

Ellis Edward Sylvester

Wyoming



Edward Ellis

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Wyoming

CHAPTER I

On the sultry third of July, 1778, Fred Godfrey, a sturdy youth of eighteen years, was riding at a breakneck speed down the Wyoming Valley, in the direction of the settlement, from which he saw columns of smoke rolling upward, and whence, during the few pauses of his steed, he heard the rattling discharge of firearms and the shouts of combatants.

"I wonder whether I am too late," he asked himself more than once, and he urged his splendid horse to a greater pace; "the road never seemed so long."

Ah, there was good cause for the anxiety of the lad, for in that lovely Wyoming Valley lived those who were dearer to him than all the world beside, and whatever fate overtook the settlers must be shared by him as well. He had ridden his horse hard, and his flanks glistened with wet and foam, but though every foot of the winding road was familiar to him, it appeared in his torturing impatience to be double its usual length.

Fred Godfrey had received the promise of his father, on the breaking out of the Revolution, that he might enlist in the patriot army so soon as he reached the age of seventeen. On the very day that he attained that age he donned the Continental uniform, made for him by loving hands, bade his friends good-bye, and hastened away to where Washington was longing for just such lusty youths as he who appeared to be several years younger than he really was.

Fred was a handsome, athletic youngster, and he sat his horse with the grace of a crusader. Although the day was warm, and his face glowed with perspiration, he wore his cocked hat, blue coat with its white facings, the belt around the waist and another which passed over one shoulder ere it joined the one around the middle of his body, knee-breeches, and strong stockings and shoes. His rifle was slung across his back, and a couple of loaded single-barreled pistols were thrust in his belt, where they could be drawn the instant needed.

During his year's service in the patriot army Fred had proven himself an excellent soldier, and the dash and nerve which he showed in more than one instance caught the eye of Washington himself, and won the youth a lieutenancy, at the time when he was the youngest member of his company.

The ardent patriot was full of ambition, and was sure, should no accident befall him, of gaining higher honors. When he tramped with several other recruits from Wyoming to the camp of the Continentals, hundreds of miles away, one of his greatest comforts was the belief that, no matter how the current of war drifted back and forth, there was no danger of its reaching Wyoming. That lovely and secluded valley was so far removed from the tread of the fierce hosts that they might feel secure.

But behold! News came to Washington that the Tories and Indians were about to march into the valley with torch and tomahawk, and he was begged to send re-enforcements without delay. The Father of his Country was then on his campaign through the Jerseys. The British army had withdrawn from Philadelphia, where it spent the winter, and Clinton with a part of the force was marching overland to New York, with the Continentals in pursuit.

The campaign was so important that the commander-in-chief could ill afford to spare a man. He knew that Wyoming was not entirely defenseless. Colonel Zebulon Butler of the Continental army was marshaling the old men and boys, and there was the strong defense known as Forty Fort, built by the original settlers from Connecticut, not to mention Wilkesbarre near at hand, so that it would seem the settlers ought to be able to protect themselves against any force likely to be brought against them.

However, Washington told several of his recruits from Wyoming of the appeal that had been made to him, and gave them permission to go to the help of their friends, though he added that he did not think it possible for them to reach the ground in time to be of service.

But a half dozen started on foot toward the threatened point. Within a day's tramp of their destination they fell somewhat apart, as each, in his familiarity of the country, believed that he knew a shorter and quicker way home than the others.

Fred Godfrey was almost in sight of his home, when he was both pleased and alarmed by coming upon an estray horse. He was saddled and bridled, and though contentedly cropping the grass at the roadside, the perspiration and jaded look showed that he had come from the battle-ground. It was startling to know that such was the fact, and supplemented as it was by the reports of guns, shouts, and the black volumes of smoke pouring upward, Fred was filled with an anguish of misgiving.

Without stopping to make inquiries or to guess who could have owned the estray steed, the young patriot slipped forward, caught the bridle before the animal had time to scent danger, and vaulting lightly into the saddle, turned the head of the horse toward Wyoming, and striking his heels against his ribs, quickly urged him to a dead run.

"I am needed there," said Fred, urging his spirited animal still more, and peering down the highway; "you're the best horse I ever rode, but I can't afford to spare you now."

Fred Godfrey not only was close to the stirring scenes that marked that memorable massacre, but he was among them sooner even than he anticipated.

CHAPTER II

Just here we must turn aside for a minute or two, in order to understand the situation.

On the third of July, Colonel Zebulon Butler, of the Continental army, had marched forth at the head of his two hundred and odd boys, old men, and a few able-bodied soldiers to meet his cousin, the British Colonel Butler, with his horde of soldiers, Tories, and Iroquois Indians.

"We come out to fight, not only for liberty," said the patriot leader, as the battle was about to open, "but for our lives and that which is dearer than our lives – to preserve our homes from conflagration, and our wives and children from the tomahawk."

For a time all went well, and Colonel Zebulon Butler began to hope that the marauders would be driven off, but his force was unsteady, and some of them gave way when they saw their enemies as they swarmed out of the woods and assailed them.

The trembling mothers who were prayerfully listening to the sounds of battle on the plain above, heard the regular platoon firing which showed that all was going well; but, by and by, the increasing yells, the dropping shots, the blaze of musketry from the swamp on the left of the fighting settlers, where the Iroquois were rushing forth, the panic-stricken fugitives coming into sight here and there, white, panting and wild, told the dreadful truth. The patriots had been overwhelmed by the invaders, who were driving everything before them. But a single hope remained – flight.

Some might succeed in reaching the mountains on the other side the river, and possibly a few would be able to force their way through the dismal wilderness known as the "Shades of Death," and reach Stroudsburg and the sparse settlements on the upper Delaware, many miles away.

The moment the patriots began flying before the Tories and Indians, the panic spread to all.

It is a historical fact that in the flight the pursuers shot many of the patriot officers and soldiers in the thigh, so as to disable them from running, and left them on the ground to be finally disposed of afterwards, while the Iroquois hastened after the other fugitives.

Many of these were tomahawked in their flight; others fled down the river banks in the direction of Wilkesbarre, on the opposite side of the river; others made for the mountains back of the battleground; still others hastened to the protection of the Forty Fort, while a great many found a temporary refuge in the undergrowth of Monocacy Island, in the Susquehanna. Still others got across the river and plunged into the mountainous wilderness and began their toilsome tramp through the section I have named, and which is still known as the "Shades of Death."

It was at this hour that Fred Godfrey galloped directly into the massacre in his desperate resolve to do all he could to save his friends.

He had turned off from the main highway, and was making toward a point whence came the sounds of sharp firing, and such shouts as to show that some unusual conflict was going on. He caught glimpses of figures moving among the trees, but he paid no heed to them, and pressed steadily forward over a half-broken path until he was stopped in the most startling manner that can be imagined – that is, by a rifle-shot.

Some one fired from the front, and undoubtedly would have struck the youthful rider, had not his horse at the very instant snuffed the danger and flung up his head. The action saved the life of the rider at the expense of the steed, who received the cruel bullet and lunged forward and fell to the ground with such suddenness that but for the dexterity of Fred Godfrey he would have been crushed.

As it was, the youth saved himself by a hair's breadth, leaping clear of the saddle and brute just in the nick of time.

The thin wreath of smoke was curling upward from the undergrowth, and the horse was in the act of falling, when a Seneca Indian, in his war paint and a gleam with ferocity, bounded from the cover, and with his smoking gun in his hand and the other grasping the handle of his tomahawk, dashed towards the patriot, whom he evidently believed was badly wounded.

"S'render! s'render!" he shrieked, coming down upon him as if fired from a cannon.

"I'm not in that business just now," snapped out Fred Godfrey, leveling and firing his pistol, with the muzzle almost in the face of the fierce warrior.

The aim could not have been more accurate. The subsequent incidents of the Wyoming massacre were of no interest to that Seneca warrior, for the sharp crack of the little weapon was scarcely more sudden than was the ending of his career.

CHAPTER III

Fred Godfrey did not stop to reload his pistol. He had another ready for use, and he unshipped his rifle in a twinkling, and hurried for the point where he hoped to gain some tidings of his loved ones. Everything was in a swirl, and of his own knowledge he could not tell the proper course to take.

He ran through the wood toward the point for which he was making at the moment the Seneca Indian shot his horse, but, short as was the distance, all sounds of conflict were over by the time he reached his destination.

Among the parties dashing hither and thither, in the blind effort to escape the Tories and Indians, who seemed to be everywhere, Fred recognized several friends and neighbors. Indeed, since Wyoming was his native place, it may be said that nearly all the fugitives were known to him.

"Why ain't you with your folks?" suddenly asked a middle-aged farmer, who stopped for a moment in his panting flight to exchange a few words and to gain breath.

"Can you tell me where they are?" asked Fred in turn.

"They're well on their way across the Susquehanna by this time, if they haven't reached the other shore."

"How do you know that?" asked Fred, his heart bounding with hope at the news which he was afraid could not be true.

"I saw them go down to the river bank before the fighting begun: Gravity told me that just as soon as he saw how things were going he meant to run to where they were waiting and take them over in his scow."

"How do you know that he has done so?"

"I don't know it of a certainty, but I saw Gravity making for the river bank a while ago, and I've no doubt he did what he set out to do."

This news was not quite so good as Fred supposed from the first remark of his friend, but it was encouraging. Before he could ask anything more, the other made a break and was gone.

"Oh, if they only *did* get across the river," muttered Fred, making haste thither; "it is their only hope."

And now it is time that you were told something about those in whom the young patriot felt such painful interest.

They were Maggie Brainerd, whose father, a leading settler from Connecticut, had gone out with the company to fight the invaders of Wyoming; Eva, her eight-year-old sister, and Aunt Peggy Carey, the sister of the dead parent, and who had been the best of mothers to the children for the last three years. Maggie and Eva were the half-sisters of Fred Godfrey, between whom existed the sweetest affection.

Maggie was a year younger than Fred, and Aunt Peggy was a peppery lady in middle life, who detested Tories as much as she did the father of all evil himself. When Mr. Brainerd bade each an affectionate good-bye and hurried away with the others to take part in the disastrous fight, they huddled close to the river bank, hoping he would soon return to them with the news that the invaders had been routed and driven away.

Side by side with the patriotic father marched the servant of the family – Gravity Gimp, an enormous African, powerful, good-natured, and so devoted to every member of his household that he gladly risked his life for them.

Gravity went into the battle with his gun on his shoulder and with the resolve to do his part like a man. He loaded and fired many times, but at the first sign of panic he broke and made for the river side, determined to save the women folks there, or die in the attempt. He lost sight of his master, whom he left loading and firing with the coolness of a veteran. It did not occur to Gravity

that he might do good service by giving some attention to the head of the family, who had not half the strength and endurance of himself.

Aunt Peggy, Maggie, and Eva waited on the river bank, with throbbing hearts, the issue of the battle. When it became certain that the patriots had suffered a check, they hoped that it was only for a brief time, and that they would speedily regain the lost ground.

While they waited, the smoke from blazing Fort Wintermoot was wafted down the valley, and became perceptible to the taste as well as to the sight. The fugitives were seen to be taking to the river, fields, and woods, and the painted Iroquois were rushing hither and thither, gathering in their fearful harvest of death.

"Aunt," said Maggie, taking the hand of Eva, "it won't do to wait another minute."

"But what will become of your father and Gravity?"

"They are in the hands of God," was the reverential reply of the courageous girl, who had asked herself the same question.

When her loved parent had kissed her good-bye he made her promise that on the very moment she became assured of the defeat of the patriots she would lose no time in getting as far away as possible. She would have felt justified in breaking that pledge could she have believed there was any hope of helping her father, but she knew there was none.

Eva was in sore distress, for now that she understood, in her vague way, the whole peril, her heart went out to the absent ones.

"Where's papa and Gravity?" she asked, holding back, with the tears running down her cheeks.

"They are doing their best to keep the bad Indians away," replied Maggie, restraining by a great effort her own feelings.

"I don't want to go till papa comes," pleaded the broken-hearted little one.

"But he wants us to go; he told me so, Eva."

"Did he? Then I'll go with you, but I feel dreadful bad."

And she ran forward, now that she knew she was doing what her father wished her to do.

CHAPTER IV

The scene at this moment was terrifying.

The river was swarming with fleeing soldiers, old men, women, and children, struggling to reach the other side and get away from the merciless hordes assailing them.

Where so many were taking to the river, it would seem that there was little hope for the three, who were moving along the bank toward some point that would take them out of the rush.

For a time they attracted no special notice, but it was impossible that this should continue.

"Oh, the scand'lous villains!" muttered Aunt Peggy, applying her favorite epithet to the Tories; "how I would like to wring their necks! I've no doubt that Jake Golcher is among them. The idea of his coming to our house to court you – "

"There, there," interrupted Maggie, "this is no time to speak of such things; Jacob Golcher is among them, for I saw him a few minutes ago, and we may need his friendship."

"I'd like to see me – "

"There's Gravity!" broke in Eva, clapping her hands. The other two, turning their heads, saw that she spoke the truth.

The bulky negro servant of the family came limping toward them with his smoking musket in hand. He was bare-headed, like Maggie and Eva, and his garments were badly torn. He was panting from his severe exertion, and the perspiration streamed down his dusty face.

"Where's father?" was the first question Maggie asked, as he drew near.

"Can't tell," was the reply; "when I last seed him, he was fightin' like all creation, and graderlly workin' off toward the woods."

"Then there is hope for him!" exclaimed Maggie, looking yearningly at the servant, as if asking for another word of encouragement.

"Hope for him? Course dere am, and so dere am for you if you hurry out ob dis place."

"But where can we go, Gravity? I promised father to try to get away, but how can we do so?"

"I'll soon show you," replied the African, rapidly recovering his wind, and moving along the bank in the direction of the present site of Kingston.

Gravity knew there was no chance for his friends until they reached the other side of the river, but it would not do to enter the stream near where they then stood.

A portion of the Susquehanna was so deep that it would be necessary for all to swim, and, strange as it may seem, the only one of the party who could do so was Maggie Brainerd herself. Though Gravity had lived for years along the river, he could not swim a stroke.

It was a wonder that the little party had not already attracted the notice of the horde swarming along the shores. They must do so very soon and Gravity hurried his gait.

"I'm looking for dat scow ob mine," he explained; "if any ob you happen to cotch sight ob it – "

Eva Brainerd gave utterance to such a shriek that every one stopped and looked toward her.

Without speaking, she pointed up the bank where a hideously painted Iroquois was in the act of drawing back his gleaming tomahawk and hurling it at Gravity Gimp, who until that moment was unconscious of his peril.

The negro held his loaded gun in hand, but the time was too brief for him to turn it to account. In fact, at the very moment he looked at the redskin, the latter let fly.

With remarkable quickness, Gravity, knowing that the Indian was aiming at his head, dropped his shoulders just as the weapon whizzed past, and striking the ground, went bounding end over end for a dozen yards.

The Iroquois was amazed by his own failure. He stared for a single moment, and then, seeing that the dusky fellow was unhurt, he brought his gun to his shoulder, with the intention of destroying the only protector the women and children had, so as to leave them defenseless.

But in the way of raising his gun to his shoulder, taking aim and firing, Gravity Gimp was five seconds in advance of the noble red man: enough said.

"De fust duty arter shootin' off a gun am to load her up agin," remarked Gravity, as he began pouring a charge from his powder horn into the palm of his hand, preparatory to letting it run down the barrel of his weapon.

"Don't wait," pleaded Maggie, greatly agitated by what had just taken place, and by the shouts, cries, and reports of guns about them; "if we tarry we are lost."

"I reckon I'm too well 'quainted wid dese parts to got lost," said the servant, who was really making all the haste he could in the way of reloading his gun. In a moment he had poured the powder into the pan of his weapon.

"Now we'll trappel," he said, hurrying again along the river shore. He took enormous strides, his gait being that peculiar hurried walk which is really faster than an ordinary trot.

It compelled the others to run, Maggie still clasping the hand of Eva, while Aunt Peggy forgot her dignity in the terrors of the time and held her pace with them.

The truth was that though Gravity was the owner of a scow which he had partly hidden at the time he saw the possibility of its need, he was afraid it had been taken by others of the fugitives that had stumbled upon it.

Less than a hundred yards remained to be passed, and, as that was fast put behind them, even the phlegmatic Gravity began to show some nervousness.

"I thinks we're gwine to make it," he said, recognizing several well-known landmarks; "and, if we does, and gits to de oder shore and has 'bout two hundred and fifty miles start ob de Tories and Injins, why dat will be sort ob cheerin' like."

All this time the sable guide, although walking fast, limped as if he were hurt.

"What makes you lame?" asked Eva.

"I was hit by a cannon-ball on de knee," was the astonishing answer: "it slewed my leg round a little, but I'll soon be all right again."

At this moment, when the hearts of all were beating high with hope, a rustling was heard among the undergrowth on their right, and the little company paused and looked up, expecting to see a dozen or more painted Iroquois in their war paint.

The *click, click* of the African's rifle, as he drew back the flint, showed that he was ready to do everything to defend those who cowered behind him like scared sheep.

To the surprise of each, however, a single man came hurriedly forth. All identified him as Jake Golcher, an old resident of Wyoming, but one of the bitterest of Tories, whose hatred of his former neighbors and friends seemed as intense as that of Queen Esther, or Katharine Montour, one of the leaders of the invaders.

He was as much surprised as the fugitives themselves, and he stared at them with open mouth, slouch hat thrown on the back of his head, and the stock of his gun resting at his feet. He was the first to recover his speech, and, with an expletive, he demanded:

"Where did *you* come from?"

"Am you addressing your remarks to me or to de ladies?" asked Gravity of the man whom he detested, and of whom, even then, he had not the slightest fear.

"I'm speaking to all of you," said Golcher, glancing furtively at the vinegar face of Aunt Peggy, and bestowing a beaming smile on Maggie Brainerd.

Much as the latter despised the Tory, she had too much sense to show it at this time. Walking toward him, she clasped her hands, and with an emotion that was certainly genuine, she said:

"Oh, Mr. Golcher, won't you help us?"

"What are you axin' him dat for?" broke in Gravity; "we don't want no help from *him*."

Aunt Peggy was evidently of the same mind, for though she said nothing, she gave a sniff and toss of her head that were more expressive than words.

The sallow face of the Tory flushed, as he looked down in the sweet countenance of Maggie Brainerd, made tenfold more winsome by the glow of the cheeks and the sparkle of the eyes, arising from the excitement of her situation.

Bear in mind that the party had gone so far along the bank of the river that they were somewhat removed from the swarm of fleeing fugitives, and therefore no immediate danger threatened; but the call for flight was as loud as ever, and a few minutes' delay was liable to bring down a score of Indians and Tories.

To none was this fact more evident than to Maggie Brainerd. In truth, she believed that Golcher was at the head of a company within call, and she sought to win his good-will before it was too late.

Gravity stood with his gun at his side, the hammer raised, and ready to fire the instant it became necessary. One foot was thrown forward, and his whole demeanor was that of enmity and defiance.

I may as well say that the servant was trying hard to persuade himself that it was not his duty to raise his piece and shoot the renegade without any further warning.

It would have been shocking, and yet there would have been some palliation for it.

In a short time the African's debate with himself ended in what may be called a compromise.

"I'll keep my eye on him while dis foolish conversation goes on, and de minute he winks at Miss Maggie, or says anyting dat she don't like, I'll pull trigger."

CHAPTER V

"Do you want me to befriend you?" asked the renegade, bending his head down close to the scared countenance of Maggie Brainerd, smiling and trying to speak in so low a voice that no one else could catch his words.

"Of course I do; don't you see what danger we are in? Oh, Mr. Golcher – "

"Don't *Mister* me," he interrupted, with a reproving grin; "call me *Jake*."

"Oh, Jake, have you seen anything of father?"

"Where would I see him?"

"Why, he went out with the rest to fight the Indians and Tories, and you were with them."

"Oh, yes; I did see him," said Golcher, as though the incident was so slight that he had forgotten it for the time: "he fought well."

"Was he – was he – Oh, Jake, tell me? – was he *hurt*?"

"I don't think he got so much as a scratch; he was with three or four others, and they were getting in the best kind of work; but you know it was no use for any one; I saw that they would be shot down where they stood, so I ran up and told your father to follow me; you know that nobody dare touch him when *I* took charge. I led him and his friends back toward the mountains and stayed by them till all danger was over, and then I bade them good-bye: if they have taken the least care and done as I told them to do, they are a great deal safer than *you* are at this very minute."

Maggie Brainerd's heart sank within her. She knew that the story that Jake Golcher had just told her was without an iota of truth. He had lied so clumsily that he had not deceived her at all.

The very question which he had asked about her parent was proof that he had not seen him, and therefore could know nothing of him.

The young lady was shocked, but she was helpless. Her duty was to do her utmost for the safety of those who were now with her, and she was sure that Golcher could give great help, if he chose to do so.

"Jake," said she, speaking with all the earnestness of her nature, "this is a dreadful day for Wyoming; I can hardly realize what has taken place; I do not believe that any one on this side of the river is safe."

"Of course he isn't – that is, none of the rebels is; *our* folks are all right."

"Can you save us?"

"I don't know what's to hinder – that is, if I take the notion, but I don't feel like doing much for that spitfire of an aunt, that insulted me the last time that I called at your house."

"You musn't mind her peculiarities; she is a good woman, and then, you know, she is my friend."

"Well, *that* makes a good deal of difference – that's a fact," remarked Golcher, with such a grotesque attempt to look arch and loving, that the watchful African, instead of firing upon him as he had meant to do, smiled.

"I'm afeard he don't feel berry well; he'll feel a good deal worse if Aunt Peggy or me gets hold of him."

"And then," added Golcher, glancing at Gravity, "*you* heard the impudence of that servant."

"Because he is a servant you ought to excuse him; I should feel very sorry to have him suffer harm."

"I don't mind taking particular care of *you* and your little sister there, but I would prefer to leave Aunt Peggy, as you call her, and the darkey to shift for themselves."

"Then I do not want you to do anything for Eva and me," said Maggie, resolutely, feeling that she was throwing away invaluable time by holding converse with this man; "God has been better to us than we deserve, and we shall leave all with him."

She turned to move off, much to the relief of Aunt Peggy, who had hard work to hide her impatience, when Golcher saw that he had gone too far. Catching her arm, he said:

"Don't be so fast; where will you go, if you don't go with me?"

"Gravity is our guide."

"I haven't told you I wouldn't take care of you, have I?"

"But if you are unwilling to include *all* of us, I do not want your friendship."

"Then for the sake of *you* I will save you *all*, though nobody beside me would do so; but, Maggie, I'll expect a little better treatment from you when I come to your house again."

At this point Golcher saw that the patience of the young lady was exhausted. Her companions were ready to chide her for halting to speak to him, though the words that passed took but a few minutes. He reached out his hand to lay it on her arm, but she drew back.

"Maggie," said he, warningly; "when I came down the river bank, I left six Seneca warriors among the trees back there; they are tired waiting for me; their guns are loaded, and I have only to raise my hand over my head to have 'em fire every one of 'em; if they do it, they will all be *pointed this way*."

Maggie Brainerd was sure the Tory spoke the truth.

"You will not do that, Jake, I am sure."

"Not if you act right; follow me."

Maggie reached out her hand as an invitation for Eva to come to her; but Aunt Peggy grasped one of the little palms in her own, for she had overheard the invitation. When Maggie looked around, her aunt compressed her thin lips and shook her head in a most decided fashion.

"*No, ma'am*; Eva stays here: if you want to go off with that scamp you can do so, but the rest of us *don't*."

"But, aunt, what shall we do? There's no escape for us unless we put ourselves in his care; Jake has promised to see that no harm befalls us from the Indians."

"Ugh!" exclaimed the aunt, with a shudder of disgust: "I'd rather trust myself with the worst Indians that are now in the valley than with *him*."

"Them's my sentiments," broke in Gravity; "we don't want to fool away any more time with *him*."

"Then you'll take the consequences," said the Tory, trembling with anger. "I offered to protect you and you refused to have me; I'll still take care of Maggie and Eva, but as for you others, you shall see – "

CHAPTER VI

The last few sentences that passed between Maggie Brainerd and Golcher, the Tory, were heard, not only by Aunt Maggie, but by the African servant.

This was due to the fact that the renegade in his excitement forgot his caution, besides which the servant took occasion to approach quite close to the two.

A very brief space of time was occupied in the conversation, but brief as it was, Gravity was resolved that it should end. He did not believe the declaration of Golcher that he had a party of half-a-dozen Senecas within call, though it was possible that he spoke the truth; but beyond a doubt the savages were so numerous that a summons from the Tory would bring a number to the spot.

When, therefore, Jake adjusted his lips for a signal, Gravity bounded forward and caught him by the throat.

"Don't be in a hurry to let out a yawp; if dere's any hollerin' to be done, I'll take charge of it."

Golcher was as helpless as a child in the vise-like grip of those iron fingers. He not only was unable to speak, but he found it hard work to breathe.

Dropping his gun, he threw up both hands in a frantic effort to loosen the clutch of those fingers.

"Why, Gravity," said the horrified Maggie; "I'm afraid you will strangle him."

"And I'm afraid I *won't*," replied the African, putting on a little more pressure.

Gravity, however, had no intention of proceeding to extremities, though he might have found justification in so doing. He regulated the pressure of his powerful right hand so that his victim, by putting forth his best efforts, was able to get enough breath to save himself.

"Young man," said Gravity, still holding him fast, "I don't think dis am a healthy place for you; de best ting you can do am to leave a little sooner dan possible."

"Let – me – let – me – go!" gurgled Golcher, still vainly trying to free himself.

"I don't find dat I've got much use for you, so I'll let you off, but de next time I lays hand onto you, you won't got off so easy, and bein' as you am goin', I'll give you a boost."

To the delight of Aunt Peggy and the horror of Maggie Brainerd, Gravity Gimp now wheeled the Tory around as though he were the smallest child, and actually delivered a kick that lifted him clear of the ground.

Not only once, but a second and third time was the indignity repeated. Then, with a fierce effort, Golcher wrenched himself free from the terrible fingers on the back of his neck, and, plunging among the trees, vanished.

"Dat ar might come handy," said Gravity, picking up the loaded musket which the panic-stricken Tory had left behind him and handing it to Aunt Peggy, who asked, with a shudder:

"Do you s'pose I would touch it?"

"Let me have it," said Maggie; "I consider it fortunate that we have two guns with us."

It was a good thing, indeed, for Maggie Brainerd, like many of the brave maidens of a hundred years ago, was an expert in handling the awkward weapons of our Revolutionary sires. With this at her command, the chances were she would be heard from before the rising of the morrow's sun.

But, if Jake Golcher was a mild enemy before, it was certain he was now an unrelenting one. He would neglect no effort to avenge himself upon all for the indignity he had received.

The African understood this, and he lost no time in getting away from the spot with the utmost speed.

It was now about five o'clock in the afternoon, but it was the eve of the Fourth of July, and the days were among the longest in the year. It would not be dark for three hours, and who could tell what might take place in that brief period?

Extremely good fortune had attended our friends thus far, but it was not reasonable to expect it to continue without break.

The Tory was scarcely out of sight when Gravity started on a trot down the bank, with the others close behind him.

"Bus'ness hab got to be pushed on de jump," he said, by way of explanation; "we ain't done wid dat chap yet."

It was scarcely a minute later when he uttered an exclamation of thankfulness, and those directly behind saw him stoop down and, grasping the prow of a small flat-boat or scow, draw it from beneath the undergrowth and push it into the water.

Such craft are not managed by oars, and Gimp handed a long pole to Maggie, saying:

"Use dat de best ye kin, and don't lose no time gittin' to de oder shore."

"But what are *you* going to do, Gravity?"

"I'se gwine wid you, but I'm afeard de boat won't hold us all, and I'll hab to ride on de outside."

The Susquehanna is generally quite shallow along shore, and it was necessary to push the scow several yards before the water was found deep enough to float it with its load.

Gravity laid the two guns within the boat, and then, picking up the *petite* Maggie, hastily carried her the short distance and placed her dry-shod within, where she immediately assumed control by means of the pole, which was a dozen feet in length.

Aunt Peggy and Eva were deposited beside her, by which time the scow was sunk within a few inches of the gunwales: had the African followed them, it would have been swamped.

As it was, the faithful negro was assuming great risk, for, as have stated, he could not swim a stroke; but the circumstances compelled such a course, and he did not hesitate.

"You see, folks," said he, as he began shoving the craft out into the river; "dat dis wessel won't carry any more passengers."

Just then he stepped into a hole, which threw him forward on his face with a loud splash, his head going under and nearly strangling him. He was thoughtful enough to let go the boat, and recovered himself with considerable effort, after causing a slight scream from Eva, who was afraid he was going to drown.

The freedom from immediate danger ended when the fugitives put out from the shore.

The suddenness of the defeat, pursuit, and massacre at Wyoming prevented anything like the use of boats by the fleeing patriots, who were beset by a merciless foe.

Had the scow been near where the main stream of fugitives were rushing into the river and striving to reach the opposite bank, the boat would not have kept afloat for a minute. It not only would have been grasped by a score of the fugitives, but it would have become the target for a number of rifles, which could hardly have failed to kill all the occupants.

The stream rapidly deepened, and by and by Gimp was up to his neck and moving rather gingerly, with his two broad hands resting on the stern of the boat.

Maggie Brainerd stood erect in the craft, pole in hand, and, bending slightly as she pressed the support against the river bottom, held on until it was almost beyond her reach, when she withdrew it, and, reaching forward, placed the lower end against the bottom again, shoving the awkward vessel with as much skill as the negro himself could have shown.

Aunt Peggy, as trim and erect as ever, was seated near the prow, while Eva nestled at her feet with her head in her lap. When they observed how deep the scow sank in the water, naturally enough their fears were withdrawn from the great calamity, and centered upon the one of drowning.

The ancient lady glanced askance at the turbid current, while Eva turned pale and shivered more than once, as she looked affrightedly at the hungry river that seemed to be climbing slowly up the frail partition which kept it away from the fugitives.

Suddenly the feet of Gravity failed to reach bottom, and, sinking down until his ears and mouth were scarcely above the surface, he bore slightly upon the support and began threshing the water with his feet, so that at a distance the scow looked as if it had a steam screw at the stern driving it forward.

This rather cumbersome means of propulsion really accomplished more than would be supposed. Despite the fact that the African could not float himself, he managed his pedal extremities with skill, and the boat was quick to respond.

CHAPTER VII

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Fred Godfrey found himself mixed up in some events of a stirring character.

It will be recalled that while hunting for his friends he was told that they had taken to a flat-boat, or scow, and were probably across the Susquehanna.

If such were the fact, the true course for Fred was to follow them without a second's delay.

His informant no doubt meant to tell the truth, but he had given a wrong impression.

It was true, as has been shown, that the female members of the Brainerd family had started across the river under charge of the herculean Gravity Gimp, but Mr. Brainerd himself was still on the side where the battle took place, though his son believed he was with the others that had taken to the boat.

Fred was making his way as best he could to the river side, when he became aware that he had attracted the notice of several Indians, who made for him. In the general flurry he did not notice the alarming fact till the party was almost upon him. Then he turned and fired among them, threw away his gun, and made for the river at the top of his speed.

He was remarkably fleet of foot, and in a fair race would have held his own with any Iroquois in Wyoming Valley; but there was no telling when or where some more of the dusky foes would leap up and join in the pursuit.

It was fortunate, perhaps, that the Susquehanna was so near, for the pursuit was no more than fairly begun when it was reached. Knowing he would be compelled to swim for life, he ran as far out in the water as he could, and then took what may be called a tremendous "header," throwing himself horizontally through the air, but with his head a little lower than the rest of the body, and with his arms extended and hands pressed palm to palm in front.

He struck the water at a point beyond his depth, and drawing in one deep inspiration as he went beneath, he swam with might and main until he could hold his breath no longer.

When he rose to the surface it was a long way beyond where he went under, and much farther than where the Indians were looking for him to reappear.

But they were ready with cocked guns, and the moment the head came to view they opened fire; but Fred expected that, and waiting only long enough to catch a mouthful of air, he went under and sped along like a loon beneath the surface.

Every rod thus gained increased his chances, but it did not by any means remove the danger, for it takes no very skillful marksman to pick off a man across the Susquehanna, and many a fugitive on that fateful day fell after reaching the eastern shore.

Working with his usual energy, Fred Godfrey soon found himself close to Monocacy Island, covered as it was with driftwood and undergrowth, and upon which many of the settlers had taken refuge.

Almost the first person whom he recognized was the middle-aged friend, who told him about the escape of the Brainerd family in the scow that Maggie and the servant had propelled across the Susquehanna.

This friend was now able to add that he had seen them crossing at a point considerably below the island. He saw them fired at by the Indians and Tories on shore, but he was satisfied that no one of the little company was struck.

To the dismay of the youth, the neighbor assured him that Mr. Brainerd, his father, was not with the company.

This made another change in the plans of the son. Quite hopeful that those who had crossed the river were beyond danger, his whole solicitude was now for his beloved parent. Despite the danger involved, he resolved to return to the western shore, and to stay there until he learned about his parent.

Fred was too experienced, however, to act rashly. He carefully watched his chance and swam down the stream until he was well below the swarm of fugitives, and so managed to reach the shore without detection, or rather without recognition, since it was impossible that he should escape observation.

Finally, he stepped out of the water and went up the bank, without, as he believed, attracting attention, and, suppressing all haste, walked in the direction of Forty Fort.

The battle-field, whereon the famous monument was afterwards erected, was about two miles above Forty Fort, where a feeble garrison was left when Colonel Zebulon Butler marched up the river bank, and met the Tories and Indians on that July afternoon.

Fred had landed at a point near the battle-ground, and he was in doubt whether to make search through the surrounding wood and marsh, or to steal down the river to the fort in the hope of finding his father there.

Many of the fugitives in their wild flight had thrown away their weapons (as indeed Fred Godfrey himself had done), so that it was an easy matter for him to find a gun to take the place of the one from which he had parted.

The youth made up his mind to visit the fort, and he had taken a dozen steps in that direction, when with whom should he come face to face but his beloved father himself?

The meeting was a happy one indeed, the two embracing with delight.

The father had no thought that his son had reached Wyoming, though he knew that Washington had been asked to send them re-enforcements.

Fred told the good news about the rest of the family: it was joy indeed to the parent, who was on his way to the river bank to look for them at the time he met his son.

Mr. Brainerd said that he had fought as long as there was any hope, when he turned and fled with the rest. It was the same aimless effort to get away, without any thought of the right course to take; but he was more fortunate than most of the others, for he succeeded in reaching the cover of the woods without harm.

"The best thing for us to do," said the parent, "is to go up the river so as to get above the point where, it seems, the most danger threatens."

"You mean toward Fort Wintermoot – that is, where it stood, for I see that it has been burned."

"Yes, but we needn't go the whole distance; night isn't far off, and it will be a hard task to find the folks after we get across."

Accordingly, father and son moved to the north, that is up the western bank of the river. This took them toward Fort Wintermoot, which was still smoking, and toward Fort Jenkins, just above. At the same time they were leaving the scene of the struggle a short time before.

Mr. Brainerd had no weapon, while his son carried the newly-found rifle and his two pistols. He had drawn the charges of these and reloaded them, so that they were ready for use.

"There's one thing that ought to be understood," said Mr. Brainerd, after they had walked a short distance; "and that is what is to be done by the survivor in case one of us falls."

"If I should be shot or captured," said Fred, impressively, "don't waste any time in trying to help me, but do all you can to get across the river, rejoin the family, and push on toward Stroudsburg; for I don't believe you'll be safe at any point this side."

"I promise you to do my utmost in that direction; and, if it should be my misfortune to fall into their hands, you must not imperil your life for me."

"I shall be careful of what I do," said Fred, refusing to make any more definite pledge, after having secured that of his companion not to step aside to befriend him in the event of misfortune.

Little did either dream that the test was so close at hand.

CHAPTER VIII

The two were compelled to pick their way with extreme care, for there was no saying when some of the wandering Indians would come upon them. It was necessary, as our friends thought, to go considerably farther up, before it would be at all safe to cross the river.

They were yet some distance from the point, when a slight disturbance was heard in a patch of woods in front, and they stopped.

"Wait a minute or two, until I find out what it means," said Fred; "it will save time to go through there, but it won't do to undertake it if it isn't safe."

And before Mr. Brainerd could protest, his son moved forward, as stealthily as an Indian scout, while the former concealed himself until the issue of the reconnoissance should become known.

The old gentleman realized too vividly the horrors of the massacre still going on around them to permit himself to run any unnecessary risk, now that there was a prospect of rejoining his family; and he regretted that his courageous child had gone forward so impulsively, instead of carefully flanking what seemed to be a dangerous spot.

But it was too late now to recall him, for he was beyond sight, and Mr. Brainerd could only wait and hope for the best, while, it may be truly said, he feared the worst.

It was not long before Fred Godfrey began strongly to suspect he had committed an error, from which it required all the skill at his command to extricate himself.

The wood that he had entered covered something less than an acre, and was simply a denser portion of the wilderness through which they had been making their way. He had scarcely entered it when the murmur of voices told him that others were in advance, and he knew enough of the Indians to recognize the sounds as made by them.

It was at that very moment he ought to have withdrawn, and, rejoining Mr. Brainerd, left the neighborhood as silently as possible, but his curiosity led him on.

That curiosity was gratified by the sight of six of his own people held prisoners by a group of twice as many Indians, who, beyond question, were making preparations for putting their victims to death.

As seems to be the rule, these prisoners, all of whom were able-bodied men, most of them young, were in a state of despair and collapse; they were standing up unbound and unarmed, and looking stolidly at their captors, who were also on their feet, but were talking and gesticulating with much earnestness.

The most remarkable figure in the group was a woman. She was doing the principal part of the talking, and in a voice so loud, and accompanied by such energetic gestures, that there could be no doubt that she was the leader.

She was attired in Indian costume, and was evidently a half-breed, though it has been claimed by many that she was of pure Indian blood. She was beyond middle life, her hair being plentifully sprinkled with gray, but she still possessed great strength and activity, and was well fitted to command the Indians, as she did when they marched into and took possession of Forty Fort on the succeeding day.

A son of this strange woman had been killed a short time before, and she was roused to the highest point of fury. She demanded not only the blood of those already captured, but that others should be brought in; and she had established a camp in the place named, until a sufficient number could be secured to satisfy, to a partial extent, her vengeful mood.

She is known in history as Queen Esther and as Katharine Montour. She was queen of the Seneca tribe of Indians – one of the Iroquois or Six Nations – the most powerful confederation of aborigines ever known on this continent.

Her home was in central New York, where the Six Nations had been ruled by Sir William Johnson, the British superintendent, and, among all the furies who entered Wyoming Valley on that day in July, there was none who excelled this being in the ferocity displayed toward the prisoners.

"That must be Queen Esther," thought Fred Godfrey, as he cautiously surveyed the scene; "I have heard of the hecate – "

At that instant a slight rustling behind caused him to turn his head, just in time to catch sight of a shadowy body that came down upon him like an avalanche.

He struggled fiercely, but other Indians joined in, and in a twinkling the lieutenant was disarmed and helpless, and was conducted triumphantly into the presence of Katharine Montour, whose small, black eyes sparkled as she surveyed this addition to her roll of victims, for whose torture she was arranging at that moment.

CHAPTER IX

Gravity Gimp bore as lightly as he could on the stern of the boat, which was already so heavily laden that a little more weight would have sunk it below the surface.

But steady progress was made, and everything was going along "swimmingly," as may be said, when the craft and its occupants began to receive alarming attention from the shore.

The reports of guns, and the shouting and whooping were so continuous that the fugitives had become used to them. The whistling of the bullets about their ears, and the call of Gimp, notified the ladies of their danger, and caused an outcry from Aunt Peggy.

"They're shooting at us, as sure as you live; stoop down, Maggie!"

The elderly lady and little Eva got down so low that they were quite safe. Maggie, however, kept her feet a few moments. Looking back toward the shore, she saw six or eight Indians standing close to the water and deliberately firing at them.

"Stoop down," said Gravity, in a low voice. "I'll take care ob de boat and you see what you can do wid de gun."

The plucky girl acted upon the suggestion. Picking up the weapon of the African (with which she had shot more than one deer), she sank upon her knee, and took careful aim at the group on the shore.

Gravity stopped threshing the water, and twisted around so as to watch the result, while Aunt Peggy and Eva fixed their eyes on the group with painful interest.

When the whip-like crack of the gun broke upon their ears, the spectators saw one of the Iroquois leap in the air and stagger backward, though he did not fall.

"You hit him!" exclaimed the delighted Gravity; "dey'll larn dat some oder folks can fire off a gun as well as dey."

The shot of the girl caused consternation for a minute or two among the group. They had evidently no thought of any one "striking back," now that the panic was everywhere. They could be seen gathering around the warrior, who was helped a few steps and allowed to sit on the ground.

Dropping the rifle, Maggie Brainerd caught up the pole once more and applied it with all the strength at her command, while Gravity threshed the water with renewed vigor.

Hope was now re-awakened that the river might be crossed in safety.

In the nature of things, the dismay among the Iroquois could not last long. They were joined by several new arrivals, among whom was at least one white man.

They saw that the boat was getting farther away, and the fugitives were likely to escape.

Gravity, who continually glanced over his shoulder, warned Maggie and the rest (who, however, were equally alert), so that when the boat was again struck by the whistling bullets no one was harmed.

"Miss Maggie," whispered Gravity, peering over the gunwale, his round face rising like the moon under a full eclipse, "you know dere's another loaded gun; try it agin."

"I musn't miss," she said to herself, sighting the weapon, "for if ever there was a case of self-defense this is one."

All remained quiet while she carefully drew a bead at the foremost figure. Before her aim was sure, she recognized her target as Jake Golcher.

She was startled, and for an instant undecided; but she could not shoot him, even though he deserved it. She slightly swerved the point of her piece, hoping to strike one of the Indians, with the result, however, that she missed altogether.

"Maggie," said Aunt Peggy, with rasping severity, "I've a mind to box your ears; you missed that Tory on purpose; you ought to be ashamed of yourself; I'll tell your father what a perjurer you are."

"I could not do it," replied Maggie, smiling in spite of herself at the spiteful earnestness of her relative.

"Then load up and try it again."

"Time is too precious to delay for loading guns and shooting at our old acquaintances, even if they are Tories."

Aunt Peggy was wise enough to see that Maggie could not be dictated to under such circumstances. She, therefore, held her peace, and watched the young lady, who applied the pole with a vigor hardly second to that of Gravity in his efforts of another kind to force the scow through the water.

Under their joint labors the clumsy craft advanced with considerable speed, every minute taking it farther from the shots that still came from the enemies they were leaving behind.

By and by, the African, while kicking, struck bottom with one foot. With the leverage thus obtained, he shoved the boat faster than before.

By this time those in the rear had ceased firing, and the interest of the occupants of the craft centered on the shore they were approaching.

The water shallowed rapidly, and soon the head and shoulders of Gravity Gimp rose above the gunwale of the scow. He was now enabled to look beyond the boat and scrutinize the point where they were about to land.

He had hardly taken the first glance, when he checked the vessel with such suddenness that Maggie nearly lost her balance. Looking inquiringly at him, she asked, with alarm.

"What's the matter, Gravity?"

"It's no use, Miss Maggie," was the despairing reply; "we may as well give up; don't you see we're cotched? The Tories hab got us *dis* time, suah!"

CHAPTER X

The scow containing the three fugitives was nearing the eastern shore of the Susquehanna, when the negro servant, Gravity Gimp, stopped, checking the craft by grasping the stern.

At that moment the water scarcely reached his waist, and was shoaling at every step, so that the boat was entirely under his control.

He had good cause for his alarm, for, only an instant before, he had looked behind him at the group of Tories and Indians on the western shore, who had stopped firing, and he saw that several had entered the river with the intention of pushing the pursuit through the desolate wilderness already spoken of as the "Shades of Death."

The distance between the pursuer and pursued was slight, for the Susquehanna is not a very broad river where it meanders through the Wyoming Valley, and there remained so much of daylight that the danger of a collision with their enemies was threatening indeed.

Still the sight increased the efforts to avoid them, and Gravity had not lost his heart by any means, when he looked over the heads of his friends to decide where they were to land.

It will be recalled that they had started below where most of the fugitives were pushing for the other bank, and the action of the current had carried them still lower, so there was reason for hoping they were outside of immediate peril.

But the African had no more than fixed his eye on the point, where there was much wood and undergrowth, than he noticed an agitation of the bushes, and, to his dismay, a tall figure clad in paint and feathers stepped forth to view.

He had a long rifle in one hand, and was daubed in the hideous fashion of the wild Indian on the war-path.

The fact that he advanced thus openly in front of the fugitives, who had been exchanging shots with their foes behind them, was proof to Gravity that he was only one of a large party hidden in the bushes, and into whose hands he and his friends were about to throw themselves.

Thus it was that the little group was caught between two fires.

Worse than all, the two guns in the scow, with which something like a fight might have been made, were empty, and it was out of the question to reload them at this critical moment.

No wonder, therefore, when the faithful negro discovered the trap into which they had run, that he straightened up, checked the boat, and uttered the exclamation I have quoted.

The ladies, with blanched faces glanced from one shore to the other, wondering to which party it was best to surrender themselves.

At this time, the warrior in front stood calmly contemplating them, as if sure there was no escape, and nothing could be added to the terror of the patriots.

"Let us turn down the river," said the brave-hearted Maggie, thrusting the pole into the water again; "they have not captured us yet, and it is better we should all be shot than fall into –"

Just then the four were struck dumb by hearing the savage in front call out:

"What have you stopped work for? Don't turn down the river; hurry over, or those consarned Iroquois will overhaul you!"

Unquestionably that was not the voice of an Indian!

And yet the words were spoken by the painted individual who confronted them, and whom they held in such terror.

He must have suspected their perplexity, for, noticing that they still hesitated, his mouth expanded into a broad grin, as he added:

"Don't you know me? I'm Habakkuk McEwen, and I'm ready to do all I can for you. Hurry up, Gravity; use that pole in the right direction, Maggie; cheer up, Eva, and how are you, Aunt Peggy?"

No words can picture the relief of the little party, on learning that he whom they mistook for an Indian was a white man and a friend.

Habakkuk McEwen was a neighbor, as he had called himself, and came from the same section in Connecticut which furnished the Brainerds and most of the settlers in the Wyoming Valley.

He had enlisted but a few months before, and, though not very brilliant mentally, yet he was well liked in the settlement.

Excepting two individuals – whose identity the reader knows – it may be safely said there was no one whom the patriots could have been more pleased to see than Habakkuk, for he added so much strength to the company that was sorely in need of it, but it may as well be admitted, that the honest fellow, although a volunteer in the defense of his country against the British invaders, was sometimes lacking in the courage so necessary to the successful soldier. However, there he was, and the words were scarcely out of his mouth when the scow ran plump against the bank, the depth of the water just permitting it, and Habakkuk cordially shook hands with each as he helped them out, winding up with a fervid grip of the African's huge palm.

His tongue was busy while thus engaged.

"You took me for an Injin, did you? Well, I'm pleased to hear that, for it is complimentary to my skill, for that's what I got up this rig for. I knowed what the danger was, and it struck me that if I was going to sarcumvent Injins it was a good idea to start out like one."

"Have you just arrived, Habakkuk?" asked Maggie.

"Not more than half an hour ago – you see – but let's get away from this spot, for some of them loose bullets may hit us."

This was prudent advice, for their pursuers were at that moment forcing their way through the river in pursuit.

"Gravity, you know this neighborhood better than I do – so take the lead," said the disguised patriot: "and move lively, for I begin to feel nervous."

"I kin move lively when dere's need ob it," replied the servant, "and it looks to me as if there couldn't be a better time for hurryin' dan dis identical one."

Gimp was familiar with the valley and mountains for miles around, and he threw himself at once in the advance, the rest following with rapid footsteps.

As they hastened toward the "Shades of Death" (and the name was never more appropriate than on that eventful night), Habakkuk McEwen explained how it was he arrived as he did.

"We fit the battle of Monmouth on the 28th of June, so you kin see I've had to travel fast to git here even as late as I did. But a lot of us heard that trouble was coming for Wyoming, and we've been uneasy for a fortnight. Three of us went to General Washington and argufied the matter with him; he seemed to be worried and anxious to do all he could, and he said that Connecticut orter lend a hand, as we were her colony, but he was after the Britishers just then, and he wouldn't 'low us to go till arter the battle.

"Wal, we had a first-class battle down there at Monmouth in Jersey, and we and Molly Pitcher made the redcoats dance to the tune of 'Yankee Doodle' as they haven't danced since Saratoga and Trenton. Whew! But wasn't the day hot, and didn't the dust fly along that road! Well, I jus' felt when we had 'em on the run, that if the Susquehanna could be turned down my throat, I would stand it for a couple of hours.

"Howsumever, just as soon as the battle was over, and I seen the General had 'em, even though General Lee tried to betray us, why, I just pulled out and started for Wyoming.

"I didn't wait for the other chaps either, for, somehow or other, I had the feeling strong that there wasn't an hour to spare down in these parts. I traveled hard, and after crossing the upper Delaware, I heard rumors that just made my hair stand on end.

"I knowed that the Tories and Iroquois were on their way, and when I stopped at the house of a settler only twenty miles off, I found him packing up and getting ready to move to Stroudsburg.

"I tried to persuade him to go back with me and help the folks, but he couldn't see why he should desert his own family, even though there was scarcely any danger to 'em.

"He was the man, howsumever, who suggested to me that I had better fix up as an Injin, and he furnished the paint, feathers, and rig. He helped me to get inside of 'em, too, and when he was through, and showed me a glass, I acterally thought I was a Seneca warrior for the time, and, if I'd had a tomahawk, I'd been likely to have tomahawked the settler and his family.

"As it was, I jumped into the air and give out a ringin' whoop, and felt mighty savage and peart like; then I struck out for Wyoming, and I've done some tall traveling, I can tell you. Everybody that saw me took me for an Injin, and gave me a wide berth. Two men shot at me, and I was just beginning to think there might be less fun in playing Injin than appeared at first.

"Well," added the eccentric individual, "I got here too late to take part in the battle, but I'm ready to do all I can to help you out of your trouble, which looks powerful serious."

And the little band, as may well be imagined, were grateful beyond expression to find that what was first taken to be a dreaded enemy was after all a valuable friend.

CHAPTER XI

It caused Lieutenant Godfrey the deepest chagrin to reflect that, after his remarkable escapes of the day, he had been taken prisoner in this fashion.

He was in a crouching posture, watching the scene in front, when several Seneca warriors returning to camp discovered him, and before he could make an effective resistance, he was borne to the ground, disarmed, and made prisoner.

But chagrin was quickly lost in alarm, for there could be no doubt of the intentions of Queen Esther respecting all her captives.

It was characteristic of the youth that his first misgiving was concerning his father, who was but such a short distance behind him, and he expected every minute to see the hapless man brought in as his companion.

But as time passed, Fred gained hope for him, and, recalling his pledge, believed he would keep beyond danger.

Katharine Montour bent her gaze upon the youth, as he came in front of her escorted by several warriors, and then she broke into a chuckling laugh.

This extraordinary creature was once quite popular with civilized people, and she spoke English as well as the Seneca tongue.

"Ha, ha, ha," she added, "you're another Yankee, ain't you?"

Fred had no wish to deny the charge, but he thought best to hold his peace. If she were disposed to enter into a fair argument, he could maintain his own with her; but the relative situation of the two was that of the wolf and lamb in the fable, and, no matter what line he might take, or how skillfully he might try to conciliate her, she would only work herself into a still more furious passion.

He therefore did wisely in not making any reply, but with his hand at his side, and with a stolid, drooping, half-vacant gaze like that of the other prisoners, he looked mutely at her.

The attractive appearance of the young lieutenant, and his manly bearing when first brought before her, may have suggested to Queen Esther that a prisoner of more consideration than usual was at her disposal.

Her exultation, therefore, was the greater, because she would gain this additional means of ministering to her thirst for vengeance.

"You Yankee officer?" she asked, peering into his handsome face.

"I am a lieutenant in the Continental army," answered Fred.

"*All* the captains were killed," was the truthful declaration of the queen, "and more of you Yankees shall be killed; do you see these here?" she asked, making a sweep with her hand toward the captives. "All of them shall die by my hands – yes, by *my* hands. Do you hear?"

Fred heard, but he did not think it wise to take the negative of the question, and he continued to hold his peace.

While the Indians were looking on with that apparent indifference which the race can so well assume under the most trying circumstances, Queen Esther suddenly whipped out from the folds of her gaudy dress a scalp, which she flourished in front of the prisoners. Then, with many execrations, she began a weird song and dance up and down in front of them.

This shocking scene lasted but a few minutes, when other Indians came in with more prisoners, among whom Fred recognized several acquaintances. They looked sorrowfully at each other, but said nothing.

The lieutenant counted, and saw there were precisely eighteen, besides himself. It must have been that Queen Esther had stopped in this piece of woods, and, calling in a number of her Senecas, had sent them out to bring in all the captives they could.

She had now secured enough to satisfy her, and she started up the river with them.

The hapless ones walked in a straggling group together, while the Indians were on either hand in front, and the Queen at the rear, as if she wished to contemplate and enjoy the treat in prospect.

Whither they were going, Fred could only guess, but he was certain that it was to some spot where torture would be inflicted on the patriots.

The mixed company had progressed something like an eighth of a mile, when a sudden confusion occurred in the ranks, and those who looked around caught sight of a man dashing through the undergrowth with the speed of a frightened deer.

Queen Esther recognized the figure as that of the young lieutenant, and, with a shriek of rage, hurled her tomahawk, missing him only by a hair's breadth.

At the same moment she called upon her warriors to recapture him, and they dashed off with all speed, not needing the incentive of her command.

It may be said that in such daring breaks for life as that of Fred Godfrey, everything depends on the start. He made such a tremendous bound that he was several rods distant before his foes really understood what had taken place.

Another piece of extremely good fortune lay in the fact that the woods where this was done were quite dense, and in the approaching twilight the start gained by the fugitive actually placed him beyond their sight.

This by no means insured his escape, for his pursuers were too close on his heels, but it gave him an advantage, the importance of which cannot be overstated.

Fred, as you have been told, was fleet of foot, and he now did his utmost, but he could not hope to outrun those who were so close.

He had gone a short distance only, when he turned to the right, and threw himself down beside a fallen tree which lay across his path, and he was not a moment too soon.

The next instant, two warriors bounded over the log and vanished in the wood. As they were sure to suspect the trick that had been played, Fred did not stay where he was. He knew the Senecas would speedily return, and he could not elude such a search as they would be sure to make.

Crawling away from the friendly log, he hurried silently off in a crouching posture, and soon reached a point where he felt quite safe from detection, though he did not throw his caution aside.

As soon as he felt himself master of his movements he made his way back to the point where he had separated from his father; but, although he cautiously signaled to him, he received no response, and he concluded that he was still in hiding somewhere in the neighborhood, and was afraid to answer the calls, if, indeed, he heard them; or he had managed to cross the Susquehanna, and was searching for the rest of his family.

In either case it was a great relief to find he had not fallen into the hands of Queen Esther, who was certain to be doubly savage, now that she had lost the prisoner whom she valued the most.

"If those captives would only made a break," said Fred, to himself, "some would get off; but, as it is, they are like dumb brutes led to the slaughter, and all will perish miserably – Heaven help them!"

CHAPTER XII

Fred Godfrey was not altogether correct in his dismal prophecy.

Queen Esther, when she found that one of her prisoners was gone, gave expressions of fury and resumed the march up the river, her warriors keeping closer watch than before to prevent any other escape.

The procession halted near a boulder which rises about eighteen inches above the ground, and which may be seen to-day, as it lies directly east of the battle monument toward the site of burned Fort Wintermoot, on the brow of the high steep bank, which centuries ago probably marked the shore of the Susquehanna.

The eighteen prisoners were driven forward until this celebrated boulder was reached, which has been known ever since by the ominous name of "Queen Esther's Rock."

Here the captives were ranged in a circle around the stone, while the queen, with a death-maul and hatchet, proceeded to wreak vengeance upon her victims for the death of her son, killed by a scouting party, a short time before the battle.

One after another, the white men were seated upon the rock, and held by two strong warriors, while the terrible Katharine Montour chanted a wild dirge, and, raising the death-maul in both hands, dealt the single blow that was all sufficient.

Occasionally she varied the dreadful ceremony by using a keen-edged hatchet with her muscular arm, which was as effective as the death-maul wielded by both hands.

The work went on until eleven victims had been sacrificed, when one of the men, Lebbeus Hammond, was roused by the sight of his own brother, who was placed upon the rock, and tightly grasped by two warriors.

It was impossible to do anything for him, but Lebbeus whispered to Joseph Elliott:

"Let's try it!"

On the instant, they wrenched themselves loose from their captors, and bounded down the river bank.

They expected to be shot, and they preferred such a death to that which awaited them if they remained.

But the very audacity of the attempt, like that of Fred Godfrey, threw the Indians into confusion for the moment, and instead of firing they broke into pursuit, without discharging a weapon.

Fortunately for the fugitives, instead of keeping together they diverged, Hammond heading up the river. The warriors must have concluded that they were making for Forty Fort, and shaped their course with the purpose of shutting them off. The fort lay to the south and below, and, understanding the aim of the Indians, Hammond turned more directly up the river.

He was fleet-footed, and ran as never before; but, while straining every nerve, he caught his foot in a root, and was thrown headlong down the bank, rolling all in a heap underneath the bushy top of a fallen tree.

He started to scramble to his feet, when, like a flash, it occurred to him that there was no safer course than to stay where he was.

Only a few seconds passed, when the Indians approached and began hunting for him. How they failed to discover the young man passes comprehension, and it was only another of the several wonderful escapes which marked the massacre of Wyoming.

The savages peered here and there, drawing the bushes aside, and looking among the old logs. The poor fellow heard their stealthy footsteps all around him, and caught glimpses of their coppery faces, smeared with paint, as they uttered some exclamation and almost stepped upon him in his concealment.

Once he was sure he was detected, and he held his breath, fearful that the throbbing of his heart would betray him; but the red men moved away, and shortly after returned to Queen Esther's Rock to help in the executions going on there.

Hammond stayed where he was until all was still, when he crept cautiously out, and, swimming the river, made his way to the fort at Wilkesbarre, where, to his amazement, he found his companion in flight.

The escape of this patriot was no less extraordinary than that of Hammond.

He had also swum the river to the bar on the lower point of Monocacy Island, going almost the entire distance under water. Whenever he threw up his head for a breath of fresh air he was fired upon, and he received a bad wound in the shoulder.

Although suffering severely from it, he persevered and soon reached the opposite side, where he found a horse wandering loose and without bridle or saddle.

With little effort Elliott succeeded in catching him, and with a bridle improvised from the bark of a hickory sapling, he rode the animal to Wilkesbarre, where the wound was dressed by a surgeon.

The next morning he went down the river with his wife and child in a canoe managed by a boy, and joined his friends at Catawissa.

Both Hammond and Elliott lived many years afterward, and are still remembered by some of the old settlers in Wyoming Valley.

CHAPTER XIII

In the mean time the little party consisting of Maggie and Eva Brainerd, Aunt Peggy, and the servant Gravity Gimp, and the eccentric New Englander Habakkuk McEwen, were improving to the utmost the advantage gained by reaching the eastern bank of the Susquehanna.

"I don't want to go away without papa," said Eva, as she looked longingly across the river, where the massacre was going on, as shown in the smoke of burning buildings, the crack of the rifles, the whoop of the Indians, the shouts of fugitives, and the flight of settlers, including women and children, who flocked to the river.

Despite the danger, Maggie shared with her sister the most tender solicitude for her parent.

"Perhaps he is among them," said she, in a lower voice, to Gravity.

"There's no telling where anybody is," replied the New Englander, "but I notice that the Tories and Injins right across from us are watching our movements pretty sharp, and it won't do for us to loaf about here many days, if we expect to get out with our lives."

"What a pity that Jake Golcher was not shot when we had the chance!" exclaimed Aunt Peggy.

"We're likely to get dat same chance agin," said Gimp, impressively, "and de next time de one dat don't took it has got to be shot for him."

"If we could do Richard any good," added Aunt Peggy, more thoughtfully, "we ought to wait here; but can we?"

McEwen, who was growing uneasy over this delay, shook his head.

"If anybody can show me the way by which we can help him I'm willing to stay, but the woods are full of people fleeing, and the savages are after 'em. I've no doubt a lot are in Forty Fort, where they'll be safe if they've enough to keep the Injins back. There's only one thing left for us to do, and that's to run."

He looked inquiringly at Maggie, and the brave girl, with a breaking heart, stifled her anguish and nodded her head to signify that she was ready.

As courageous as the Roman maiden of old, she could walk straight along the line of duty, even though it led over red-hot plow-shares.

Poor Eva put her hands to her face, and the tears streamed through her fingers, but she, too, had something of the high courage of her sister, and when the latter placed her arm about her and drew her head over upon her shoulder, the little girl sobbed for a few minutes only, and then cheered up and bent to her task.

"Where do you go?" asked Maggie of Habakkuk.

"I think there is an old trail leading through the mountains and wilderness to Stroudsburg, ain't there, Gimp?"

"Dar am," was the response, "and I've been over it twice, so dat I knows de way."

"Does it lead through the 'Shades of Death?'"

"It am."

"It's a long road to Stroudsburg, for I came from out that way, and it'll be a powerful hard tramp, but I don't think we can do any better. These Iroquois have had a taste of victory, and they'll never stop, so long as there's a chance to get any more. They'll trail us all day to-morrow, and it's my opinion we ain't goin' to get to Stroudsburg in a hurry, either."

"Den let's be off," added Gravity, who could not fail to see the necessity for such promptness.

"If papa comes across the river," said Eva, who threatened to yield again; "won't he cross higher up?"

It struck all that there was some reason in this suggestion, which was acted upon without delay.

They made their way up the western shore until some distance above Monocacy Island, every eye and ear on the alert.

They saw plenty of fugitives, some on horseback, some wounded, all scared half out of their senses, and striving to get as far from the valley as possible.

Numerous neighbors and acquaintances were encountered, but naught was seen of Mr. Brainerd, and nothing was known of Fred's presence on the other shore. He had left the Continental army directly after McEwen, who was unaware, therefore, of his coming.

It would not do to tarry any longer. The afternoon was drawing to a close, and the whoops and rifle-shots that every now and then were heard on the eastern shore proved that the little party in whom we are interested were only rendering their situation more perilous by every minute's delay.

Accordingly an abrupt turn was made to the right, and they plunged into the woods, pushing for the mountains some distance back of the river, and aiming to strike the Stroudsburg trail, after reaching the other side of the range, which is about a thousand feet in height.

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