly a sergeant, now commanded us; Benjamin de Luysnes was our lieutenant; Dries Bowman and Phil Helmer our sergeants – both already suspected.

Well, we got away from Stoner's, marching in double file, and only the little creatures of the forest to hear our drums and fifes.

But the old discipline which had obtained in all our Tryon regiments when Sir William was our Major General and the landed gentry our officers seemed gone; a dull sense of bewilderment reigned, confusing many among us, as when leaderless men begin to realize how they had depended upon a sturdy staff now broken forever.

We marched with neither advanced guard nor flankers for the first half mile; then Joe Scott halted us and made Nick Stoner put away his beloved fife and sent him out on our right flank where the forest was heavy.

Me he selected to scout forward on the left – a dirty job where alders and willows grew thick above the bogs.

But why in God's name our music played to advertise our coming I can not guess, for our men needed no heartening, having courage and resolution, only the lack of officers causing them any anxiety at all.

On the left flank of the little column I kept very easily in touch because of this same silly drumming and fifing. And I was glad when we came to high ground and breasted the hills which lead to that higher plateau, over which runs the road to Johnstown.

Plodding along in the bush, keeping a keen watch for any enemy who might come in paint or in scarlet coat, and the far rhythm of our drums thumping dully in my ears, I wondered whether other companies of my regiment were marching on Johnstown, and if other Tryon regiments – or what was left of them – were also afoot that day.

Was this, then, the beginning of the war in the Northland? And, when we made a prisoner of Sir John, would all the dusky forests glow with scarlet war-paint and scarlet coats?

Today birds sang. Tomorrow the terrific panther-slogan of the Iroquois might break out into hell's own uproar among these purple hills.

Was this truly the beginning? Would these still, leafy trails where the crested partridge strutted witness bloody combats between old neighbors – all the horrors of a fratricidal war?

Would the painted men of the woods hold their hands while Tory and patriot fought it out? Or was this utter and supreme horror to be added to this unnatural conflict?

Reflecting very seriously upon these matters, I trotted forward, rifle a-trail, and saw nothing living in the woods save a big hare or two in the alders, and the wild brown poultry of the woods, that ran to cover or rose into thunderous flight among the thickets.

About four o'clock came to me Godfrey Shew, of Fish House, a private soldier like myself, with news of a halt on the Johnstown road, and orders that I eat a snack and rest in my tracks.

He told me that a company of horse from Albany was out scouting along the Mohawk, and that a column of three thousand men under Colonel Dayton were marching on Johnstown and had passed Schenectady about noon.

Other news he had none, excepting that our company was to remain where we had halted, in order to stop the road to Fonda's Bush and Saratoga, in case Sir John should attempt to retire this way.

"Well, Godfrey," said I, "if Sir John truly turns out to be without shame and honour, and if he marches this way, there is like to be a lively time for us of the Bush, because Sir John has three hundred Highlanders to thirty odd of ourselves, and enough Borderers and Tory militia to double the count."

"We all know that," said Shew calmly, "and are not afraid."

"Do you think our people mean to stand?"

"Yes," said he simply.

A hot thrill of pride tingled my every vein. Suddenly I completely comprehended that these plain folk of Fonda's Bush were my own people; that I was one of them; that, as they meant to stand for the ancient liberties of all Englishmen, now wickedly denied them, so I also meant to stand to the end.

And now, at last, I comprehended that I was in actual revolt against that King and against that nobility and gentry who were deserting us when we had so desperate need of them in this coming battle for human freedom in a slave-cursed world.

The cleavage had come at last; the Northland was clean split; the red livery of the King's men had suddenly become a target for every honest rifle in Tryon.

"Godfrey," I said, "the last chance for truce is passing as you and I stand here, – the last chance for any reconciliation and brotherly understanding between us and our Tory neighbors."

"It is better that way," he said, giving me a sombre look.

I nodded, but all the horror of civil war lay heavy in my heart and I thought of my many friends in Tryon who would wear the scarlet coat tomorrow, and whom I now must try to murder with my proper hands, lest they do the like for me.

Around us, where we were standing, a golden dusk reigned in the forest, into which, through the roof of green above, fell a long sunbeam, lighting the wooded aisle as a single candle on the altar gleams athwart the gloom of some still cathedral.

At five o'clock Godfrey and I had not moved from that silent place where we stood on watch, leaning upon our rifles.

Twice soldiers came to bid us keep close guard in these open woods which, being primeval, were clear of underbrush and deep with the brown carpet of dead leaves.

At last, toward six o'clock, we heard our drums rolling in the distance – signal to scout forward. I ran out among the great trees and started on toward Johnstown, keeping Godfrey in view on my left hand.

Very soon I came out of the forest on the edge of cleared land. Against the evening sky I saw the spires of Johnstown, stained crimson in the westering sun which was going down red as a cherry.

But what held me in spell was the sight that met my eyes across the open meadows, where moving ranks of musket-barrels glanced redly in the last gleam of sunset and the naked swords and gorgets of mounted officers glittered.

Godfrey Shew emerged from the edge of the forest on my left and stood knee deep in last year's wild grass, one hand shading his eyes.

"What troops are those?" I shouted to him. "They look like the Continental Line!"

"It's a reg'lar rig'ment," he bawled, "but whose I know not!"

The clanking of their armament came clearly to my ears; the timing tap of their drum sounded nearer still.

"There can be no mistake," I called out to Godfrey; "yonder marches a regiment of the New York line! We're at war!"

We moved out across the pasture. I examined my flint and priming, and, finding all tight and bright, waded forward waist high, through last year's ghostly golden-rod, ready for a quick shot if necessary.

The sun had gone down; a lilac-tinted dusk veiled the fields, through which the gay evening chirruping of the robins rang incessantly.

"There go our people!" shouted Godfrey.

I had already caught sight of the Fonda's Bush Company filing between some cattle-bars to the left of us; and knew they must be making straight for Johnson Hall.

We shouldered our pieces and ran through the dead weeds to intercept them; but there was no need for haste, because they halted presently in some disorder; and I saw Joe Scott walking to and fro along the files, gesticulating.

And then, as Godfrey and I came up with them, we witnessed the first shameful exhibition of disorder that for so many months disgraced the militia of New York – a stupidity partly cowardly, partly treacherous, which at one time so incensed His Excellency the Virginian that he said they were, as a body, more detrimental than helpful to the cause, and proposed to disband them.

In the light of later events, I now realize that their apparent poltroonery arose not from individual cowardice. But these levies had no faith in their companies because every battalion was still full of Tories, nor had any regiment yet been purged.

Also, they had no confidence in their officers, who, for the greater part, were as inexperienced as they themselves. And I think it was because of these things that the New York militia behaved so contemptibly after the battle of Long Island, and in Tryon County, until the terrific trial by fire at Oriskany had burnt the dross out of us and left only the nobler metal.

Our Fonda's Bush Company presented a most mortifying spectacle as Godfrey and I came up. Joe Scott stood facing the slovenly single rank which he had contrived to parade in the gathering dusk; and he was arguing with the men while they talked back loudly.

There was a hubbub of voices, angry arguments, some laughter which sounded more sinister to me than the cursing.

Then Charlie Cady and John Howell of Sacandaga left the ranks, refusing to listen to Scott, and withdrew a little distance, where they stood sullenly in their defiance.

Elias Cady called out that he would not march to the Hall to take Sir John, and he, also, left the ranks.

Then, and despite Joe Scott's pleading, Phil Helmer and his sullen son, John, walked away and joined the Cadys, and called on Andrew Bowman to do the like.

Dries wavered; but Baltus Weed and Eugene Grinnis left the company.

Which so enraged me that I, also, forgot all discipline and duty, and shook my rifles at the mutineers.

"You Tory dogs!" I said, "we're well purged of you, and I for one thank God that we now know you for what you are!"

Godfrey, a stark, fierce figure in his blackened buckskins, went out in front of our single rank and called to the malcontents:

"Pull foot, you swine, or I'll mark you!"

And, "Pull foot!" shouted Nick Stoner, "and be damned to you! Why do you loiter! Do you wait for a volley in your guts!"

At that, Balty Weed turned and ran toward the woods; but the others moved more slowly and sullenly, not exactly menacing us with their rifles, but carrying them conveniently across the hollow of their left arms.

In the increasing darkness I heard somebody sob, and saw Joe Scott standing with one hand across his eyes, as though to close from his sight such a scene of deep disgrace.

Then I went to him. I was trembling and could scarce command my voice, but gave him a salute and stood at attention until he finally noticed me.

"Well, John," said he, "this is like to be the death of me."

"Sir; will you order the drums to beat a march?"

"Do you think the men will march?"

"Yes, sir – what remains of them."

He came slowly back, motioning what was left of the company to close up. I could not hear what he said, but the men began to count off, and their voices were resolute enough to hearten all.

So presently Nick Stoner, who acted as fife-major, blew lustily into his fife, playing the marching tune, which is called "The Little Red Foot"; and the drums beat it; and we marched in column of fours to take Sir John at his ancestral Hall, if it chanced to be God's will.

CHAPTER IX

STOLE AWAY

Johnson Hall was a blaze of light with candles in every window, and great lanterns flaring from both stone forts which flanked the Hall, and along the new palisades which Sir John had built recently for his defense.

All gates and doors stood wide open, and officers in Continental uniform and in the uniform of the Palatine Regiment, were passing in and out with a great clanking of swords and spurs.

Everywhere companies of regular infantry from Colonel Dayton's regiment of the New York Line were making camp, and I saw their baggage waggons drive up from the town below and go into park to the east of the Hall, where cattle were lying in the new grass.

An officer of the Palatine Regiment carrying a torch came up to Joe Scott, where our little company stood at ease along the hedge fence.

"What troops are these, sir?" he inquired, indicating us with a nervous gesture.

And when he was informed:

"Oho!" said he, "there should be material for rangers among your farmer-militia. Pick me two men for Colonel Dayton who live by rifle and trap and who know the wilderness from Albany to the Lakes."

So our captain told off Nick Stoner and me, and we stepped out of the ranks into the red torch-glow.

"Thank you, sir," said the Palatine officer to our Captain. And to us: "Follow me, lads."

He was a brisk, handsome and smartly uniformed officer of militia; and his cheerful demeanor heartened me who had lately witnessed such humiliations and disgrace.

We followed him through the stockade gate and into the great house, so perfectly familiar to me in happier days.

Excepting for the noise and confusion of officers coming and going, there was no disorder within; the beautiful furniture stood ranged in stately symmetry; the pictures hung on the walls; but I saw no silver anywhere, and all the candlesticks were pewter.

As we came to the library, an officer in the uniform of a colonel of the Continental Line turned from a group of men crowded around the centre table, on which lay a map. Nick Stoner and I saluted his epaulettes.

He came close to us and searched our faces coolly enough, as a farmer inspects an offered horse.

"This is young Nick Stoner, of Fonda's Bush, sir," said the Palatine officer.

"Oh," said the Colonel drily, "I have heard of the Stoner boys. And what may be your name?" he inquired, fastening his piercing eyes on mine.

"John Drogue, sir."

"I have heard of you, also," he remarked, more drily still.

For a full minute, it seemed to me, he scrutinized me from head to foot with a sort of curiosity almost brutal. Then, on his features a fine smile softened what had seemed insolence. With a glance he dismissed the Palatine, motioned us to follow him, and we three entered the drawing-room across the hall, which was lighted but empty.

"Mr. Drogue," said he, "I am Colonel Dayton; and I have in my personal baggage a lieutenant's commission for you from our good Governor, procured, I believe, through the solicitation of our mutual and most excellent friend, Lord Stirling."

I stood astonished to learn of my preferment, never dreaming nor even wishing for military rank, but perfectly content to carry the sack of a private soldier in this most just of all wars. And as for Billy Alexander remembering to so serve me, I was still more amazed. For Lord Stirling was

already a general officer in His Excellency's new army, and I never expected him to remember me amid the desperate anxieties of his new position.

"Mr. Drogue," said Dayton, "you, I believe, are the only example among the gentry of Tryon County who has openly embraced the cause of our thirteen colonies. I do not include the Albany Patriot; I speak only of the nobility and gentry of this county... And it took courage to turn your back upon your own caste."

"It would have taken more to turn against my own countrymen, sir."

He smiled. "Come, sir, were you not sometime Brent-Meester to Sir William?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you should know the forest, Mr. Drogue."

"I do know it."

"So General Schuyler has informed me."

He clasped his gloved hands behind his back and began to pace to and fro, his absent glances on the window candles. Presently he halted:

"Sir John is fled. Did you know it?" he said abruptly.

I felt the hot shame burn my face to the roots of my hair.

"Broke his parole of honour and gone off," added Dayton. "Where do you suppose he is making for with his Tories and Highlanders?"

I could scarcely speak, so mortified was I that a gentleman of my own class could have so foully conducted. But I made out to say that Sir John, no doubt, was traveling toward Canada. "Certainly," said the Colonel; "but which route?"

"God knows, sir. By the Sacandaga and the Lakes, no doubt."

"Could he go by Saratoga and the top o' the Hudson?"

"It is a pathless wilderness."

"Yes. And still I think the rogue went that way. I have rangers out looking for signs of him beyond Ballston. Also, I sent half a battalion toward the Sacandaga. Of course Albany Royalists warned him of my coming; I couldn't prevent that, nor could Schuyler, no, nor the very devil himself!

"And here am I at the Hall, and the fox stole away to the Canadas. And what now to do I know not... Do *you*?"

He shot the question in my face point blank; and I stood dumb for a minute, striving to collect and marshal any ideas that might bear upon so urgent a matter.

"Colonel," said I, "unless the British hold Champlain, Sir John would scarcely risk a flight in that direction. No. He would prefer to plunge into the wilderness and travel by Oswegatchi."

"Do you so believe, Mr. Drogue?"

I considered a moment more; then:

"Yet, if Guy Johnson's Indians have come down toward the Sacandaga to protect him – knowing that he had meant to flee – "

I looked at Dayton, then turned to Nick.

"What think you, Nick?" I demanded.

"By God," he blurted out, "I am of that mind too! Only a madman would attempt the wilderness by Oswegatchi; and I wager that Sir John is already beyond the Sacandaga and making for the Canadas on the old Mohawk war-trail!"

Colonel Dayton laid one hand on my shoulder:

"Mr. Drogue," said he, "we have militia and partizans more than sufficient in Tryon. What we need are more regulars, too; but most of all, and in this crisis, we need rangers. God alone knows what is coming upon Tryon County from the North, – what evil is breeding there, – what sinister forces are gathering to overwhelm these defenceless settlements.

"We have scarcely a fort on this frontier, scarcely a block house. Every town and village and hamlet north of Albany is unprotected; every lonely settler is now at the mercy of this unknown and monstrous menace which is gathering like a thundercloud in the North.

"Regular regiments require time to muster; the militia have yet to prove their worth; partizans, minute men, alarm companies – the value of all these remains a question still. Damn it, I want rangers! I want them *now!*"

He began to stride about the room again in his perplexity, but presently came back to where we stood.

"How many rifles in your company from Fonda's Bush?" he demanded.

I blushed to tell him, and further confessed what had occurred that very evening in the open fields before Johnstown.

"Well," said he coolly, "it is well to be rid of vermin. Now you should pick your men in safety, Mr. Drogue. And if none will volunteer – such as have families or are not fit material for rangers – you are authorized to go out into the wilderness and recruit any forest-running fellow you can persuade."

He drove one gloved hand into the palm of the other to emphasize what he said:

"I want real rangers, not militia! I want young men who laugh at any face old Death can pull at them! I want strong men, keen men, tough men, rough men.

"I want men who fear God, if that may be, or who fear the devil, if that may be; but who fear nothing else on earth!"

He shot a look at Nick, " – like that boy there!" he exclaimed – "or I am no judge of men! And like yourself, Mr. Drogue, when once they blood you! Come, sir; can you find a few such men for me, and take full charge?"

"Yes, sir."

"A pledge!" he exclaimed, beating his gloved palms. "And when you can collect a dozen – the first full dozen – I want you to stop the Iroquois trail at the Sacandaga. That's where you shall chiefly operate – along the Sacandaga and the mountains northward! That's where I expect trouble. There lies this accursed war-trail; and along it there is like to be a very bloody business!"

He turned aside and stood smiting his hands softly together, his preoccupied eyes regarding the candles.

"A very bloody business," he repeated absently to himself. "Only rangers can aid us now... Help us a little in this dreadful crisis... Until we can recruit – build forts –"

An officer appeared at the open door and saluted.

"Well, sir," inquired Dayton sharply.

"Lady Johnson is not to be discovered in the town, sir."

"What? Has Lady Johnson run away also? Does the poor, deluded woman imagine that any man in my command would offer insult to her?"

"It is reported, sir, that Lady Johnson said some very bitter things concerning us. It is further reported that Lady Johnson is gone in a great rage to the hunting lodge of the late Sir William, as there were already family servants there at last accounts."

"Where's this place?" demanded Dayton, turning to me.

"The summer house on the Vlaie, sir."

"Very well. Take what men you can collect and go there instantly, Mr. Drogue, and place that foolish woman under arrest!"

A most painful colour burnt my face, but I saluted in silence.

"The little fool," muttered Dayton, "to think we meant to insult her!" And to me: "Let her remain there, Mr. Drogue, if she so desires. Only guard well the house. I shall march a battalion of my regiment thither in the morning, and later I shall order a company of Colonel Livingston's regiment to Fish House. And then we shall see what we shall see," he added grimly to the officer in the doorway, who smiled in return.

There ensued a silence through which, very far away, we heard the music of another regiment marching into the town, which lay below us under the calm, high stars.

"That's Livingston, now!" said Colonel Dayton, briskly; and went out in a hurry, his sword and spurs ringing loudly in the hall. And a moment later we heard him ride away at a gallop, and the loud clatter of horsemen at his heels.

I pulled a bit of jerked venison from my sack and bit into it. Nick Stoner filled his mouth with cold johnnycake.

And so, munching our supper, we left the Hall, headed for the Drowned Lands to make prisoner an unhappy girl who had gone off in a rage to Summer House Point.

CHAPTER X

A NIGHT MARCH

The village of Johnstown was more brightly lighted than I had ever before seen it. Indeed, as we came out of the Hall the glow of it showed rosy in the sky and the distant bustle in the streets came quite plainly to our ears.

Near the hedge fence outside the Hall we came upon remnants of our militia company, which had just been dismissed from further duty, and the men permitted to go home.

Some already were walking away across the fields toward the Fonda's Bush road, and these all were farmers; but I saw De Luysnes and Johnny Silver, the French trappers, talking to old man Stoner and his younger boy; and Nick and I went over to where they were gathered near a splinter torch, which burned with a clear, straight flame like a candle.

Joe Scott, too, was there, and I told him about my commission, whereupon he gave me the officer's salute and we shook hands very gravely.

"There is scarce a handful remaining of our company," said he, "and you had best choose from us such as may qualify for rangers, and who are willing to go with you. As for me, I can not go, John, because I have here a letter but just delivered from Honikol Herkimer, calling me to the Canajoharie Regiment."

It appeared, also, that old man Stoner had already enlisted with Colonel Livingston's regiment, and his thirteen-year-old boy, also, had been taken into the same command as a drummer.

Dries Bowman shook his head when I appealed to him, saying he had a wife and children to look after, and would not leave them alone in the Bush.

None could find fault with such an answer, though his surly tone troubled me a little.

However, the two French trappers offered to enlist in my company of Rangers, and they instantly began to strap up their packs like men prepared to start on any journey at a moment's notice.

Then Godfrey Shew, of Fish House, said to me very simply that his conscience and his country weighed more together than did his cabin; and that he was quite ready to go with me at once.

At that, Joe de Golyer, of Varick's, fetched a laugh and came up in the torch-light and stood there towering six foot eight in his greasy buckskins, and showing every hound's tooth in his boyish head.

"Give me my shilling, John," quoth he, "for I, also, am going with you. I've a grist-mill and a cabin and a glebe fair cleared at Varick's. But my father was all French; I have seen red for many a day; and if the King of England wants my mill I shall take my pay for it where I find it!"

Silver began to grin and strut and comb out his scarlet thrums with dirty fingers.

"Enfin," said he, with both thumbs in his arm-pits, "we shall be ver' happee familee in our pretee Bush. No more Toree, no more Iroquois! Tryon Bush all belong to us."

"All that belongs to us today," remarked Godfrey grimly, "is what we hold over our proper rifles, Johnny Silver!"

Old man Stoner nodded: "What you look at over your rifle sight is all that'll ever feed and clothe you now, Silver."

"Oh, sure, by gar!" cried Silver with his lively grin. "Deer in blue coat, man in red coat, même chose, savvy? All good game to Johnee Silver. Ver' fine chasse! Ah, sacré garce!" And he strutted about like a cock-partridge, slapping his hips.

Nick Stoner burst into a loud laugh.

"Ours is like to be a rough companionship, John!" he said. "For the first shot fired will hum in our ears like new ale; and the first screech from the Iroquois will turn us into devils!"

"Come," said I with a shiver I could not control.

I shook hands with Joe Scott; Nick took leave of his big, gaunt father. We both looked at Dries Bowman, but he had turned away in pretense of firing the torch.

"Good-bye, Brent-Meester!" cried little Johnny Stoner in his childish treble, as we started down the stony way toward the town below.

Johnstown streets were full of people and every dwelling, shop, and tavern lighted brightly as we came into the village.

Mounted troopers of the Albany Horse guarded every street or clattered to and fro in search, they told us, of hidden arms and supplies. Soldiers of the regiments of Colonels Dayton and Livingston, too, were to be seen everywhere, some guarding the jail, some encamped before the Court House, others occupying suspected dwellings and taverns notorious as Tory nests.

Such inhabitants as were known friends to liberty roamed about the streets or stood in knots under the trees, whispering together and watching the soldiers. But Tories and their families remained indoors, peering sullenly from their windows and sometimes scowling upon these soldiers of a new nation, within the confines of which they already were discovering that no place remained for any friend to England or her King.

As my little file of riflemen passed on moccasined feet through the swarming streets of Johnstown, soldiers and townspeople gazed curiously after us, surmising immediately what might be our errand. And many greeted us or called out pleasantries after us, such as, "Hearkaway! The red fox will fool you yet!" And, "Dig him out, you wolf-hounds! He's gone to earth at Sacandaga!"

Many soldiers cheered us, swinging their cocked hats; and Nick Stoner and Johnny Silver swung their coon-tailed caps in return, shouting the wolf-cry of the Coureur-du-Bois – "Yik-yik-hoo-hoolo – o!"

And now we passed the slow-moving baggage waggons of Colonel Livingston's regiment, toiling up from Caughnawaga, the sleepy teamsters nodding, and armed soldiers drowsing behind, who scarce opened one eye as we trotted by them and out into the darkness of the Mayfield road.

Now, in this dim and starlit land, we moved more slowly, for the road lay often through woods where all was dark; and among us none had fetched any lantern.

It was close to midnight, I think, when we were challenged; and I knew we were near the new Block House, because I heard the creek, very noisy in the dark, and smelled English grass.

The sentinel held us very firmly and bawled to his fellow, who arrived presently with a lantern; and we saw the grist-mill close to us, with its dripping wheel and the high flume belching water.

When they were satisfied, I asked for news and they told us they had seen none of Sir John's people, but that a carriage carrying two ladies had nigh driven over them, refusing to halt, and that they had been ashamed to fire on women.

He informed us, further, that a sergeant and five men of Colonel Dayton's regiment had arrived at the Block House and would remain the night.

"Also," said one of the men, "we caught a girl riding a fine horse this morning, who gave an account that she came from Fonda's Bush and was servant to Douw Fonda at Caughnawaga."

"Where is the horse?" I asked.

"Safe stabled in the new fort."

"Where is the girl?"

"Well," said he, "she sits yonder eating soupaan in the fort, and all the Continentals making moon-eyes at her."

"That's my horse," said I shortly. "Take your lantern and show her to me."

One of the militia men picked up the lantern, which had been burning on the grass between us, and I followed along the bank of the creek.

Presently I saw the Block House against the stars, but all loops were shuttered and no light came from them.

There was a ditch, a bridge of three logs, a stockade not finished; and we passed in between the palings where a gateway was to be made, and where another militia-man sat guard on a chopping block, cradling his fire-lock between his knees, fast asleep.

The stable was but a shed. Kaya turned her head as I went to her and made a soft little noise of welcome, and fell a-lipping me and rubbing her velvet nose against me.

"The Scotch girl cared for your mare and fed her, paying four pence," said the militia-man. "But we were ashamed to take pay."

I examined Kaya. She had been well cared for. Then I lifted her harness from the wooden peg where it hung and saddled her by the lantern light.

And when all was snug I passed the bridle over my arm and led her to the door of the Block House.

Before I entered, I could hear from within the strains of a fiddle; and then opened the door and went in.

The girl, Penelope, sat on a block of wood eating soupaan with a pewter spoon out of a glazed bowl upon her knees.

Ten soldiers stood in a ring around her, every man jack o' them a-courting as hard as he could court and ogle – which all was as plain to me as the nose on your face! – and seemed to me a most silly sight.

For the sergeant, a dapper man smelling rank of pomatum and his queue smartly floured, was a-wooing her with his fiddle and rolling big eyes at her to kill at twenty paces; and a tall, thin corporal was tying a nosegay made of swamp marigolds for her, which, now and again, he pretended to match against her yellow hair and smirked when she lifted her eyes to see what he was about.

Every man jack o' them was up to something, one with a jug o' milk to douse her soupaan withal, another busy with his Barlow carving a basket out of a walnut to please her; – this fellow making pictures on birch-bark; that one scraping her name on his powder-horn and pricking a heart about it.

As for the girl, Penelope, she sat upon her chopping block with downcast eyes and very leisurely eating of her porridge; but I saw her lips traced with that faint smile which I remembered.

What with the noise of the fiddle and the chatter all about her, neither she nor the soldiers heard the door open, nor, indeed, noticed us at all until my militia-men sings out: "Lieutenant Drogue, boys, on duty from Johnstown!"

At that the Continentals jumped up very lively, I warrant you, being troops of some little discipline already; and I spoke civilly to their sergeant and went over to the girl, Penelope, who had risen, bowl in one hand, spoon in t'other, and looking upon me very hard out of her brown eyes.

"Come," said I pleasantly, "you have kept your word to me and I mean to keep mine to you. My mare is saddled for you."

"You take me to Caughnawaga, sir!" she exclaimed, setting bowl and spoon aside.

"Tomorrow. Tonight you shall ride with us to the Summer House, where I promise you a bed."

I held out my hand. She placed hers within it, looked shyly at the Continentals where they stood, dropped a curtsy to all, and went out beside me.

"Is there news?" she asked as I lifted her to the saddle.

"Sir John is gone."

"I meant news from Caughnawaga."

"Why, yes. All is safe there. A regiment of Continentals passed through Caughnawaga today with their waggons. So, for the time at least, all is quite secure along the Mohawk."

"Thank you," she said in a low voice.

I led the horse back to the road, where my little squad of men was waiting me, and who fell in behind me, astonished, I think, as I started east by north once more along the Mayfield road.

Presently Nick stole to my side through the darkness, not a whit embarrassed by my new military rank.

"Why, John," says he in a guarded voice, "is this not the Scotch girl of Caughnawaga who rides your mare, Kaya?"

I told him how she had come to the Bowmans the night before, and how, having stolen my mare, I bargained with her and must send her or guide her myself on the morrow to Cayadutta.

I was conscious of his stifled mirth but paid no heed, for we were entering the pineries now, where all was inky dark, and the trail to be followed only by touch of foot.

"Drop your bridle; Kaya will follow me," I called back softly to the girl, Penelope. "Hold to the saddle and be not afraid."

"I am not afraid," said she.

We were now moving directly toward Fonda's Bush, and not three miles from my own house, but presently we crossed the brook, ascended a hill, and so came out of the pinery and took a wide and starlit waggon-path which bore to the left, running between fields where great stumps stood.

This was Sir William's carriage road to the Point; and twice we crossed the Kenneyto by shallow fords.

Close beside this carriage path on the north, and following all the way, ran the Iroquois war trail, hard and clean as a sheep walk, worn more than a foot deep by the innumerable moccasined feet that had trodden it through the ages.

Very soon we passed Nine-Mile Tree, a landmark of Sir William's, which was a giant pine left by the road to tower in melancholy majesty all alone.

When I rode the hills as Brent-Meester, this pine was like a guide post to me, visible for miles.

Now, as I passed, I looked at it in the silvery dusk of the stars and saw some strange object shining on the bark.

"What is that shining on Nine-Mile Tree?" said I to Nick. He ran across the road; we marched on, I leading, then the Scotch girl on my mare, then my handful of men trudging doggedly with pieces a-trail.

A moment later Nick came swiftly to my side and nudged me; and looking around I saw an Indian hatchet in his hand, the blade freshly brightened.

"It was sticking in the tree," he breathed. "My God, John, the Iroquois are out!"

Chill after chill crawled up my back as I began to understand the significance of that freshly polished little war-axe with its limber helve of hickory worn slippery by long usage, and its loop of braided deer-hide blackened by age.

"Was there aught else?" I whispered.

"Nothing except this Mohawk hatchet struck deep into the bark of Nine-Mile Tree, and sticking there."

"Do you know what it means, Nick?"

"Aye. Also, it is an *old* war-axe *newly* polished. And struck deep into the tallest pine in Tryon. Any fool must know what all this means. Shall you speak of this to the others, John?"

"Yes," said I, "they must know at once."

I waited for Kaya to come up, laid my hand on the bridle and called back in a low voice to my men: "Boys, an Indian war-axe was left sticking in Nine-Mile Tree. Nick drew it out. The hatchet is an old one, but *it is newly polished!*"

"Sacré garce!" whispered Silver fiercely. "Now, grâce à dieu, shall I reckon with those dirtee trap-robbers who take my pelts like the carcajou! Ha! So is it war? A la bonheur! Let them come for my hair then! And if they get Johnny Silver's hair they may paint the Little Red Foot on the hoop, nom de dieu!"

"Get along forward, boys," said I. "Some of you keep an eye on the mountains lest they begin calling to Sir John with fire – "

"A flame on Maxon!" whispered Nick at my elbow.

I jerked my head around as though I had been shot. There it rose, a thin red streak above the blunt headland that towered over the Drowned Lands. Steadily as a candle's flame in a still room, it burned for a few moments, then was shattered into crimson jets.

Far to the North, on some invisible mountain, a faint crimson flare replied.

Nobody spoke, but I knew that every eye was fixed on those Indian signal-fires as we moved rapidly forward into the swale country where swampy willows spread away on either hand and little pools of water caught the starlight.

The road, too, had become wet, and water stood in the ruts; and every few minutes we crossed corduroy.

"Yonder stands the Summer House," whispered Nick.

A ridge of hard land ran out into the reed-set water. A hinged gate barred the neck. Nick swung it wide; I led my mare and her rider through it; posted Godfrey and Silver there; posted Luysnes and De Golyer a hundred paces inland near the apple trees; left Nick by the well, and, walking beside my mare, continued on to the little green and white hunting lodge where, through the crescents of closed shutters, rays of light streamed out into the night.

Here I lifted the Scotch girl from her saddle, walked with her to the kitchen porch, and knocked softly on the kitchen door.

After a while I could hear a stirring within, voices, steps.

"Nicholas! Pontioch! Flora!" I called in guarded tones.

Presently I heard Flora's voice inquiring timidly who I might be.

"Mr. Drogue is arrived to await her ladyship's commands," said I.

At that the bolts slid and the door creaked open. Black Flora stood there in her yellow night shift, rolling enormous eyes at me, and behind her I saw Colas with a lighted dip, gaping to see me enter with a strange woman.

"Is your mistress here?" I demanded.

"Yassuh," answered Flora, "mah lady done gone to baid, suh."

"Who else is here? Mistress Swift?"

"Yassuh."

"Is there a spare bed?"

Flora rolled suspicious eyes at the Scotch girl, but thought there was a bed in Sir William's old gun room.

I waited until the black wench had made sure, then bade Colas look to my mare, said a curt good-night to Penelope Grant, and went out to unroll my blanket on the front porch.

When I whistled softly Nick came across the garden from the well.

"Lady Johnson is here," said I. "Yonder lies my blanket. I stand first watch. Go you and sleep now while you can – "

"Sleep first, John. I am not weary – "

"Remember I am your officer, Nick!"

"Oh, hell!" quoth he. "That does not awe me, John. What awes me in you is your kindness – and to remember that your ancestors wore their gold rings upon their fingers."

I passed my arm about his shoulders, then released him and went slowly over to the well. And here I primed my rifle with bright, dry powder, shouldered it, and began to walk my post at a brisk pace to cheat the sleep which meddled with my heavy eyes and set me yawning till my young jaws crackled.

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