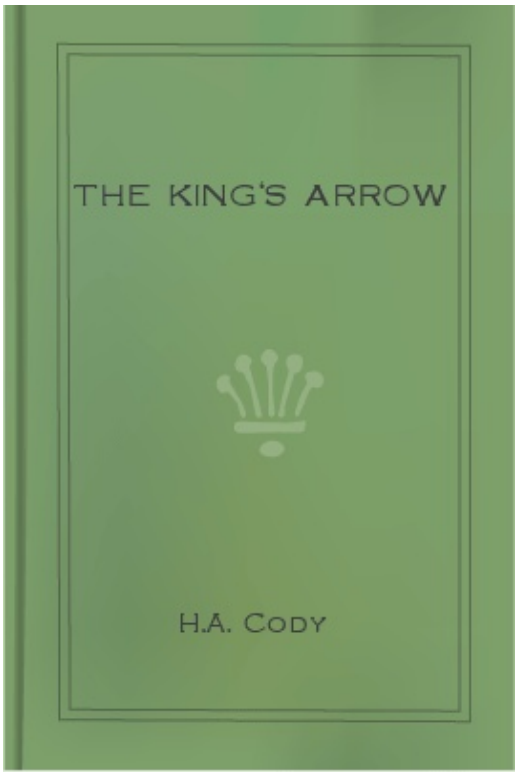

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Transcriber's note: In the original book, the 's' in "Wu−las−tukw" is actually "s−acute", or Unicode U+015B, and the first 'u' in "Pu−kut" is actually "u−breve", or Unicode U+016D. In this e−text, both characters have been rendered as their standard ASCII equivalents.

THE KING'S ARROW

A Tale of the United Empire Loyalists

by

H. A. CODY

Author of "The Frontiersman," "The Long Patrol," "Glen of the High North," "Jess of the Rebel Trail," etc.

McClelland and Stewart Publishers Toronto George H. Doran Company

1922,

To

MY ANCESTORS OF THE UNITED EMPIRE LOYALISTS

Who Came to the St. John River, May, 1783,

This Book is Gratefully Dedicated

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CHAPTER

THE LOYALISTS

(1783)

"Broad lands, ancestral homes, the gathered wealth Of patient toil and self−denying years Were confiscate and lost. . . . Not drooping like poor fugitives they came In exodus to our Canadian wilds, But full of heart and hope, with heads erect, And fearless eyes, victorious in defeat."

WILLIAM KIRBY

"No one will know, because none has told, all that those brave pioneers underwent for their devotion and fidelity. You will see to−day on the outskirts of the older settlements little mounds, moss−covered tombstones which record the last resting−places of the forefathers of the hamlet. They do not tell you of the brave hearts

laid low by hunger and exposure, of the girlish forms washed away, of the babes and little children who perished for want of proper food and raiment. They have nothing to tell of the courageous, high−minded mothers, wives and daughters, who bore themselves as bravely as men, complaining never, toiling with men in the fields, banishing all regrets for the life they might have led had they sacrificed their loyalty. . . . No great monument is raised to their memory; none is needed; it is enshrined forever in the hearts of every Canadian and of every one who admires fidelity to principle, devotion and self−sacrifice."

"*Romance of Canada*," BECKLES H. WILLSON

THE KING'S ARROW

CHAPTER I

WHEN THE CANNON ROARED

A keen wind whipping in from the west swayed the tops of innumerable pines, firs, spruces, and maples. They were goodly trees, unharmed as yet by scathing fire or biting axe. Proudly they lifted their crests to the wind and the sun, while down below, their great boles were wrapped in perpetual shade and calm. Life, mysterious life, lurked within those brooding depths, and well did the friendly trees keep the many secrets of the denizens of the wild.

Through that trackless maze two wayfarers warily threaded their course on a chill May day in the year seventeen hundred and eighty−three. They were men, and their speed denoted the urgency of the business upon which they were bent. They were clad in buckskin jackets, and homespun trousers, which showed signs of hard usage. Moccasins encased their feet, and squirrel−skin caps sat lightly upon their heads. Each carried a heavy flint−lock musket in his hand, while at his side swung the inevitable powder−horn, hung low enough so as not to interfere with the small pack strapped across the shoulders.

Both travellers were peering intently forward, and when at length the glint of shimmering water glimmered through the trees their faces brightened with satisfaction. But just then the leader stopped dead in his tracks, and glanced anxiously to the left. He was an Indian of magnificent physique, and princely bearing, as straight as the trees around him. His companion, too, was standing in a listening attitude a few feet away. His keen ears had also caught a sound, and he knew its meaning. He was a white man, much younger than the Indian, although from his deeply−bronzed face he might have been mistaken for a native. He measured up nobly to the other in size and bearing, as well as in strength, woodland skill, and endurance on the trail.

"Slashers, Pete, eh?" he questioned in a low voice.

"A−ha−ha," was the reply. "No meet 'em, Dane. Too many. We go round."

Without another word he swung sharply to the right, and led the way to the water in a wide circle. Cautiously they approached the shore, and then keeping within the edge of the forest they moved slowly along, most of the time upon their hands and knees. Occasionally they paused to listen, but the only sounds they heard were the ones which had first arrested their attention, although much nearer now.

Presently they stopped and from a thicket of bushes drew forth a birch canoe, which had been cunningly hidden. It took them but a few minutes to carry it to the water, step lightly aboard, and push away from the shore. Each seized a paddle, and soon the canoe was headed for the open, with Dane squatting forward, and the Indian seated astern.

Less hardy souls would have hesitated ere venturing out upon that angry stretch of water in such a frail craft. The crooked Kennebacasis was showing its temper in no uncertain manner. Exposed to the full rake of the

strong westerly wind, the waves were running high, and breaking into white−caps, threatened to engulf the reeling canoe. But the Indian was master of the situation, and steered so skilfully that only an occasional wisp of spray was flung on board.

They had gone about two hundred yards when a shot rang out from the shore, and a bullet whistled past their heads. Glancing quickly around, they saw several men in the distance with muskets in their hands. They were shouting words of defiance to which the canoeists made no reply. Intuitively Dane reached for his musket, but a sharp warning from the Indian caused him to desist.

"No shoot," he ordered. "Paddle. Quick."

And in truth there was urgent need, for the canoe had swung somewhat to the left and was in danger of being swamped by the big waves as they rolled and tossed their white foamy manes. Another bullet sang by as Dane drove his paddle into the water and forced the canoe into the eye of the wind just as a larger wave than usual was about to break. To attempt to shoot he realised would be useless, although he longed to have a try at the insulting slashers. But to reach the opposite shore in safety would require every ounce of strength and utmost skill, so he bent steadily to his task and paid no further heed to the men upon the shore.

Ahead lay two islands, separated by a narrow strip of water, and toward this opening they directed their course. It was a hard fight, and only men of great strength and thoroughly−developed muscles could have accomplished the task. Reeling, dipping, lifting, and sliding, the canoe pressed on, a fragile thing in the grip of an angry monster. But bear up it did and rode proudly at last into the smooth water between the two islands. Here the men rested and mopped their moist foreheads.

"Bad blow," the Indian casually remarked.

"Pretty heavy," Dane replied. "I wish the slashers had come after us."

"Slashers, ugh! Cowards! No come. Bimeby me ketch 'em. Me fix 'em, all sam' skunk."

Dane smiled as he again dipped his paddle into the water.

"Come, Pete, let's get on. There's a nasty run ahead, and it'll take us over two hours after we land to reach the Fort."

"Plenty rum to−night, eh?" the Indian queried, as he guided the canoe out into the open.

"Not plenty, remember, Pete. You've got to be careful this time and not take too much. If there are slashers hanging around the trading post they'll be only too anxious to get you drunk, and put you out of business. There's too much at stake to run any risk."

"Umph! me no get drunk," the Indian retorted. "Me no fool. Me no crazee white man."

It took them almost a half hour to cross to the mainland. Here they landed, concealed the canoe, and ate a frugal meal of bread and dried meat. This detained them but a short time, and they then started forth upon the trail which led along the river not far from the shore. They swung rapidly on their way, up hill and down, leaping small brooks, and crossing swamps overgrown with a tangle of alders, rank grass, and succulent weeds. Small game was plentiful. Rabbits scurried across the trail, and partridges rose and whirred among the trees. But the travellers never paused in their onward march. Although they had been on the way since early morning, they showed no sign of fatigue. Their strong athletic bodies, bent somewhat forward, swayed in rythmic motion, and their feet beat a silent tatoo upon the well−worn trail.

For over an hour they kept up this swinging gait, and only slowed down when at length the trail led them out of the thick forest into a great open portion of the country. This was marshland, and it spread out before them miles in extent. To the right were rugged wooded hills, while far away to the left the cold steel glitter of the Bay of Fundy could be distinctly seen.

For a few minutes they stopped to rest on this commanding elevation, Dane's whole soul athrill at the wonderful panorama thus suddenly presented to view. His eyes glowed, and he eagerly inhaled great draughts of the invigorating tang wafted in from the far distant sea.

"My, that's fine!" he ejaculated, giving a deep sigh of satisfaction. "That puts new life into one, eh, Pete?"

The Indian's mind, however, was not upon the marvellous things of nature. He was gazing intently down toward the marshland where something had attracted his attention.

"Plenty duck down dere," he replied. "Me get 'em bimeby."

Dane smiled, picked up his musket, and looked quizzically at his companion.

"Can't you see anything but ducks, Pete? What do you think of all that?" and he waved his hand to the left. "Isn't it great!"

"Umph!" the Indian grunted, "me see only duck; stummick say only 'duck.'"

"Come on, then, Pete," the young man ordered. "The sooner we get through with our business, the sooner you can come back for your ducks. One of those fat fellows would go well for supper."

Turning somewhat to the right, they followed the trail over the rugged hills, where through breaks in the trees they could catch occasional glimpses of the marsh and the water beyond. The way here was rough, and their progress somewhat slow. But steadily they plodded on, knowing that their destination was now not far off.

After crossing an exceptionally bad piece of ground, they came out upon a pleasant little lake lying like a gem among the hills. At its outlet was a small saw−mill, but now idle, and with no one in sight. Here they paused for a few minutes, and when they were about to proceed a great roar startled them. It was quickly followed by three more in rapid succession, and then all was still.

"It's the Fort cannon!" Dane exclaimed, much excited. "Something's happening over there. Maybe that old pirate, Crabtree, has come up the harbour again. He won't find Fort Howe as easy to take as Fort Frederick, let me tell you that. Come on, Pete, let's see the fun."

Hurrying on their way, ere long they reached the summit of a hill above the lake, from which position they were able to obtain the first view of the Fort away in the distance. The guns were silent now, and no sign of life could they see.

Below stretched a deep wooded valley through which the trail ran. It did not take the excited men long to speed down the hill and up the opposite side. The roar of the cannon had roused these hardy sons of the wild, and the fire of a new adventure thrilled their souls. The great guns had roared, and what else did it mean but a fight with a desperate foe in the narrow harbour? And if they could see the struggle, what a tale they would have to tell their comrades around the camp fires in the heart of the great forest.

As they gained the summit of the hill, the trail led them through clearings where the trees had been cut for fuel. Piles of brush were on all sides, and in places cords of wood lined the way which here widened into a rough road. They were coming into the limits of civilisation now, and the view of the Fort was much more

distinct. The great guns gave no further voice, but as they neared the crest of the hill which slopes down to the harbour, a new and peculiar sound fell upon their ears. They paused and listened intently, but could not understand its meaning.

Cautiously they advanced, alert, and ready to flee to the shelter of the forest should occasion require. For a time nothing unusual could they see, although the strange sound was becoming more audible. Reaching at length the brow of the hill, they stopped dead in their tracks at a wonderful sight. Below lay the harbour, where vessels large and small were riding calmly at anchor. Where had they come from? and what were they doing there? Such were the questions which leaped to Dane's mind. Small boats were coming from the ships, loaded with people, while on the shore and some distance from the water throngs of men, women, and children were either huddled in groups, or hurrying to and fro in the most excited manner. Tents and rude brush shacks dotted the hillside, before which people were standing, while bundles and household effects were scattered about on every side.

Never had Dane been so greatly puzzled. Why had the Fort guns roared? What were those ships doing there in the harbour? That they did not belong to the pirates he felt certain, for they bore the English flag, and he could see red−coated soldiers mingling with the people on the shore. In his intense interest he forgot for the moment his important mission, and he was upon the point of hastening down the hill to find out for himself the meaning of the strange scene when Pete touched his arm.

"What all dat beeg fuss, eh?" he asked.

The Indian's question startled him, and brought him to himself.

"Blamed if I know, Pete," he replied. "It's beyond me, for I never saw anything like it before. Anyway, I'm going to find out. You take my pack and gun and go back to the lake. Get a duck for supper, a good big fat fellow. I'll be there as soon as I can, and tell you what I can learn at the Fort. We've run across something to−day, Pete, more than we expected."

CHAPTER II

"COME AND TAKE IT"

Fort Howe occupied an important position at the mouth of the St. John River when the present Province of New Brunswick was a part of Nova Scotia. It was well situated, and from the summit of a high hill commanded the harbour, a large stretch of the river, and the entire surrounding country for miles in extent. It looked down upon the ruins of Fort Frederick, which it replaced, and across to the site of another old Fort where the brave and noble Lady LaTour and her little band of men made their gallant resistance to a treacherous foe.

Fort Howe proved a great comfort to the trading post at Portland Point, and to the thirty or more families settled in the vicinity. Scarcely had it been erected, and its guns mounted, when the rapacious pirate from Machias, A. Greene Crabtree by name, appeared upon the scene, as he had done before with disastrous results. But this time he received the surprise of his life. He viewed with astonishment the new Fort upon the hill, and the flag of England floating from the ramparts. So great was his astonishment that he beat a hasty retreat, and troubled no more the little settlement at Portland Point.

Fort Howe was not a large place, containing in all two blockhouses and barracks, with twelve rooms for the officers, and accommodation for one hundred men. The armament consisted of two five and a half inch brass mortars, and eight iron guns, the latter including two eighteen−pounders, four six−pounders, and two four−pounders.

Although Fort Howe was small, yet it meant a great deal to the people scattered along the St. John River and its various tributaries. It was the seat of authority where all knew that true British justice would be meted out by the brave, sturdy commander in charge, Major Gilfred Studholme. It had a restraining influence upon restless, warlike Indians, and rebels dwelling along the river. At the same time it filled the hearts of all loyal, peaceful people with a feeling of security. To them it was a symbol of England's power, and they often discussed it around their camp fires, and in their lonely forest homes.

As Dane Norwood paused for a minute upon the brow of the opposite hill, after he had left the Indian, a feeling of pride and awe welled up in his heart as he looked across at the Fort. He had heard much about it, but never until this day had he set eyes upon the place. He saw the big flag fluttering in the breeze, and the black muzzels of the cannon frowning seaward. He longed to hear them roar again, and he wondered how far they would shoot, much farther, he had been told, than the largest flint−lock ever made.

Leaving the brow of the hill, he moved swiftly down a narrow trail which led to a large pond of water below. At its outlet was a tidal grist mill, back of which a strong dam had been built. Along this latter was a foot path which he followed, and soon reached the opposite bank. From here a well−constructed road, lined with trees, wound up the hill to the Fort. Dane walked somewhat slower now, and his heart beat fast. He was at the end of his long journey, and soon he would be in the presence of the man of whom he had heard so much. He slipped his hand beneath his buckskin jacket and felt, as he had done so often during the last three days, a small package hidden in an inside pocket. In a few minutes more it would be delivered into the hands of the owner, and his responsibility would be ended.

When part way up the hill he came to a strong barricade, where he was suddenly confronted and challenged by a sentry, who demanded where he was going and what he wanted.

"I have a message for the commander of the Fort," Dane told him. "I must see him at once."

"The Major is out at present," the soldier replied. "But let me have your message and I shall give it to him as soon as he comes back."

"I have orders to give it to the Major himself and to no one else," the courier explained. "It is very important."

"It certainly must be," and the soldier smiled. "But the Major is very busy to−day, so may not have time to see you. He is down at the trading post just now looking after the wants of those people who have come in the ships. They have upset things in general, and are making matters pretty lively around here, let me tell you that. The Major is almost at his wits' end."

"Who are they?" Dane eagerly asked, "and where did they come from?"

"Why, don't you know?" the soldier asked in surprise.

"No, I have not the least idea. When I heard the Fort guns roar, I thought maybe old Crabtree had come back again."

The soldier laughed and looked curiously at the young man.

"Say, where do you hail from, anyway, that you haven't heard about the coming of the Loyalists? Why, we've been expecting them for some time."

"I never heard of them," Dane confessed, "and have no idea who they are."

"They are the ones who stood by King George during the Revolutionary War, of course. When England gave

up the fight, and peace was decided upon, the Loyalists were in a bad way. Their property was confiscated, and they themselves treated very badly. They would not live under the new flag of their enemies, so they got out, and here they are."

Dane glanced out toward the ships with the light of intense interest in his eyes. What a story he would have to tell his comrades in the wilderness. They all knew about the war, but no word had reached them of the coming of the Loyalists.

"Didn't you want them to come here?" he asked turning to the sentry.

"Want them? Why, we had nothing to say about the matter."

"But didn't you fire upon them? I heard the roar of the guns when out in the hills."

The soldier threw back his head and gave a hearty laugh. He was enjoying this conversation, as it broke the monotony of his duty.

"We weren't firing upon them," he explained. "That was only a salute of welcome."

"What are all those people going to do?" Dane asked. "How are they to make a living?"

"Oh, I suppose many will settle here, while others will take up land and farm. It will be some time, though, before everything is straightened out. Just look at that crowd down there," and he motioned to the trading post. "I guess we'll have our hands full keeping order. I don't envy the Major his job."

"And there are others he must handle as well," Dane replied. "I must see him at once. Which is the best road to take?"

"You better follow that one along the side of the hill," the soldier advised, pointing to the right. "There is a short cut down over the bank some distance ahead. You can't miss it. There is another along the waterfront leading to the mill−pond. That's the best one to take coming back."

Thanking the friendly sentry, Dane hurried away, and in about fifteen minutes came near the trading post. He walked slower now, greatly interested in everything he beheld, from the quaint store to the people gathered ground the building.

For years this post at Portland Point had been the Mecca for the entire country. The owners, Simonds and White, carried on an extensive trade with both Indians and whites. Enduring and overcoming great difficulties, they laid the foundation of what to−day is the City of St. John. The most important event, however, in all their career at Portland Point was the arrival of the thousands of exiles in their midst. They gave them a hearty welcome, and did all in their power to aid them in the land of their adoption.

As Dane approached the crowd, he looked keenly about for Major Studholme. Although he had never seen him, he imagined that he would know him at once. He surely would be a large man, of princely bearing, who would be busy issuing orders to his men. But although he saw a number of soldiers, there was no one who measured Up to his ideal of the commander of the Fort.

At length he observed a man, who from his uniform seemed to be an officer, seated at a small rough table near the store door. He was busy writing, and passing pieces of paper to men standing before him. Surely he must be the Major, Dane thought, so stepping forward, he stood for a few minutes close to the table. He soon learned that the officer was issuing orders to the Loyalists for boards, shingles, clapboards, and bricks for the building of their houses. For a while he had no chance to speak to the man, but waiting his opportunity, he at

last stood before him.

"Are you Major Studholme?" he asked.

"No," the officer replied, laying down his pen with a sigh of weariness. "I am merely acting in the Major's place."

Then he looked at Dane more closely, and his interest became aroused. He knew at once that this young man was not one of the newly−arrived exiles, but a courier from the wilderness. He noted his buckskin garb, finely−built body, erect manner, and the bright open countenance. He had seen special couriers before, and they had all been men worthy of more than a passing glance. But this young man surpassed them all, and he looked upon him with admiration.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he at length asked.

"I have a message for the Major," Dane explained, "and I must deliver it to him."

"Give it to me," and the officer reached out his hand. "I am Lieutenant Street, and I shall see that the Major gets it."

"That I cannot do," Dane replied as he drew back a step. "I have strict orders to give it to Major Studholme, and to no one else."

"It must be very important, then," and the officer smiled.

"It is, and the Major must get it at once. Where is he?"

"Over there," and the Lieutenant motioned across the water to the right where the small boats were still busy landing people from the ships. "He's got his hands full straightening things out. But he can do it if any one can."

The officer now turned his attention to several impatient men who were standing near, so further conversation was out of the question. Dane had taken no notice of those around him. Neither did he see three men watching his every movement. They had evidently overheard his conversation with the officer, and seemed greatly pleased. As Dane left the place and walked toward the road leading to the mill−pond, the three followed. They kept some distance behind until they came to a grove of rough tangled trees, when they started forward at a run. Dane, hearing them coming, stopped and looked back. Instinctively the caution of the wild possessed him, causing him to stand on the defensive, and his eyes to gleam with the light of danger.

"What do you want?" he demanded, as the three suddenly stopped before him. "You seem to be in a hurry."

"We are," one of the men replied. "We want that message you have for the Major."

"What do you want it for?"

"Never mind about that. Hand it over, and be damn quick about it, too."

Dane's body now quivered with excitement, and the thrill of battle swept upon him. His eyes narrowed until they became mere slits, and his hands clenched hard as he drew himself to his full height.

"If you want the message I carry, come and take it," he challenged. "That is the only way you can get it."

"Don't be a fool," another of the men warned. "You might as well hand over that message first as last. It will save you a lot of trouble. We're going to get it, so make up your mind to that."

"How?" Dane asked.

"Oh, you'll soon know. Out with it. We're in a hurry."

"So am I," Dane replied.

Then he slightly crouched, and with a sudden tiger−like spring he was upon them. A sledge−hammer drive to the jaw of one sent him reeling backwards among the trees, while a mighty swinging blow to the right crumpled up another in the middle of the road. So astonished was the third at this unexpected attack, and the complete knock−out of his companions, that he did not raise a hand in their defence. A sudden terror possessed him, so leaping aside just in time to escape the whirlwind of a man charging upon him, he ran as he had never run in his life before.

Dane stood looking after him, and a smile overspread his face.

"Hi, there, you've forgotten the message," he called. "Come back and get it."

But the man paid no heed. He kept steadily on, and only slowed down to a walk as he neared the store. Dane next turned his attention to the other two men. They had both recovered, and were sitting upon the ground, rubbing their injured faces in the most doleful manner.

"Why, what's the matter?" he bantered. "Did something hit you?"

"Did it?" one of them growled. "Did lightning ever hit a tree? Who in h−−−− are you, anyway?"

"Oh, I'm the man with the message. I've got it yet; don't you want it? I thought you were in a hurry."

As the crestfallen men made no reply, Dane stepped toward them.

"I'll tell you who I am," he began. "I am the King's Arrow. I go where I am sent, and I hit the bull's eye every time, and hit it hard, too. Do you doubt it?"

"Good Lord, no!" was the gasping confession from each.

"And let me tell you further," Dane continued, "that as I have dealt with you now, so others will deal with you in the future if you try any more of your mean tricks. Perhaps you will not get off so easily then as you have this time. I know who you are. You are employed by the slashers to spy upon the King's men, engaged in the lawful business of cutting masts for his Majesty's navy. They are well named, for they are slashing everywhere, and ruining the forests. But they have about reached the end of their tether, and you can tell them so from me, Dane Norwood, the King's Arrow."

Without another word he turned, and walked rapidly along the road leading to the mill−pond.

CHAPTER III

CUPID'S ARROW

Before a rude shack, somewhat back from the water, a middle aged colored woman was seated upon a block of wood. In her hands she held a waffle−iron, the farther end of which was thrust into a small fire between

several stones. She was a bunty little body, clad in a plain grey dress, with a cap, somewhat in the form of a white turban, adorning her head. Her naturally good−natured face bore an anxious expression, and a worried look appeared in her eyes as she turned them occasionally to the people moving about farther down the hill.

Presently she drew the iron from the fire, unclamped it, and with remarkable deftness turned out a nicely−browned waffle into a dish by her side. She then greased both halves of the pan, filled them with batter, reclamped the iron and thrust it again into the fire. This she did several times until the dish was almost filled with delicious−smelling waffles.

"Guess dey'll suit de Cun'l," she said to herself. "He's mighty fond of waffles, he shur' is. An' Missie Jean is, too, fo' dat matter. I wonder what's keepin' dem. Dey's generally on time fo' supper. But, den, t'ings are so upset dese days dat only de Lo'd knows what's goin' to happen next."

Then she began to sing in a subdued voice the Twenty−third psalm, the only piece she knew.

"I hab no doubt about de Lo'd bein' my Shepa'd," she commented, "an' I guess He'll not let me want. But He hasn't led me into green past'rs dis time. I wonder if de Good Lo'd made dis place, anyway," and she gazed ruefully around. "It looks to me as if de deb'l had a mighty big hand in it, fo' sich a mixed up contraption of a hole I nebber set my two eyes on befo'. An' to t'ink dat de Cun'l had to leab his nice home in Ol' Connec., an' come to a jumpin'−off place like dis. I hope de ever−lastin' fire will be seben times hot when it gits dem skunks dat stirred up ructions 'ginst good King George, I sa'tinly do."

A slight noise startled her, and turning her head, she smiled as she saw a girl standing near her side.

"Land sakes! Missie Jean, how yo' did scare me!" she exclaimed. "I thought mebbe it was a bear or a tager comin' out ob de woods, fo' one nebber knows what to 'spect next in dis place."

"I am sorry I frightened you, Mammy," the girl smilingly replied, "And it was too bad that I interrupted you in your interesting talk about 'everlasting fire,' 'ructions,' and 'King George.' You seem to be in a fighting mood."

"I is, Missie Jean, I is in a turrible fightin' mood. I'd like jes at dis very minute to hab my two hands on dem rascals dat turned on good King George, an' den druve us all out ob our homes. I'd show dem a t'ing or two, I sa'tinly would."

"I don't doubt it," the girl replied, as she stooped and helped herself to a waffle. "If you could fight as well as you can cook you would be a wonder."

"I could cook on our stove in Ol' Connec., Missie Jean, but it's mighty hard work on dat," and she looked contemptuously at the rude fire−place. "To t'ink that we should ebber come to dis!"

"Why, I think it's great, Mammy."

"What' not better'n Ol' Connec.?"

"Oh, not at all. But this might be worse. I miss our dear old home in Connecticut, and yet I have often longed for a life such as this. I am sure you will like it, too, Mammy, when you get used to it."

"I kin nebber git used to it, chile. I'se been torn up by de roots from de ol' home where I was born an' bred, an' I kin nebber take root agin, 'specially in sich a rocky hole as dis."

"But we're not going to stay here, Mammy. We are going up the river, and make a new home in a beautiful place among the trees."

"Ah, chile, dat's what makes me tremble. It's bad 'nuf here, de Lo'd knows, but up dere! Why, dere's bears, an' tagers dat'll eat ye up in a jiffy. An' dere's Injuns, too, dat'll skin ye alive, an' scalp ye, an' roast ye fo' dinner. No, I kin nebber take root in a place like dat."

"But we'll be pioneers, Mammy," the girl reminded. "Just think what an honour it will be to take part in holding this land for King George. People will be proud of what we are doing in years to come."

"I don't want to be no pioneers, Missie Jean, an' I'm not hankerin' after no honour. It suits dis ol' woman better to hab her skin an' scalp now, even if dey are black, den to hab folks ye don't know nuffin' 'bout blubberin' over ye a hundred years from now. Dem's my solemn sent'ments."

"But daddy thinks there is a great purpose in our coming here, Mammy. He says he believes that the Lord is overruling our defeat, and that the driving us out from our homes and scattering us abroad will be the means of extending King George's sway, and raising up a great nation in this land."

"Missie Jean," and Mammy raised a warning finger, "I doan want to predjis you 'ginst yer daddy's jeg'ment, remember. But I can't see de Lo'd's hand in dis racket. It doan seems nat'ral to me fo' de Lo'd to let King George lose a good an' beau'ful country, an' den gib him sich a jumpin'−off place as dis instead. An', chile, I doan believe dat de Lo'd ever meant yo' to come here."

"Why, Mammy? Do I look any the worse for it?"

"Yo' couldn't look worse, Missie Jean, not if yo' tried ebber so hard."

"Come, come, Mammy, I am surprised at you," and the girl's eyes sparkled with merriment. "What do you mean by saying I couldn't look worse? I didn't know I was as hideous as all that."

"I didn't say yo' was hidjus, Missie Jean. I jes said yo' couldn't look worse, an' ye can't. Yo' kin only look beau'ful. Why, chile, it makes my ol' heart ache when I t'ink of sich a lubly creature as yo' bein' buried alive 'way off in de woods."

"But I don't intend to be buried alive, Mammy. I hope to live a good many years yet, and only buried when I am dead."

"Ah, chile, dere is more ways den one of bein' buried alive. I am t'inkin' of de lonely life in de woods, wif no nice young men to look at yer pretty face, lubly eyes, an' beau'ful hair. An' ye'll hab no chance to wear fine clothes an' be admired."

"Mammy." There was a note in the girl's voice which caused the colored woman to glance quickly up.

"What is it, chile?"

"I want to tell you something, Mammy. This is not the time to talk about such things, nor to wail and lament about our lot. I have just been down helping some of those women with their children. They are almost heart−broken, and I did what I could to cheer them up. I have made up my mind that no matter how badly I feel, no one is to know anything about it. I am going to forget my own troubles in helping others. And, Mammy, I want you to do the same. If you talk to others as you have been talking to me, it will make them more depressed than ever. They need smiles, words of cheer, and a helping hand. And you can do that, remember. Never mind about me, or admiring young men. There are more serious things to think about just now."

"Land sakes, chile!" the colored woman exclaimed, holding up both hands. "I nebber heard yo' talk dat way

befo'. But I guess yo're right, an' I'se ready to do what I kin. But here comes de Cun'l! An', oh, Missie Jean, de Major's wif him! Dere won't be 'nuf waffles to go 'round, an' de fire's 'most out. What in de world is I to do?"

"Never mind, Mammy," the girl comforted, "they have hardly time to think about eating. Just give them what you have."

"But dese waffles are col', chile, an' I know how fond men are of eatin'. Nuffin' kin make dem fergit dere stummicks."

Smiling at the colored woman's worries, Jean at once set to work to renew the fire. There were a few hot coals, so by the time the men arrived, she had the fire burning brightly, and Mammy was preparing to cook an extra supply of waffles.

Colonel Sterling was a fine looking man. His white hair, flowing beard, and commanding presence would have distinguished him in any company. His face was genial, and his grey eyes shone with pleasure and pride as they rested upon his daughter who now turned to meet him.

"Is supper ready, dear?" he enquired, "I am hungry, and I know the Major is, too."

"There is the supper," and Jean pointed to the dish of waffles. "But I'm afraid it's not much for two hungry men. The Major, I am sure, will find it pretty poor fare."

"Not at all, Miss Jean," the officer smilingly assured her. "I recall so well the choice waffles I had at your old home in Stamford the last time I visited there. And I am confident, too, that your excellent cook has lost none of her skill since then."

He looked toward Mammy as he spoke, causing the faithful servant almost to drop the iron she was holding, so great was her confusion at such a compliment from so great a person.

Major Gilfred Studholme was the right man in the right place at this critical time in the history of Portland Point. He had served with distinction on behalf of his King in numerous engagements, and his heart went out in sympathy to the thousands of refugees so suddenly thrust upon him for protection. This soldier had held his post secure in the face of hostile savages and lawless marauders, and he was equally faithful now in the discharge of his duties to the newcomers.

Leaving Mammy to recover from her embarrassment and to continue her cooking, Jean went into the little shack, the only home she now knew, and brought forth a small table. This she placed near the door, covered it with a white cloth, and again went inside for dishes. Her supply of the latter was most meagre, as the rest had not been unpacked. Her eyes grew a little misty as she recalled what the Major had said about the last time he had been with them in their old home in Stamford. She had a clear remembrance of that day, of the neatly−arranged table, with fresh flowers in the centre, and the light of pleasure and contentment upon her dear mother's face. What changes had taken place since then! Her mother had been laid to rest, the old home was gone, and they were exiles in a strange cruel land.

Hastily wiping her eyes with a delicately−embroidered handkerchief, she collected a few dishes, and had just reached the door when she suddenly stopped. Standing before the Major she saw a young man, clad in the most peculiar manner she had ever seen. But his face and bearing were what chiefly attracted her, while a pleasurable sensation, such as she had never before experienced, swept through her being.

"I am Dane Norwood," the young man was saying, "and I bring a message from William Davidson, the King's purveyor. Here it is," and he handed forth a letter he had taken from the inside pocket of his jacket.

"Are you in the King's service?" the Major asked as he took the missive.

"I am," was the reply. "I am a special courier, known as the 'King's Arrow,' and I always go where I am sent. That is why I am here."

"Where are your manners, then?" the Major demanded with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Manners! What manners?"

"When you approach a superior officer, of course."

"Oh, you mean the salute. I have heard of it, but never saw it given."

"What! you never saluted any one; not even the King's purveyor?"

"No. Where I live we are all equal when it comes to that. We never bother about such things. The only salute I know is the kind I handed out to those slashers a short time ago when they tried to take that message from me."

"Where was that?" the Major questioned.

"Just over there along that road," and Dane motioned to the right.

"Where are they now?"

"I think two are busy nursing their faces, while the third is hiding somewhere around the trading post. He was running that way the last time I saw him."

"And you defeated the three of them single−handed?"

"Why, that was nothing. I would be a mighty poor courier if I couldn't take care of myself, especially when slashers are around."

A bright smile illumined the Major's face as he held out his right hand.

"Young man, I am proud of you," he said, "and I shall mention you to the General Officers in my next report. We need such men as you to−day."

"I don't care for any honour," Dane replied. "I only want an answer to that letter, so I can get away early in the morning. Davidson is pretty anxious up river."

"Why, sure enough," the Major agreed. "I must not keep you longer than is necessary."

Opening the envelope, which was marked with a big broad arrow, he drew forth the paper within, unfolded it, and glanced rapidly over the contents. As he did so, a serious expression overspread his face, and he remained a minute or two lost in deep thought.

All this Jean had heard and seen from the door where she was standing with the dishes in her hands. When, however, the Major began to read the letter, she stepped outside, and placed the cups, saucers, and plates upon the table. It was then that Dane first saw her, and his eyes opened wide with surprise and admiration. Presently Jean turned, and seeing the courier's ardent gaze, her eyes dropped, and a deep flush of embarrassment suffused her face. This all happened in a few seconds, but in that brief space of time that quaint little archer,

Cupid, had been busy, and two youthful hearts had been pierced by his subtle arrows.

Never before had Dane beheld such a vision of loveliness and maidenly charm. The girl fascinated him, and moved by a sudden impulse, he was upon the point of going to her side, fearful lest she should vanish, when the Major's voice restrained him.

"Come to the Fort early in the morning," he heard the officer say. "I wish to have a talk with you there."

"I shall be on hand, and early at that," Dane replied.

With another fleeting glance toward the girl, he turned and moved swiftly away toward the lake back in the hills.

CHAPTER IV

THE WARNING

Dane walked as in a dream along the trail to the lake. Something had come into his life during the last half hour which had wrought a subtle mystic change. He did not try to analyse it, as he had never experienced such a feeling before. He only knew that back there where the land slopes to the harbour he had beheld a vision which had thrilled his entire being. The face and form of the girl with the large questioning eyes were all that he saw as he hurried on his way. Everything else was blotted from his mind, even the urgency of his important mission. The spirit of the wild was upon him, and an overmastering impulse was surging through his heart. He must see her again; he must look upon her face; he must hear her speak. His passion was intense. It was a living fire, the ardour of a great first love.

The Indian noted the change which had come over his master, and wondered. He made no comment, however, as he squatted upon the ground, slowly turning a wooden spit on which a fat duck was roasting over a small fire. Dane sat down upon a log, with his eyes upon Pete, although in fact he was hardly aware what he was doing, for his thoughts were elsewhere.

When the duck was at last cooked, the Indian divided it, and gave half to Dane.

"Fine bird, dat," he remarked. "Me shoot him on wing. Taste good, eh?"

"Does it?" Dane asked, rousing for a minute from his reverie. He then relapsed into silence.

"What de matter?" Pete presently asked. "See sometin', eh?"

"Why, what makes you think there is anything the matter?" the young man queried.

"Dane so still. Dane no talk, no smile, no eat. Dane seek, mebbe. Bad medicine, eh?"

Dane laughed and looked at his companion.

"I am all right, Pete," he assured. "But I've seen and heard great things to−day. I also knocked out two slashers, while the third ran away."

"A−ha−ha, good," the Indian grunted. "Dem all slashers in beeg canoe, eh?" and he motioned toward the harbour.

"No, no; they are King George's people. They were driven out of their own homes, and have come here. There are thousands of them, so I learned."

"All stay here?"

"Some will, but many will go up river, and settle on the land."

"Ugh! too many white men dere now. Chase Injun, kill moose, ketch feesh. Injun all starve."

"Don't you worry about that," Dane replied. "These are all King George's people, so they will treat the Indians right."

"Mebbe so," and Pete shook his head in a somewhat doubtful manner. "Me see bimeby."

At length Dane rose to his feet, and looked over toward the harbour. The sun had disappeared beyond the far distant hills, and dusk was stealing up over the land. A stiff breeze was drifting in from the Bay, chilly and damp. Dane thought of the Loyalists in their wretched shacks, and of the ones who had no shelter at all. He longed to know how they were making out, and especially her who was so much in his mind.

"You stay here, Pete, and keep guard," he ordered. "I'm going to see how King George's people are making out."

"Come back soon, eh?" the Indian asked.

"I shall not be long, Pete. You get camp fixed up for the night, and keep the fire going."

"A−ha−ha. Me feex t'ings, a'right."

Leaving the Indian, Dane hurried away from the lake, descended into the valley, and climbed the hill on the opposite side. By the time he reached the height above the waterfront, the dusk had deepened into a weird darkness. Here he paused and looked down upon the strange scene below. Hundreds of camp−fires, large and small, emitted their fitful ruddy glow, while beyond, the lights of a score of anchored ships were reflected in the wind−ruffled water. A murmur of many voices drifted up to the silent watcher on the brow of the hill, mingled with shrill cries of children, and the sound of beating hammers, as weary men worked late at their rude dwellings.

Down into this Babel of confusion Dane slowly made his way. He passed the spot where he had met the Major, and he looked eagerly for the girl who had won his heart. But she was nowhere to be seen, although a small fire was burning near the shack, before which the colored woman was keeping watch, swaying her body, and humming her favourite psalm.

Farther down the hill the people had settled closer together, and as Dane moved through this strange medley of shacks, brush houses, tents, sails fastened to sticks driven into the ground, and other rude contrivances, he realised for the first time the sadly−pathetic condition of these outcast people. Although many of them were hidden from view, he could see numbers huddled about their fires, and children wrapped in blankets asleep upon the ground, while here and there tired mothers were nursing and soothing their fretful babes.

Little attention was paid to the young courier as he moved from place to place, except an occasional glance at his curious costume. In fact, most of these exiles were strangers to one another, as they had come on different ships, and had only met for the first time on the day of their landing. The ones who had sailed on the same vessels, and had thus become acquainted, naturally kept together as much as possible. But they were all comrades in distress, sufferers in a common cause, united by the golden bond of sympathy.

Down by the water men were sorting out and piling up their household effects, which had been carelessly dumped upon the shore. But others not so engaged were gathered in little groups around camp−fires, either discussing their present prospects, or relating their experiences on the vessels, and their hardships during and after the war. To some of these tales Dane listened with wide−eyed wonder, and a burning indignation in his heart. What stories he would have to tell when he went back to his woodland home.

All that he heard, however, was not of a sad or gloomy nature. These sturdy men enjoyed humorous yarns, and as Dane listened to several, he joined in the laughter that ensued. One, especially, appealed to him. It was told by a big strapping fellow, who hitherto had taken little part in the talk.

"Your yarns can't equal that of the shoemaker of Richmond, Virginia" he began. "When the rebels were passing through the town he stood in the door of his house and cried out 'Hurrah for King George.' He followed the soldiers to a wood, where they had halted, and began again to hurrah for King George. When the commanding officer and his aides had mounted and were moving on, the shoemaker followed, still hurrahing for King George. The officer, therefore, ordered that he should be taken to the river and ducked. This was done, and he was plunged several times under the water. But whenever his head appeared above the surface he would shout for King George. He was then taken to his own house, where his wife and four daughters were crying and beseeching him to hold his tongue. The top of a barrel of tar was knocked off, and the man was plunged in headlong. He was then pulled out by the heels, and rolled in a mass of feathers, from a bed which had been taken from his own house, until he presented a strange, horrible sight. But through it all, whenever he could get his mouth open, he would hurrah for King George. He was then driven out of the town, and the officer warned him that he would be shot if he troubled them again. That is the story as it was told me, and I think it a mighty good one."

Dane longed to hear more tales of that wonderful land, and of the great fights which had taken place. But just then a strange sound startled him. It was the roll of a drum, followed almost immediately by the shrill notes of several fifes. He could not see the musicians, as they were some distance away to the left. But he knew what they were playing, for he was quite familiar with the tune and words of the old fireside song. A sudden silence fell upon the little band around the fire. Bronzed faces became grave, and more than one man's eyes grew misty with honest tears.

Barely had the notes of this tune died away when the men were roused to action by the stirring strains of the National Anthem. They sprang to their feet as one, and stood at attention. Somewhere a strong voice took up the words, and in an instant all over that hillside hundreds of men and women were singing as they had never sung before.

God save our gracious King, Long live our noble King, God save the King.

Though driven from their homes; exiles in a strange land; surrounded by unknown dangers, and with a most uncertain future, nothing could dampen their spirit of loyalty to their King across the sea.

To Dane this was all wonderful. He longed to see the musicians, and to watch them as they played. He walked over in the direction from which the music had come, and had almost reached what he supposed was the spot, when he suddenly stopped. There before him he beheld the real object of his visit. She was seated on the ground before a fire, with several children gathered about her. They were all listening with rapt attention to some story she was telling them. Dane was held spellbound at the pretty scene before him. He could look upon the girl to his heart's content without being seen, for he was sheltered by a cluster of rough, tangled trees. In all his life he had never beheld such a beautiful face. He longed to know her name, and to hear her speak. He recalled the glance she had given him with her expressive eyes ere they had dropped before his ardent gaze. But he knew that he was nothing to her, and no doubt she had never thought of him again. How could he leave without finding out who she was, and where she was going? But she was a complete stranger to him, and he had no right to approach any nearer. It would be much better to worship at a distance and await a

favourable opportunity.

Presently he was aroused by a slight noise near at hand. Glancing quickly around to his right, his keen eyes detected the form of a man slinking along among the bushes. Dane could not see his face, but from his attitude it was quite evident that the girl near the fire was the object of his special attention. At length he stopped, and, crouching behind a small pile of brush kept his eyes fixed upon the unsuspecting girl.

Dane was now thoroughly aroused, and he was about to spring forward and demand an explanation for the man's suspicious actions, when the crouching figure rose suddenly to a standing position, and then stepped quickly forward. The reason was at once apparent, for glancing toward the fire, Dane saw that the girl had just left the children to their parents' care with the evident intention of returning home. In order to do so, it was necessary for her to cross an upper portion of the hillside, considered too rough and rocky for any one to pitch his abode. There was not the slightest semblance of a trail, but the girl had traversed the place several times that day, so was quite sure of her way. Nevertheless, she glanced somewhat anxiously around as she hurried onward, especially so where the bushes and scrubby trees stood the thickest.

Dane followed the man who was slinking along after the girl, and for a while he was able to keep him in view. Then he disappeared among the trees, and as Dane stepped quickly forward so as not to miss him altogether, a sudden cry of fear fell upon his ears. That it came from the girl he was well aware; telling plainly that she was in need of help. He leaped at once to her assistance, and in another minute he saw her struggling in the arms of her assailant, and trying to free herself from his grasp. The next instant Dane was by her side, while a blow from the clenched fist of his right hand sent the cowardly villain reeling back among the trees. Then like a tiger Dane was upon him, his fingers clutching his throat as he pinned him to the ground. The fallen man fought and struggled desperately to tear away that fearful vise−like grip, but all in vain. At length his striving ceased, and his body relaxed. Then Dane unloosened his hold, and looked at the girl.

"Shall I kill him?" he asked.

"No, no!" was the startled reply. "That would be terrible!"

"But he tried to harm you. If I kill him, he won't have a chance to try again."

"Let him go," the girl pleaded. "Perhaps this will teach him a lesson."

Dane, however, hesitated. A passionate impulse urged him to make an end of such a cowardly creature. The spirit of the wild was strong upon him, and his nature craved complete satisfaction. How could it be otherwise? Steeped for years in the ways of the wilderness, he had become a part of all that he had seen and heard. He knew how the beasts of the forest and the monarchs of the air dealt with their prey. He had at times watched two great bull moose locked in deadly combat, until one had gone down to defeat and death. And around campfires at night he had listened to rough men as they related tales of terrible fights, grewsome murders, and sudden deaths. Everywhere he turned it was the same savage struggle, with only one outcome, the survival of the strongest, and death to the vanquished.

While he thus sat upon the fallen man's body, reasoning with himself what to do, the girl touched him lightly upon the arm.

"Let him go," she urged. "You wouldn't kill a man when he is down, would you? That would be cowardly."

This appeal had an immediate effect, and slowly, though somewhat reluctantly, Dane rose to his feet.

"He deserves to be killed," he growled. Then he touched the man with the toe of his right foot. "Get up, you brute," he ordered.

This command was at once obeyed. The defeated assailant scrambled to his feet, and started to move away. But Dane caught him roughly by the arm, and faced him sharply around.

"Just a word," he began. "You get clear this time, you devil, whoever you are. But if you lay hands on this young woman again I'll break every bone in your body. You won't escape, for I am Dane Norwood, the King's Arrow, and what I say I mean. Get out of this now as fast as you can."

The next instant the man was gone, swallowed up by the darkness.

"Oh, how can I ever thank you enough?" the girl impulsively asked. "You have saved me from that creature. I didn't know that he was here."

"Who is he?" Dane asked. "And where did he come from?"

"He is Seth Lupin, a man I hate and fear. He must have come on one of the other vessels, most likely as a stowaway. He is not a Loyalist, for he was a coward during the war, and has no right to be numbered among us. I am sure that daddy does not know he is here, and I am almost afraid to tell him for fear he might do something desperate to the villain. But, then, we shall soon be away from this place, so it is hardly likely that Seth will follow us."

They were walking slowly now, picking their way with difficulty across the rough hillside. Dane's soul was athrill in the presence of this girl who had affected him in such a wonderful manner. It was almost too good to be true that he had rescued her, and was now so close to her.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Up river, I believe. But just where I do not know. Daddy hasn't drawn his lot of land yet."

"What is your name?"

"Jean."

"I like it. But Jean what?"

"Sterling."

"Did you ever live in the woods?"

"No. This is my first experience."

"Do you think you will like it? Won't you be afraid?"

"I am going to do my best to like it. And why should I be afraid?"

"Because of men, especially the slashers; that's why."

"Who are the slashers?"

"Rebels who oppose the King's men in cutting masts. They wander everywhere, slashing as they go, and ruining the forests."

"But why should I be afraid of them? They have never heard of me."

"But they will soon hear of you, though." Dane stopped abruptly, and laid his hand upon her arm. "Say, do you know how beautiful you are?"

Jean was somewhat startled by this strange question.

"What makes you ask that?"

"Because if you don't know, then you are not aware of your danger. That villain, Lupin, knows of your beauty, so he followed you here. The slashers and others will soon know, too, and I might not always be on hand. This is just a friendly warning."

Jean's heart was beating rapidly, while the darkness hid her flushed face.

"T−thank you," she stammered. "I think I understand your meaning, although I am not used to such plain words, especially from a stranger. But I feel I can trust you."

"In a country such as this we use plain language, Miss Sterling. I have warned you of your danger because I am deeply interested in your welfare. You can trust me, for, thank God, I have had a noble mother's training, and was taught to respect women. But, we are almost at your home, so I must leave you."

"Forgive me," Jean begged, as Dane was about to hurry away. "I appreciate what you have told me and done for me to−night, I shall always remember your kindness, and I hope to see you again."

"I hope so, too, and soon at that," was the fervent reply.

Dane hardly knew how he reached the lake. He felt that he had made a fool of himself. Never before had he spoken to a girl in such a straightforward manner. What must she think of him?

"I could not help it," he told himself. "She needed to be warned. She doesn't realise her danger. She can't surely know how beautiful she is."

CHAPTER V

"TRY IT"

The early morning sun, slanting in through a small window, found Major Studholme seated at his table lost in deep thought. The letter Dane had brought was lying open before him. Occasionally he glanced toward it, and each time his brow knitted in perplexity. At length he rose and paced rapidly up and down the room. With the exception of the table and a few stools this office was destitute of any furniture. It was as bleak as the hill upon which Fort Howe was situated. Here the men of the garrison received their orders, and it was here that the Major interviewed visitors from Portland Point, and couriers from all sections of the country. This commanding officer was the same to all men, so the humblest workman in the trading company's employ, or the uncouth native from the heart of the wilderness received just as much attention as men of high rank. Stern and unbending in the line of duty, Major Studholme realised the importance of his position, and that as a superior officer in the service of his King he must render even−handed justice, irrespective of color or rank. A sharp rat−tat−tat upon the door startled him.

"Come in," he called.

At once the door swung open, and a stalwart, sturdy man entered, carrying a stout stick in his hand which he used as a cane.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Simonds," the Major accosted, his face brightening with pleasure and relief as he held out his hand. "I didn't expect you so early."

"Umph! this is not early," the visitor replied. "It seems late to me. Why, I've been up all night. Not a wink of sleep have I had. But, say, I've something here that'll refresh us both."

Drawing a flask from an inner pocket, he stepped forward and placed it upon the table.

"Have a noggin, Major. The *Polly* arrived last night, straight from the West Indies, and Leavitt brought me some special Old Jamaica. I thought maybe you'd like to test it."

In a twinkling two mugs were produced, and filled to the brim.

"To the King, God bless him," Simonds toasted.

"To the King," the Major responded, as he raised his mug and clinked it against the visitor's.

When this toast had been drunk, the Major again filled the mugs.

"Now, another," he cried. "To the Loyalists, especially to Colonel Sterling's daughter, the fairest of them all."

"To the Loyalists and the Colonel's daughter," Simonds repeated.

Again the mugs clinked, and two honest men drank their second toast. This done, they took their seats at the table, and settled down to business of a most important nature.

James Simonds was really the business pioneer of Portland Point. He was a man of outstanding ability and remarkable energy. For years he had been the moving spirit and leader in numerous enterprises. Of him and his partner, James White, it was said that "At one time the fishery claimed their attention, at another the Indian trade; at one time the building of houses for themselves and their tenants, at another the dyking of the marsh; at one time they were engaged in the erection of a mill, at another the building of a schooner; at one time they were making a wharf, at another laying out roads or clearing land; at one time they were furnishing supplies and cordwood to the garrison, at another in burning and shipping lime." In addition to this they owned and employed a score of vessels, both schooners and sloops, which plied not only on the river, but beyond the Bay to distant ports.

It was only natural that the commanding officer of Fort Howe should call upon the senior partner of the company for advice and assistance in time of need. And two serious problems had now been thrust upon him. One was the care and disposal of the three thousand Loyalists; the other, the arrival of Dane Norwood with news of threatening trouble up river.

"How many vessels have you on hand?" the Major asked.

"Only a few," Simonds replied. "But I expect several more in a few days. The _Peggy & Molly_ is already spoken for by the people on the *Union*. They haven't disembarked, as they plan to go up river at once."

"And you say the *Polly* arrived last night?"

"Yes, and she is unloading now."

"Well, I want you to keep her for Colonel Sterling, and a number of other people."

"So the Colonel is going to leave, is he? I was hoping that he would stay here. Where does he expect to settle?"

"It is not decided yet. However, we shall know in a few days when the lots are drawn."

"There will be a big load, I suppose. They'll want to take their boards, shingles, and household effects, no doubt."

"Yes, if you can manage it; otherwise Leavitt will have to make two trips. And there is something else I want to send."

The Major leaned forward, and touched the letter lying upon the table.

"I received this yesterday from Davidson," he explained, "and he requests immediate help."

"He does? What's wrong?"

"The slashers are giving him no end of trouble. There is danger of a serious outbreak, and he has not enough men to cope with the situation."

"So he wants you to send soldiers?"

"He does, and at once. But I cannot spare any men now, as I have barely enough to guard this place. There are rebels in our midst, and it is hard to tell what mischief they are planning."

"How do you know that?" the trader asked in surprise. "I thought they were all up river."

"And so did I until last night. But the young man who brought this letter from Davidson was attacked by three slashers as he was searching for me. They met him as he was coming from your store along the waterfront. Fortunately he was able to put the three to route."

"How did he know they were slashers?"

"Because they demanded the letter he was carrying. It proves that they were spies, and knew from whence the courier had come."

"It does seem reasonable," the trader agreed. "But I did not know they were hanging around our store. There has been such a crowd there, though, the last two days that I could not tell the slashers from the Loyalists. However, I shall keep a sharp watch after this, and if I catch them I shall let you know at once. But what about Davidson? He must be hard pressed, or he would not have sent you that urgent appeal."

"I can't send him any men, Mr. Simonds, that's certain," and the Major thrummed upon the table as he spoke. "Why, it would take a regiment to do any good, and I have barely fifty men in all. But I am going to send him a supply of guns and ammunition. They must go on the *Polly*, and you are to give Leavitt strict instructions to see that they are delivered to Davidson as speedily as possible. That is the best I can do."

A sharp rap sounded upon the door, and at once a soldier entered. He advanced to the centre of the room, stopped, clicked his heels together, saluted, and stood at attention.

"Well, Parker, what is it?" the Major asked..

"A man to see you, sir."

"A courier?"

"Yes, sir."

"Send him in at once."

"Yes, sir."

Again the soldier saluted, wheeled, and left the room. In another minute Dane entered, and at once walked over to where the two men were sitting. His free and easy manner was in striking contrast to the soldier's, and this the Major noted. He admired the courier's frank open countenance, and clear, fearless eyes. He was a man after his own heart.

"I am glad to see you on time," he accosted.

"I generally try to be," Dane replied. "Have you the message for Davidson?"

"It's not ready yet, but I shall write it at once."

The Major turned to the table, drew a sheet of paper toward him, and picked up a quill pen, which he examined critically before dipping it into the ink. Again he turned to the courier.

"The situation is serious up river, is it not?" he asked.

"It certainly is. Davidson must have help."

"Where is the greatest danger?"

"That is hard to tell. The slashers are scattered over a wide extent of country, and are to be found in most unexpected places. Why, you have them in and around here. My Indian and I were fired upon yesterday while crossing the Kennebacasis, and I was attacked by three while leaving the trading post."

"And you were fired upon yesterday, you say?" the Major asked in surprise. "How far out?"

"About ten miles. We had just crossed the portage from the main river to the Kennebacasis when we heard the slashers at work. We launched our canoe, and were heading for this side when they blazed at us several times."

"Dear me! Dear me!" the Major groaned. "I didn't know they were as bold as all that."

"And they will be bolder yet," Dane warned.

"In what way?"

"They will stir up the Indians, if I am not much mistaken."

"But the Indians are friendly to us. Why, we made a treaty with them right here nearly five years ago."

"I know that. But the Indians have become quite restless of late. When the war was on they received special attention from the English and the Americans. Both sides were anxious to win their good will and support, and gave them many presents. But now that the war is over the Indians are neglected, so they are becoming surly, and ready for mischief. Mark my word, the arrival of these Loyalists will make matters worse."

"In what way?"

"The slashers will do their utmost to stir up the Indians. They will tell them that these newcomers will settle on their hunting−grounds, and kill all their game, while they will be driven out and left to starve."

"Surely they will not do that."

"They have been doing it already, although they know nothing as yet about the coming of the Loyalists. They have been filling the minds of the Indians with all kinds of false stories. So far their words have had little definite effect, but when the natives see so many white people settling along the river, I am afraid they will remember what the slashers have told them, and trouble will follow. Some of the Indians, I am sure, will stand by the treaty, but I have my doubts about many others."

During this conversation Mr. Simonds had been a silent and interested listener. When, however, Dane had ended, he brought his stick down upon the floor with a bang.

"I believe you are right, young man," he began. "White and I have had our suspicions of this for some time, and your words confirm what we have by chance heard. Where do you live, and how is it I have never seen you before?"

"I live in no special place," Dane replied. "My business as the King's Arrow takes me everywhere, although this is the first time I have been sent here."

"How did you come to get that name?"

"Davidson gave it to me. You know, every white pine that is considered suitable for the King's navy is marked with a broad arrow, I guess that suggested the idea to Davidson, as I am always darting here and there like an arrow. Anyway, the name has stuck to me ever since."

"And well that it should," the trader agreed, nodding his head in approval. "Don't you think so, Major?"

The latter, however, was busily writing, so did not hear the question. Presently he paused and turned to the courier.

"So you think the Loyalists will be in danger along the river?" he asked.

"They will, unless the slashers and others who are against the King can be stopped."

"Who is the ringleader in this rebellion?"

For the first time since entering the room Dane failed to reply. His bronzed face flushed, and his eyes dropped. This both the Major and the trader noted, and their curiosity became aroused. They felt that this courier knew more than he was willing to divulge.

"Are you afraid to tell?" the Major questioned.

Dane suddenly lifted his head, and an angry expression glowed in his eyes.

"Do you think I am afraid?" he demanded. "Do I look it?"

"Well, no," and the Major slightly smiled. "But why will you not tell me the name of the ringleader?"

"Because I have a special reason."

"Suppose I make you?"

"Try it."

Although this reply was low and calm, yet the Major had sufficient knowledge of human nature to know that those two small words meant a great deal. He truly realised that nothing, not even death, could force this sturdy courier to divulge the secret against his will. He wisely dropped the subject, and turned again to the table. Nothing now was heard in the room but the scratching of the quill across the paper as the Major fashioned the bold comely letters of his answer to William Davidson, the King's purveyor. When he had signed his name, he picked up a small sand−box, and lightly sprinkled the paper. This done, he rose to his feet, crossed the room, and opened the door.

"Parker, bring me a fire," he ordered.

The soldier thus addressed evidently knew what was needed, for in a few minutes he entered, bearing in his hands a small iron receptacle containing a few hot coals. He stood perfectly rigid before the table while the Major held a stick of sealing−wax to the hot iron, and allowed a few drops to fall upon the back of the folded letter. When the Major had pressed his signet ring upon the wax, the task was finished, the soldier saluted and left the room. After the Major had addressed the letter, and sprinkled it until the ink was dry, he handed it to the courier.

"Take this to Davidson," he ordered. "I am glad that I have met you, young man, and I hope to hear from you again."

Dane took the letter, placed it carefully in an inside pocket of his jacket, bade the two men good morning, and at once left the room.

"What do you think of him?" the Major asked turning toward the trader.

"A remarkable young man," was the emphatic reply. "But I am surprised that I have not heard of him before."

"It is strange. But look here, Mr. Simonds," and the Major brought his fist down heavily upon the table, "if I had a regiment of men like that courier to send to Davidson, we would have no more trouble with the slashers and other rebels."

"You're about right, Major. But I'm wondering why he refused to tell us the name of that ringleader. I must get White to work at this. He may be able to find out, for he can do more with the Indians than anybody else."

"I wish you would look carefully into this matter," the Major replied. "If we can round up that ringleader, it may put a sudden stop to the whole trouble. I shall send half of my men to capture him if he can be found."

CHAPTER VI

WHEN THE BOW−STRING TWANGED

The little schooner *Polly*, of twenty tons burden, had come on the flood tide up through the Reversible Falls. She had then slipped out of the Narrows where the grey, weather−beaten limestone rocks frown high on both sides, and was clipping merrily across the big basin of Grand Bay straight for Beaubear's River. She was well loaded, for over a dozen families were on board, with their household effects, together with a large supply of boards and shingles. In addition, there were the guns which Major Studholme was sending up river to William

Davidson, the King's purveyor.

It was a beautiful early June day, and as Jean Sterling stood close at the bow she thought that she had never beheld a more perfect sight. Everywhere she looked great sweeping forests were to be seen crowding to the very water's edge. She breathed a deep sigh of relief, for she was glad to be speeding at last toward her new home in the wilderness. Surely there she would find refuge from the man who had been dogging her steps ever since she landed at Portland Point. He had not spoken to her after his defeat by Dane Norwood, but she knew that he had ever been near, following and watching her wherever she went. She thought, too, of him who had rescued her that night, and her eyes brightened. He had seldom been out of her mind since then, and she recalled again his pleasing presence and the words he had spoken. She wondered if she should ever see him again, or whether he had forgotten her altogether.

She was aroused by her father's voice, and glancing quickly around she saw him coming toward her, and with him the captain of the schooner, Jonathan Leavitt.

"Been indulging in day−dreams?" her father asked.

"I believe I have," she smilingly replied, while a conscious blush stole into her cheeks. "And why shouldn't I?" she hastily added. "Who could help having daydreams in such a wonderful place as this?"

"I am glad to see you so bright and happy, dear. Poor Old Mammy is indulging in night−dreams, and moaning about our terrible lot."

"Night−mares, I should say," the captain laughingly corrected. "To hear her wail and lament one would think that we are all going to be scalped alive before morning."

"And there are others who have the same idea," the Colonel replied. "They can see nothing but misery and death right ahead."

"But is there any real danger, captain?" Jean asked.

"There is always more or less danger in a country such as this," was the quiet reply. "This river has witnessed stirring scenes. Look at those little clearings over yonder, for instance," and he pointed to the western shore. "A few settlers had their homes there, but the Indians drove them out, and burned their houses. It has been the same in other places, and it may happen again. But I have made many trips on this river, and the natives have never troubled me yet. It may be because I sail on the *Polly*," he added with a twinkle in his eyes.

"What has the *Polly* to do with it, captain?"

"Oh, she leads a charmed life. She has got into no end of difficult places, but has always come out on top. I have driven her through storms between here and the West Indies that would have swamped a much larger vessel. At one time she was forced by a wild gale on the top of the wharf at Newburyport. But she was pulled off all right. Several times she was captured by pirates, though generally she was able to show her heels in a lively manner to the fastest pursuer. She has carried all kinds of loads, from fish taken at Annapolis and Passamaquoddy to barrels of rum from Jamaica. But this is the most important cargo she ever carried, and she seems proud of it. She's English to the core, the *Polly* is. Now, look how she swings away from that point. She doesn't like the place."

"Why?" the colonel asked. "It is a most beautiful spot."

"Indeed it is, but the *Polly* always shies off when she comes here. No doubt it's due to the current from that little stream, the Beaubear, but I like to think that this schooner knows that the old French Fort, Boishebert,

was situated on that point. You can see the ruins of the place from here. No, the *Polly* doesn't like the French; guess she's had too much to do with them, the same as her captain."

They were out of Grand Bay now and bearing up through a fine stretch of water known as the "Long Reach." The land on both sides of the river was rugged, while far ahead the outlines of several islands could be discerned.

"And there's another," the captain exclaimed in disgust.

"Another what?" Jean asked.

"Oh, a place where the French once held out. It's that first island you see away up there. The Indian name is 'Ah−men−henik,' but the French called it 'Isle au Garce,' for what reason I don't know. Anyway, there were lively times on that island when the French had a trading post there. It now belongs to Captain Isaac Caton. There's a small rocky island a little above, which the French called 'Isle de trent,' while just above is the 'Isle of Vines.' It is in behind that where you are to land, just below Oak Point."

"Is it a pretty place?" Jean asked, now much excited. "Have you ever been there?"

"Not often, Miss. I generally keep out in the main channel, as I haven't the time to run into any of the out−of−the−way places. But I guess you'll like it all right."

"I am going to like it," the girl declared with enthusiasm. "And what is more, I am going to do my best to make others like it, too. It will be our home only for a while until daddy and the other men can look around and choose places where they are to settle permanently. Mammy, I believe, will be the hardest one to manage. She means well, and makes all kinds of promises, though she is very forgetful. I must now go and cheer her up."

An hour and a half later the *Polly* left the channel and glided in through a narrow opening between the first island and the mainland. Captain Leavitt was at the wheel, for navigation here was difficult. Jean was standing by his side, her eyes and face aglow with animation.

"What a wonderful and beautiful place this is!" she exclaimed. "Those islands lying over there, and that long point running out into the river make this a perfect harbour. Where do we land, captain?"

"Straight ahead, Miss, where those big pines stand the thickest," the captain replied as he gave the wheel a rapid turn to the left. "Say, I nearly struck that bar," he added. "I didn't know it ran out so far from the island."

In less than a half hour the *Polly* was brought up head to the wind, and the anchor dropped. The small boat, which had been towed astern, was brought into service, and the passengers taken ashore. It was a snug cove where these exiles had determined for a time to make their wilderness home. The land lifted gradually back to the high hills, all covered with a dense forest. Eastward, toward the point, the trees were thinner, and in some spots the land had been cleared, evidently by early French settlers. To the northwest the water extended inland in the form of a marshy creek, with a fair−sized brook beyond, flanked on both sides by high hills.

It wanted but two hours to sunset when the passengers were landed, and their household effects brought ashore. It was a busy time, for camping sites had to be chosen, underbrush cleared away, and tents pitched. But men and women alike worked with a hearty good will. There was something thrilling and invigorating in this new and strange life. It was most restful after the tumult and distractions of war, the unpleasant ocean voyage, and the landing at desolate Portland Point. The warmth and brightness of the day, the fragrance of the forest, and the happy laughter of children racing along the sandy shore charmed and inspired the parents' hearts. Even Old Mammy forgot for a time her gloomy forbodings, and was quite cheerful as she helped Jean

to unpack some of their household belongings.

The Colonel had pitched his tent in a snug retreat several rods back from the water. When the last peg had been driven securely into the ground, he stepped back to view the effect.

"How does that suit you, dear?" he asked, turning to Jean who was standing near by.

"I think it is great, daddy," was the enthusiastic reply. "This is the happiest and most peaceful time I have known for years. It is like a perfect calm after a terrible storm."

"I am very thankful, Jean, that our wanderings are at last ended. Here we shall stay for a time until we can choose a suitable place for our future home. When we get our house built we should be quite comfortable. We are on English soil, at any rate, and that is a great satisfaction. We are not likely to be molested here."

"Not if the Indians and rebels leave us alone, daddy."

"You must not worry about them, dear. We have had no quarrel with them, so why should they molest us? I feel that we are perfectly safe."

Night at length shut down slowly over the land, and a deep silence reigned on all sides. The weary children were asleep in the tents, and men and women were gathered upon the shore. A fire of drift−wood had been built, and around the bright cheerful blaze all were gathered. The small crew of the schooner had come ashore, and were taking part in the general conversation. For some time they sat there, talking of bygone days and plans for the future.

Colonel Sterling took little part in the talk. He sat upon a block of wood, with Jean seated on the ground by his side, her right arm resting upon his knee as she gazed dreamily into the fire. He was much interested in studying the flame−illumined faces of that little circle of men and women. He knew the history of their lives, what they had suffered during the war, and how much they had sacrificed for conscience's sake. A few were bowed with age, and their late trials had deepened the furrows upon their faces, and increased the whiteness of their hoary heads. Upon them the removal from their old homes had been the hardest. There were others, middle−aged men and women, whose eyes glowed with the light of a high resolve. Their features expressed determination which nothing could daunt. These said but little, leaving the younger ones to do most of the talking. There were youths and maidens, more free from care than their elders, who chatted and laughed in the most animated manner.

As the evening wore on and the conversation gradually died down, Simon Winters brought forth his fife and began to play an old familiar tune. At once all talking ceased, and hearts thrilled with memories of other days. Several tunes did Simon play, and when he had ended, the Colonel brought forth a small, well−worn book from an inside coat pocket. This he opened and then glanced around upon the little band.

"Friends," he began, "the hour is late, and we are all weary. But ere we separate, I ask you to join with me in a brief service of prayer and praise. But first of all, we need a message from the Great Book."

Then in a clear strong voice he read the ninety−first psalm, and as the words of promise sounded forth an intense silence reigned. The psalm ended, the Colonel closed the book, and dropping upon his knees began to repeat the Lord's Prayer. All immediately followed his example, including the captain and the crew of the schooner. As they rose to their feet, one man started to sing. The words and tune were familiar, and in another minute old and young were lifting up their voices in Isaac Watts' grand hymn of comfort and hope.

O God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come, Our shelter from the stormy blast, And our eternal home.

Never before had the silent, brooding forest witnessed a like gathering, nor its dark mysterious depths re−echoed with such unfamiliar sounds. But that camp−fire scene was merely a prelude to the tide of progress already setting, when unnamed rivers, hidden lakes, crouching valleys, lofty hills, and secret woodland depths would know those sounds, and rejoice in the knowledge.

An hour later silence reigned over the camp in the wilderness, broken only by the occasional hoot of an owl, or the light steps of some little forest creature.

About midnight the moon rose beyond the eastern hills, and rode high above the Isle of Vines. It cast its bright beams across the now placid water, and stole on furtive foot into the camping ground of the weary sleepers. As the river and shore thus became illuminated, a tall Indian stepped out from the darkness of the forest, and stood for a few minutes gazing upon the ghost−like tents. In one hand he carried a heavy flint−lock, and in the other a string of fine trout, while across his right shoulder hung a long bow and several arrows. He was not at all surprised at the sight before him, as he had been lurking near all the evening, watching with intense interest the group about the camp−fire. His attention now, however, was fixed upon the tent where Jean and Old Mammy were sleeping, and the Colonel's form wrapped in his blankets just outside.

At length he placed his gun and fish upon the ground, unslung the bow from his back, and fitted an arrow to its place. Then the bow−string twanged, and the arrow hurtled through the air, and sank deep into a great pine tree a few feet from where the Colonel was lying. For several minutes the Indian stood as motionless as the trees around him. Then picking up the fish, he glided silently forward, and reaching the pine, he fastened them to the embedded arrow. This done, he cast a quick glance toward the still form near at hand, turned and moved swiftly away. In another minute he had recovered his weapons, and disappeared in the depths of the great gloomy forest.

CHAPTER VII

OUT OF THE STORM

Early the next morning Old Mammy drew back the flap of the tent, stepped outside, and waddled over to where she had prepared supper the previous evening. She had always prided herself upon being the first to rise, and she was determined that she would continue the custom here in the wilderness.

The sun had just risen above the far off eastern horizon, and was struggling to disentangle itself from the drifting tresses of fog hanging in massy banks over the river. Slowly but surely it slipped away from each misty, tremulous embrace, and then like a giant refreshed by the encounter assumed the offensive. Before the mighty champion's silent fiery darts the surging foggy battalions wavered, loosened their hold on river and land, and broke in utter confusion. Wildly they scattered and fled, but escape they could not, and ere long not the slightest vestige remained of their once proud ranks.

Of all this Old Mammy saw nothing, as she was too busy digging among the ashes of the fire−place for a few live coals. It was only Jean who witnessed the magnificent sight. She had slipped out of the tent shortly after her old servant, and had hurried down to the shore for her morning wash. Here Mother Nature had provided her with basin and mirror combined in the calm water at her feet. Straight and lithe she stood, her dark, unbound hair flowing in ripples to her waist. Her face, turned eastward, was aglow with health and animation, and her eyes shone with the light of a joyous surprise.

"Isn't it wonderful!" she breathed. "I never saw anything like it. Why, it's a real fairy−land."

She was startled by a cry from Mammy, and turning quickly around, she saw the woman pointing excitedly to the big pine tree. The Colonel, aroused from slumber, had leaped to his feet, and was staring straight before him as Jean hurried up from the shore.

"What is the matter?" the girl asked.

"Look, look!" Mammy cried, pointing to the tree. "De debbil has been here."

Jean's eyes were now resting upon the object of the woman's excitement, and she, too, was filled with astonishment. She stared at the trout and the arrow, and then looked wonderingly at her father.

"How do you suppose they got there, daddy?" she questioned.

"It was de debbil, I tell ye," Mammy insisted before the Colonel could speak. "He's been in dis place, an' dat's his mark."

"He must be very friendly, then," the Colonel replied. "I don't mind how often he comes if he leaves fish, and they are trout at that."

By this time the entire camp had been aroused, and men, women and children were gathered near, gazing with wide−eyed astonishment upon the big pine. There were numerous conjectures as to the meaning of the arrow and the fish. Most, however, were of the opinion that it was the work of Indians, and that no doubt they were lurking near. Fearful glances were cast along the silent forest aisles, and vivid imagination pictured dusky warriors ready to swoop down with terrible war−whoops. But Old Mammy scoffed at this idea.

"It's de debbil, I tell ye, an' no Injun," she declared. "Dat's his mark, an' he's plannin' some mischief. It's a warnin' to us all. We nebber should hab come to sich a place as dis."

The Colonel listened with considerable amusement to what was being said. At length, however, he stepped forward and laid his right hand upon the fish. With a cry of fear Mammy sprang to his side.

"Doan touch 'em! Doan touch 'em!" she shrieked. "It ain't safe! It ain't safe!"

"Why, Mammy, what do you mean?" the Colonel asked.

"Go 'way, go 'way," the excited woman pleaded. "Dey belong to de debbil, an' he'll bewitch ye. Doan touch 'em."

"Look here, Mammy," and there was a note of sternness in the Colonel's voice, "I want you to be quiet. I thought you had more sense. The devil had nothing to do with this. It's the Lord's arrow, it seems to me. He sent the ravens of old to feed his faithful servant in the wilderness, so perhaps he has sent the Indians to do the same to us now. Anyway, we are going to have a taste of fish for breakfast. It would be a shame to throw away such excellent trout."

Jean had been a silent and interested spectator of all that had taken place. Like her father she was somewhat amused at the various expressions of fear. She was not afraid of the Indians, neither was she superstitious enough to believe that the devil had anything to do with the arrow and the fish. But when the Colonel spoke about the "Lord's Arrow," she gave a sudden start, while the light of understanding dawned in her eyes. The "King's Arrow" at once came into her mind, and she thought of him who had come to her rescue at Portland Point. Could it be possible that he had anything to do with it? she asked herself. Was that arrow a token that he was near? And were the fish a sign of his care? She glanced around as if expecting to see him emerge from the forest to explain the whole matter. Her heart beat fast, and the rich blood tingled to her cheeks. She withdrew a few steps lest her confusion should be observed. The King's Arrow. The King's Arrow. It kept surging through her mind. It could be no one else, she reasoned. She longed to speak, to tell of the discovery she had made. But how could she explain? Would she not betray her feelings, and thus increase her embarrassment? Would it not be better to remain silent than to lay bare to others the thoughts which were

agitating her heart and mind?

She was aroused by her father bidding her to help prepare one of the fish for breakfast, as Mammy would have nothing to do with it. She obeyed with alacrity, pleased to have something to do. As she looked upon the speckled beauty she thought how like an arrow it appeared; its long, lithe body resembling the smooth shaft; the head and gills the barbed point; and the spreading tail the feathered end. She wondered if there was a meaning in all this, or was it merely her own foolish imagination?

She thought much about this during the days that followed, although she mentioned it to no one, not even to Old Mammy. For several nights a number of the younger men had kept watch, with their special attention directed to the big pine. This, however, soon proved very irksome, and as nothing further happened, the watch was discontinued. The men worked hard by day erecting their rude log cabins, so they could ill afford to sit up all night. A feeling of security gradually pervaded the camp, and all became cheerful and hopeful.

At a meeting held one night they decided upon the name "Loyal" for their little community.

"I feel we could not choose a better one," the Colonel said. "Every one here is an outcast for loyalty to the King, and when we get our flag−staff erected, the Union Jack floating above the trees will be a reminder to friend and foe alike of our unswerving devotion."

No one had interfered with the arrow embedded in the pine, and that lordly tree had been left standing while most of its nearby companions had fallen beneath the axe. Not a day passed that Jean did not glance toward the arrow, and each time she thought of him who had become so real to her. But for two weeks no further sign was vouchsafed, until one morning as she came forth from her tent she saw a brace of fine partridges hanging from the arrow. Once more excitement spread throughout the camp, and again various conjectures were heard as to the presence of the partridges. The birds were carefully examined, and several small pieces of lead were found in their bodies. Jean showed these to Mammy in her effort to convince the superstitious servant that the devil had nothing to do with it.

"Why, these birds were shot, Mammy," she explained. "Some one with a gun did it, and brought them to us."

"Ah, Missie Jean," and the old woman raised a warning finger, "de debbil knows eberyt'ing. He kin use a gun when he wants to, an' he kin make men do his nasty work. Didn't he put it into de heart of ol' Judas Scariot to betray de good Lo'd? An' mark my word, dat's jes what he's doin' now. He's up to some trick."

"But why would he be so friendly, Mammy? He's helping us instead of trying to do us harm."

"Doan ye know yo' Bible, chile? Doesn't it say in de Good Book dat de debbil comes to folks as an angel of light, an' makes 'em b'lieve dat he's friendly an' good? No, ye kin nebber trust de debbil. He's got somet'ing up his sleeve, an' doan yo' fo'git it."

Jean merely smiled at the woman's fears, knowing how useless it was to reason any further. She was satisfied in her own mind where the birds had come from, and the thought brought a thrill to her heart. This was intensified several days later when two wild ducks were found one morning suspended from the arrow.

"This is getting to be almost uncanny," the Colonel remarked as he examined the birds. "Whoever is responsible for these presents is a strange friend. I wish he would make himself known that we might thank him."

Jean was of the same opinion, although she did not say so. She had often wondered why Dane Norwood had remained hidden. That it was the courier she had not the slightest doubt. But why did he not come by day that she might see him?

Two weeks passed and nothing more happened. Most of the houses were almost completed. The Colonel had his finished first, and it was a proud day when he gave the order to move their few belongings from the tent. This was soon done, and Jean and Mammy spent the whole of the afternoon fitting up their new abode. The day was unusually hot, and at times they were forced to seek shelter beneath the shade of some friendly trees. Night brought but little respite, and even Old Mammy complained of the heat.

"Dis is de first time I'se been wa'm since comin' to dis place," she announced. "It reminds me of my ol' home in de Souf, it sa'tinly does."

At length a vivid flash of lightning streaked the air, followed immediately by a roll of thunder off to the west.

"It's just what I've been expecting" the Colonel remarked, as he walked over to the door and looked out. "Such heat as we've had to−day is generally followed by a thunder storm. It is coming this way fast. Listen to that."

The storm was rolling up rapidly over the hills, while the play of the lightning was grand and terrible. And mingled with the roar of thunder was the sound of the hurrying feet of the rain driven before the onrushing wind. Suddenly a blinding flash illumined water and land, followed instantly by a crash that shook the cabin. Old Mammy gave a shriek of fear, and caught Jean in her arms.

"Oh, oh, oh!" she moaned. "Dis is turrible! We'll all be killed! We'll all be killed!"

"Hush, hush, Mammy," Jean ordered. "Don't get so excited. This storm will soon be over, will it not, daddy?"

"Most likely," the Colonel replied. "But come here, dear, I want you to see this wonderful electric display upon the water."

Freeing herself from the colored woman's embrace, the girl rose, crossed the room, and stood by her father's side. As she turned her eyes upon the river, she gave a gasp of astonishment. Between the shore and the Isle of Vines the lightning was holding high carnival. For an instant there was intense darkness, followed by a succession of brilliant, flickering illuminations, bewildering to the senses. Several times she was forced to turn away her head, but only for a second, as she was compelled by some strange fascination to look upon the wonderful spectacle. Flash upon flash, racing gleam upon gleam, Stygian darkness and crashing thunder intermingled in an appalling confusion. Jean felt that she could endure the sight no longer. Her body trembled, and her eyes ached. She was about to go back to Mammy, when her father laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"What is that out there?" he asked. "Ah, it's gone now. It seemed to me like a boat. There it is again."

Jean looked and for a few seconds was enabled to catch a glimpse of a craft of some kind coming to them straight from the island.

"It is a canoe, daddy, and I can see some one paddling. Who can it be on the river in such a storm as this?"

And just then the rain swept down, forcing them to retreat a few steps within the cabin. But still they peered forth, and with fast−beating hearts watched the approaching voyager. Whenever a glimmering flash revealed the canoe, it resembled a mystic bark riding through the storm, encircled with a living fire. So weird and mysterious did it seem that Jean caught her father impulsively by the arm, while a slight cry of awe escaped her lips.

"It isn't natural, daddy," she whispered. "It's uncanny. Do you suppose it's a spirit?"

"No, no, dear. It's an Indian, no doubt. Look, he has stopped paddling now, and is about to land."

Darkness again intervened, and the next flash revealed a tall form stepping upon the shore as blackness once more enshrouded him. The next glimpse showed him coming toward the cabin, carrying a bundle in his arms. In another minute he was at the door, an Indian of magnificent physique, clad in buckskins, with a squirrel−skin cap upon his head. He smiled as he looked upon the astonished ones before him. Then he held out the bundle toward the girl.

"White woman tak' babby, eh?" he asked,

But Jean hesitated, and drew back a little. This seemed to surprise the Indian.

"Babby no hurt white woman," he explained. "Babby velly leetle. Babby no home, no mamma."

No longer could Jean resist such an appeal, so stepping forward, she took the bundle in her arms. Awkwardly she held it, uncertain what to do. Then Old Mammy came to her aid, and relieved her of her burden.

"Why, chile, yo' doan know how to hol' a baby," she reproached. "Yo' hol' it upside−down. Yo' nebber had 'sperience wif babies. Dis o' woman'll show yo' how."

Seating herself upon a bench, she removed the blanket with which the child was enwrapped. Jean dropped upon her knees by her side, and when a little dusky face was exposed to view, she gave a cry of delight.

"Isn't it pretty!" she exclaimed. "And it's asleep, too."

The Indian's eyes shone with pleasure as he watched the girl's interest in the little child.

"White woman tak' care babby, eh?"

"You want us to keep it?" Jean asked.

"Ah−ha−ha. Wan moon, two moon, mebbe. Injun come bimeby."

Jean turned to her father, who had been standing silently near the door.

"May we keep it, daddy?"

"Ask Mammy," the Colonel replied. "If she is willing, I have no objections. She is the only one in this house who knows how to look after a baby."

"I'se willin', Cun'l," the old woman agreed. "It makes me t'ink of de lil'l chile I los' long time ago in ol' Connec. Yes, I'se willin'."

The Indian understood, and smiled. He turned to go, but paused and looked at Jean.

"White woman keep canoe, eh?" he queried.

"Oh, may I?" the girl eagerly asked. She had often longed for a canoe to paddle along the shore and explore the various creeks.

"Ah−ha−ha. White woman paddle all sam' Injun bimeby. Me go now."

The Colonel pressed the Indian to stay until the storm was over, but the native shook his head, and with another glance at the sleeping child, he passed out into the night.

For about an hour the storm continued to rage. But the gleaming lightning and the crashing thunder worried Old Mammy no longer. She was completely engrossed in the little charge which had been so unexpectedly committed to her care.

"I mus' take special care ob dis chile," she' said. "Mebbe it's one of de Lo'd's angels, fo' wif Him it doan make no diff'rance what is de colah of de skin. Dey's all His chillun, an' He lubs dem all alike. Doan yo' nebber fo'git dat, Missie Jean. Dis may be one of de Lo'd's angels undewares."

CHAPTER VIII

BENEATH THE SPREADING MAPLE

The little community of Loyal had most things in common, as is generally the custom in pioneer settlements. All took to their hearts the little Indian child, and felt somewhat responsible for its welfare. It seemed to them an omen of good will, and they believed that so long as it was with them they would not be disturbed by the Indians. Old Mammy was very strong on this point, and was the one who first suggested the idea.

"If a cat comes to yo' it's a sign of good luck," she declared. "Now, we didn't send fo' dis chile; it jes came to us, so why shouldn't it bring us better luck den a cat?"

The colored woman considered the baby her special property, and only on rare occasions would she allow anyone else to look after it. Jean was delighted to have it in the house, and both she and her father became very fond of the little one. They called it "Babby," not knowing its Indian name, and were greatly pleased at its cunning ways.

The days and weeks sped rapidly by, and August was close edging into September before Jean realised that summer was almost gone. It had been a busy time at the settlement, and the bright beautiful days glided uneventfully by. Once again the *Polly* had come up river with a load of provisions, and all had listened eagerly to the latest scraps of news brought by Captain Leavitt. They learned from him that another fleet with a band of Loyalists was coming in the fall. He expected to take many of the newcomers on his boat up river, and promised to call on his way back. This important piece of information, as well as other bits of news, was discussed for days at Loyal. They longed for some word from their old homes, and the friends they had left behind. If they could but see the Loyalists when they arrived in the fall they might hear much. Anyway, Captain Leavitt had promised to call, and no doubt he would have a fund of information.

Every fine Sunday was a great day for Jean. During the morning the Colonel gathered the people of the settlement about him, and read the service from the Prayer Book. The responses and the singing of a few old familiar hymns were very hearty, and the Doxology and the National Anthem were invariably sung at the close. It was but natural that the eyes of the older ones should become misty during this service, for it brought back memories of other days before the war.

After dinner the Colonel and Jean always went for a walk, either through the woods or along the shore to the large point which ran far out into the river. Here at this latter place they would sit under the great oak trees and talk to their hearts' content.

Their chief resort, however, was the brook which babbled down among the hills, and flowed into the river between the settlement and the point. About a mile back the brook was broken by a mass of huge rocks over which the water poured in torrents during the spring and after every heavy rain. But in the summer the rocks were bare, and only one great wreath of water slipped through a narrow crevice, and fell with a roar and a splash to the level below. Nearby father and daughter liked to sit in the shade of the trees and listen to the music of the falling water.

Jean always remembered the last time they were thus together. It was the final Sunday in August, and a most perfect afternoon. The Colonel had worked hard during the week and was very tired. He was strangely silent and depressed as he sat leaning against a rock, gazing off into space. It was so unlike his usual buoyant, cheery manner that Jean was quite anxious.

"Is anything the matter, daddy?" she at length asked. "Are you feeling sick?"

The Colonel started, and a slight forced laugh escaped his lips.

"No, no, not at all," he replied. "Do I look sick?"

"Then you must be worrying about something, daddy," and the girl's right hand stole sympathetically into his as she spoke.

"Not worrying, dear; only somewhat lost in thought. I have strange fancies this afternoon, suggested by those rocks which break the brook's steady course. There have been three such breaks in my life, and of them I have been thinking."

"I believe I know of two, daddy," Jean replied, as her father paused. "One was dear mother's death, and another the terrible war. But I do not remember the third."

"I told you once, dear, though you have forgotten, which is only natural. It was the loss of a very dear friend, Thomas Norman."

"Oh, yes, I remember now, daddy. He was the man who suddenly disappeared, and has never been heard from since."

"The very same, Jean. Next to your mother he was the best friend I had on earth. We had been boys together, and were inseparable. He was well educated, and held an important position in the King's service. When he lost it, as he believed through intrigue and treachery, his whole life was embittered. He became a changed man, and he brooded over it so much that I really believe it affected his mind. Anyway, he suddenly left with his wife and family, and I have never heard from him since. That was a long time ago when you were a mere child. But I can never forget him, and the happy years we spent together. What a joy it would be to have him here with me now as in the days of old. But that cannot be. As that brook flows on, notwithstanding the break in its course, so must my life. However, I have much to be thankful for. I have you, dear, and you are a great comfort. If anything should happen to you, I do not believe I could endure life any longer."

"Don't you worry about losing me, daddy," the girl assured. "I am going to stick right close to you, no matter what happens. But I think you had better leave this place which gives you such gloomy thoughts. This is too nice a day to feel unhappy."

"You are right, dear, and I suppose we had better go home. But I like to watch those great trees over yonder. How strong and self−reliant they are. How proudly they lift their heads. What storms have swept over them, and yet they stand as erect as ever. They do not complain, but accept everything, whether sunshine or darkness, winter or summer, as a matter of course. They are friendly, too, and their big branches seem to reach out like welcoming hands. There is always something inspiring to me about a great forest."

Often during the following days Jean's mind reverted to what her father had said to her at the falls. Although his old cheerful spirit returned, yet she observed him at times during the evenings, which were now lengthening, wrapped in thought, unheeding what was taking place around him. This worried her a great deal, and a new sense of responsibility began to shape itself in her mind. She believed that he missed his old home in Connecticut more than he would acknowledge, and that he was wearying of the monotonous life in the

wilderness. Perhaps he needed a change, and she wondered how this could be brought about.

She was thinking seriously of this at the close of a bright day as she pointed the bark canoe up the creek lying to the northwest of the settlement. She had become quite expert in handling the frail craft, although, at her father's bidding, she always paddled in shallow water. It was a beautiful afternoon, and the mighty forest crowning the undulating hills was radiant with the beams of the streaming sun. Slowly she moved up a narrow winding channel, the trees of the shoreward side spreading out their great branches in a leafy canopy, while on the other, acres of rushes and lily−pads lined the way. It was a fairy−like scene through which she moved, and but for the serious thoughts which were agitating her mind, her soul would have been thrilled at the magnificent vista spreading out before her.

Reaching at length the mouth of the brook, where the shallowness of the water made further progress impossible, she ran the bow of the canoe gently upon the shore under the shade of a big maple tree. Here she rested and viewed with interest the antics of two red squirrels as they frisked about and scolded most furiously at the intrusion of the stranger in their domain. So funny did they appear that Jean was compelled to laugh outright. She always enjoyed watching the tiny creatures of the wild, especially the squirrels. She could get closer to these saucy and daring rascals of the nimble feet than their shyer comrades of the forest.

Presently in the midst of their antics the squirrels suddenly started, ceased their scolding, and scurried rapidly away. That something had frightened them Jean was certain, and she grew nervous. She was about to back the canoe from the shore and leave the place, when the tall form of a man unexpectedly emerged from the forest and stood before her. So great was her own fright that for a few seconds she was completely unnerved, although she uttered no sound. Her face became very white, and her heart beat wildly. Then recognising the intruder as Dane Norwood, she gave a slight hysterical laugh, and her tense body relaxed.

"Oh, my, how you frightened me!" she gasped. "I didn't know you at first."

"Forgive me," the young man apologised, as he stepped to the side of the canoe. "I came upon you sooner than I expected."

"Did you know I was here?" Jean asked.

"Yes. I happened to see you as I crossed the brook farther up."

"Where were you going?"

"To see you, of course. It has taken me three months to get here, and when I do arrive I frighten you almost out of your senses."

Jean smiled as she picked up the paddle. She had to be doing something, for she felt the hot glow stealing into her cheeks beneath Dane's ardent gaze. She was greatly struck by the remarkable change in his appearance. The travel−stained buckskin suit he had worn when first she met him had been replaced by a new one, neat and clean. It fitted him perfectly, making him appear taller and nobler than ever.

"Have you been really travelling three months to get here?" Jean asked. "You do not look like it." She glanced at his clothes, and this Dane noted.

"I have not been travelling all that time to get here," he explained. "I did not mean that. But Davidson has kept me so busy the last three months that I could not get away, although I tried several times."

"And you were not here before?" Jean asked in surprise. "Why, I thought it was you who gave us those presents, and stuck that arrow into the tree."

"Oh, Pete did that. He was keeping an eye over you."

"Who is Pete?"

"My Indian; the one who generally travels with me. You surely must have met him."

"No, I never did."

"But this is his canoe! How did you get it, then? It must be a sign of special favour, for I never knew him to let any one have his favourite canoe before."

"A big Indian left it with me the night of the great storm when he brought his little child to our place. It is there now."

"That must have been Pete!" Dane exclaimed in astonishment. "I have not seen him for several weeks, and did not know what had happened to him. It is very seldom that he leaves me for such a length of time. I am puzzled, though, about the child."

"He said that its mother is dead, and he wanted us to look after it for one moon, and maybe two. I hope he will leave it with us a long time, for we are very fond of it."

"Ah, now I understand," and Dane's eyes wandered thoughtfully out upon the river. "Poor Pete, he must be making up for lost time. It is just like him. He is a great Indian."

Noticing the expression of interest and curiosity in the girl's eyes, Dane smiled.

"Yes," he continued, "Pete always makes up for lost time. Five years ago his first wife died, and he was away for over two months. It was during the war when efforts were being made to keep the Indians true to King George. It was a hard struggle, and James White, the deputy agent of Indian affairs, was often at his wits' end. But at last a treaty was signed at Fort Howe, when the Indians and the English all became 'one brother,' as the natives say. I found out afterwards that Pete had a great deal to do with the signing of that treaty. He travelled from camp to camp, meeting the Indians, and urging them to be loyal to King George. He made up for lost time then, and I believe he is doing so now. No doubt we shall hear from him soon."

"Do you think the Indians are becoming troublesome again?" Jean somewhat anxiously asked.

"Not altogether this time. Our danger now is from the slashers, as they will do their best to stir up the Indians. But Pete will be on the lookout. He nipped a little game of theirs in the bud over a year ago."

"How?" Jean was becoming keenly interested.

"Oh, he brought us news of a raid the slashers were about to make upon the King's mast−cutters, so we were able to check them. Twenty of us marched all day and night through the woods and fell upon the rebels before they were awake. There was a lively tussle, but we cleaned them out, although they were double our number. Pete had been absent for two weeks before that, but his timely news put him back again in Davidson's good books."

"I hope there will be no more trouble," and Jean gave a deep sigh. "Everything has been so quiet this summer that I can hardly imagine that there are mischief−makers around. Perhaps those guns which Major Studholme sent up river have been a warning to the slashers. But my, how late it is getting! Daddy will be anxious about me. You will come and have tea with us, will you not?"

The young courier needed no second bidding, so in a few minutes the canoe was speeding riverward, with Dane paddling and Jean facing him. Peace surrounded them as they moved onward, but a deeper peace than that which brooded over river and land dwelt in their happy young hearts.

CHAPTER IX

LOVE'S−CHARM

Through the great network of branches of maples, birches, and other trees the light of a new day sifted down upon a little lake about a mile back from the settlement. Dane Norwood woke from a sound sleep and looked out over the water. He was in no hurry to rise, as he felt very comfortable lying there on his bed of fir boughs wrapped in his warm blanket. About half way up the lake several wild ducks were feeding among the weeds and rushes, unconscious of any danger. To these Dane paid little attention. He was waiting for larger game, and his eyes and ears were keenly alert to the one sound and sight which would electrify him into immediate action.

His mind naturally turned to the previous evening when he had sat with the Colonel and his daughter before the big fire−place. The vision of the girl's face, lighted by the dancing flames, stood out before him clear and distinct. How her eyes had shone as, urged by the Colonel, he related story after story of adventures in the heart of the untamed forest among Indians, slashers, and wild beasts. The time had passed all too quickly, and when he at length rose to leave, the Colonel offered him the use of his tent near the cabin. But Dane had reluctantly declined. He had his own camping−outfit on the shore of the lake, where he had left gun, blanket, and a small supply of food that afternoon. He did not mind the walk through the forest, dark though it was. He was more at home in the woodland ways than on city streets. His was the instinct of the wild, and he travelled more by intuition than by sight.

There was another reason why he wished to camp by the lake. He correctly surmised that the food supply at the settlement was getting low. The men were not hunters, and although supplied with guns, they had made little use of them in obtaining game from the surrounding hills, considering them chiefly as weapons of defence in case of attack. With Dane, however, it was different. To him the forests and streams were Nature's great larder, filled with all manner of good things.

As he lay there thinking of the girl at the settlement, the morning light strengthened, and the trees along the eastern shore threw out long uneven shadows upon the water. Not a ripple ruffled the mirror−like surface, except those caused by the feeding ducks. Dane's special attention was directed to a spot on the western shore which he had carefully examined the day before. From the newly−made foot−prints he knew that this was a favourite resort of moose, deer, and caribou where they came to drink and to wallow in the mud. And in this he was not mistaken, for as he patiently waited, the great antlered−head of a bull moose suddenly emerged from the forest. The lordly animal paused for a few seconds and looked around. Dane was fully alert now. With his gun resting across a fallen log, he trained his eye along the smooth dark barrel. Then as the moose stepped forward and its right side was presented to view, he pulled the trigger. The loud report resounded through the silent forest reaches, and sent the ducks scurrying wildly out of the water. With a snort of pain and surprise the moose threw back its great head, lifted its fore feet from the ground, reeled for an instant, and crashed over on its side, a huge bulk of quivering, lifeless flesh.

Half an hour later Dane was speeding toward the settlement, carrying a choice piece of meat suspended from a stout stick across his right shoulder. He surprised Mammy in the act of preparing the fire for breakfast as he approached with noiseless steps, and held the meat before her.

"Oh, Lo'd, how yo' did scare me!" she exclaimed, straightening herself up, and looking at the young man. "I'se as weak as a chicken, an' my bref's almos' gone. I was sure yo' was an Injun or a tager jumpin' at me."

Dane smiled as he laid the meat upon a log, and drew forth his sharp sheath knife.

"I am sorry I frightened you," he apologised. "But a piece of this will give you new strength. You get the frying−pan ready while I carve a few slices. I am going to help you get breakfast this morning. We will give the Colonel and Miss Sterling a great surprise."

And surprised father and daughter certainly were when at length they came out of the house and saw the nicely−browned slices of steak lying in the frying−pan.

"So this is what you have been up to, young man," the Colonel smilingly remarked. "I understand now why you refused to remain here last night. Is this moose or deer steak?"

"Moose, and there is plenty more where this came from. I am astounded that you have not been feasting upon game before this, as the forest is full of birds and animals."

"I am afraid that we are poor hunters," the Colonel replied. "I, at any rate, know very little about woodland ways."

"Then I shall teach you," Dane declared. "But first of all, I want you to try this steak. Then we must get the men to go with me to bring in that moose. It will not do to leave it long out there. If we do, the bears and other animals will soon finish it."

Jean said very little during breakfast, leaving her father and Dane to do most of the talking. But her heart was happy and light. To her this visitor was more than an ordinary man. She was of an impressionable nature, and naturally surrounded Dane Norwood with the glamour of romance. His buoyant, free−from−care manner, and the roving life he led thrilled and enthralled her very soul. To her he was the living embodiment of valiant knights and princes who figured in tales she had heard and read, especially those of the Arthurian Legends. Malory's "Morte d'Arthur," notwithstanding its quaint language and quainter pictures, had so enkindled her mind that she herself at times had seemed the heroine in many a stirring scene. It was largely due to these impressions that she relished the life in the wilderness, and looked upon the King's courier as a hero of more than ordinary mettle.

Breakfast over, the Colonel summoned the men of the settlement, and, guided by Dane, they went at once to the lake after the moose. Jean obtained her father's permission to accompany them, and she thoroughly enjoyed the trip. The men were like a crowd of boys just out of school, and the forest resounded with laughter and animated talk. The prospect of an abundance of game during the fall and winter elevated their spirits, and made them forget the days and weeks when food had been scarce. To them Dane was a Godsend, and they took him to their hearts and made him as one of themselves. That he and the Colonel's daughter were in love with each other they were not slow in learning. But there was no rude chaffing as the two walked a little apart from the rest. They were men noble enough to respect the sacredness of a first great love.

There was much rejoicing among the women and children when the men returned to the settlement with the moose. It had been skinned and carefully divided. Some carried their portions, while others bore theirs suspended on poles from shoulder to shoulder. Thus for the first time since leaving their old homes did the exiles have a sufficient supply of meat.

A new life now pervaded the settlement. During the following days and weeks the men roamed the forest−clad hills and valleys in search of game. Directed by Dane, they soon became quite skilful hunters, especially the Colonel, who was never happier than when out in the woods. Then around the big camp−fire at night, the men would relate their thrilling and humorous experiences during the day.

This was a pleasant time for Dane. He had shifted his camping−place from the lake to the shore of the creek,

and here he had built for himself a small abode, covering the roof and sides with wide strips of birch bark to keep out the rain. He was very skilful at such work, and a happy afternoon it was for him when he first showed Jean his finished cabin. They had come by water, and the bow of the canoe was resting upon the shore. It was here that they had met three weeks before, and under the big maple Dane had erected his little building. The tree had put on its scarlet bunting, and touched by the bright September sun, glowed its welcome to the young lovers.

Jean examined the cabin most carefully, and her admiration was unbounded.

"I think it is splendid!" she enthusiastically exclaimed. "You never told me anything about it."

"I wanted to surprise you," Dane explained. "I have been so busy with other things that I have had little time to work here, so only finished it a few days ago."

"And will you live here all the time?" Jean eagerly asked.

The young man smiled as he looked fondly upon the girl's animated face and sparkling eyes. Then he shook his head.

"I wish I could live here, Jean. But I have a dozen such cabins in various places, and I must spend some time in them during the coming winter. They are my stopping−places, you see, when I am carrying messages for Davidson. No doubt he is very angry now at my long absence, so I shall have to go away in a day or two."

"But you will come back soon, will you not?"

"Do you really want me to come back soon?" Dane asked.

"W−why certainly," the girl stammered, while her face suddenly flushed. "I hope you will use this cabin often."

"I will make it larger and stay here all the time, if you want me to."

"Oh, will you? How nice that would be."

"But only if you will stay with me."

"Oh!" It was all that Jean could say, for his meaning was now quite clear. Her eyes dropped, and her body slightly trembled.

Impulsively Dane reached out and took both of her hands in his.

"You know what I mean, Jean," he said. "Surely you know how I love you."

Receiving no reply, he drew her quickly to him, and kissed her upon the lips. Startled and embarrassed, she made a faint effort to free herself, but strong arms held her firm.

"Don't! Don't!" she gasped, while the rich blood crimsoned her face. "You have no right to do this."

"I have the right of love," Dane contended, as he again kissed her. "I love you, and I know that you love me."

Jean made no further protest. Notwithstanding her confusion, she was supremely happy. Although often wooed, she had never before submitted to a lover's kiss, nor allowed his arms to encircle her. But now it was

different. She loved this man as she once thought it impossible to love any one, and she knew that he loved her. His strength and masterfulness appealed to her, and made her a willing victim. She could not deny it, neither did she wish to do so. She was content to give herself up wholly and unreservedly to her conquering hero.

And as the two stood silently there, the lordly maple seemed to reach out its great branches over their young united heads and beam its happy benediction. The ubiquitous squirrels appeared to know that something unusual was taking place. They cocked their shrewd little heads in a listening attitude, stared impudently, and then sent the news abroad to their feathered and furry comrades of the forest. Of all this, however, the lovers were unconscious, so lost were they in their new−found joy.

"I never realised that you cared so much for me," Jean at length whispered. "When did you begin to love me?"

"From the first time I saw you by that shack at Portland Point," Dane replied. "I was so absent−minded when I went back to the lake that Pete did not know what to make of me. I returned later and saw you at one of the camps telling stories to several children. You know what happened after that."

"Indeed I do," the girl declared. "I can never forget that night, nor how you saved me from Seth Lupin."

"Have you heard from the villain since?"

"Not since coming here. But so long as he is in this country I cannot feel safe. I sometimes imagine he is prowling around here and will appear at any minute."

"Umph, it won't be well for him if he does when I am here," and Dane's hands clenched hard. "He won't get off as easily as he did that last time. I thought he might follow you when you first arrived at this place, so ordered Pete to be on the lookout. I hoped that you would understand the meaning of that arrow in the big pine."

"I was certain that you had much to do with that," Jean replied. "For a while I thought that you were near, and wondered why you did not come to see me. But now I know that you were thinking of my welfare, and longing to come."

"I was always thinking about you, Jean, and I have something here to show how much you were in my mind."

Thrusting his right hand into the breast−pocket of his jacket, he brought forth a little piece of wood. Removing a plug from one end, he drew out a silver arrow−pin.

"This is a proof how much I was thinking of you. You little know how eagerly I looked forward to the time when I would have the right to present it to you."

"And did you really make this?" Jean asked, taking the arrow in her hand and examining it most carefully. "I think it is wonderful."

"Yes, I made it myself," Dane replied, delighted at the girl's interest and pleasure. "I worked it out of a silver coin my mother gave me years ago, and which I valued most highly. For no one else would I have done such a thing."

Dane's voice was a little husky as he spoke, and this Jean noticed.

"Your mother is dead, then?" she queried. She had often longed to ask him about her, but owing to his reticence about his past life, she had not done so. She had thought it strange, nevertheless, that he had never

mentioned his parents.

"My mother died five years ago," Dane explained. "Whatever I am I owe to her. She was a noble woman."

"Is your father dead, too? Have you no home?"

"I have had no real home since my mother died," was the evasive reply. "My home is wherever night overtakes me. I cannot tell you any more now, so please do not ask me. I know you will trust me."

He paused abruptly, impulsively took the arrow from the girl's hand, and placed it in her dress at her throat. He then stepped back to view the effect.

"It becomes you well, Jean, and you must always wear it there. It is Love's−Charm, and it may mean more to you than you now imagine."

"I shall always wear it," was the low response, "not only as Love's−Charm but as a remembrance of this happy day."

CHAPTER X

WHILE THE WATER FLOWS

The Colonel was not altogether surprised when that evening Jean told him the important news. He had not been blind and deaf to all that had been taking place around him since Dane's arrival. He was fond of the courier, and believed him to be a noble young man, worthy of his daughter's love. He wanted Jean to be happy, for in her happiness his own was vitally involved. Yet it was only natural that the news of the betrothal should bring a pang to his heart. Jean was his all, his comfort, his joy. But now she shared her love with another, a young man, of whose past history he knew very little, and nothing of the family from which he had sprung.

He showed no trace of this feeling, however, as he sat before the fire. Jean was standing by his side, the bright, flickering flames illuminating her happy face. Suddenly she realised something of what this revelation meant to him who was so dear to her. She had never thought of it before, and it swept upon her now with a startling intensity. What would her father do without her? She was all that he had, and should she leave him, what would become of him? She recalled his words uttered at the falls. "If anything happens to you," he had said, "I do not believe I could endure life any longer." She had smiled at him then, but she did not do so now. Stooping, she impulsively threw her arms around her father's neck, and kissed him.

"You are not going to lose me, daddy," she said. "You will always have me with you. And you will have another to help you," she added in a lower voice.

"I know it, dear, I know it," was the somewhat faltering reply. "I want you to be happy, Jean, and I believe the young man is worthy of your love."

"'Deed he is," Old Mammy declared, as just then she waddled toward the fire. Early that evening Jean had whispered the news into her ear, and had received the old nurse's blessing, accompanied by a great motherly hug. "Mistah Dane is a puffect gen'l'man," she continued. "He's not one bit stuck up, an' he's got manners, too. Why, he touches his cap to dis ol' woman, an' if dat ain't a sign of a gen'leman, den I'd like to know what is. I ain't afraid to trust Missie Jean wif a man like dat."

"But suppose he should take Jean away?" the Colonel queried.

"Doan yo' worry 'bout dat, Cun'l. Missie Jean'll nebber leave us. But if she should, dis ol' woman'll go wif her."

"You are right, Mammy," Jean replied. "I shall not leave you and daddy. We must always remain together."

For some time father and daughter sat before the fire and talked after Old Mammy had gone to bed. To Jean the future looked bright and rosy. The Colonel, on the other hand, viewed it with considerable apprehension. In a land as yet a great wilderness, he could not help seeing mountains of difficulties rising sternly before them. He knew how many hardships must beset their path for years to come. At present they were living in a most precarious manner, exiles, with the pioneering work all ahead. But with Jean it was different. To her the trail of life looked very pleasant, gleaming golden beneath the mystic halo of romance.

The Colonel spent the next day with Dane in the hills. He wished to be alone with the courier who had won his daughter's heart. There were many things he desired to say to him, and he hoped to learn a little, at least, about his past life. He had something on his mind this day of far greater importance to him than moose, deer, or caribou.

The morning passed most pleasantly, and the Colonel was more satisfied than ever with his companion. Dane was well versed in forest lore, and the ways of the feathered and furry creatures of the trails were to him an open book. Gradually and tactfully the Colonel led him to talk about his life, but on this subject he became more reserved. He spoke enthusiastically about his mother, and how much he owed to her. His father, however, he never mentioned. The Colonel was far from satisfied, as he had learned really nothing about Dane's history, nor how his parents happened to be in this country.

They stopped to eat their dinner by a sparkling spring which bubbled from a wooded hillside. They were hungry, and thoroughly enjoyed the good things Mammy had provided.

"I suppose this is a common occurrence to you," the Colonel remarked when he had finished his meal.

"It has been my life for years," was the quiet reply. "I hardly know how to eat at a table."

"Have you no home?" the Colonel asked. "Is your father not living?"

"Yes, I believe he is living, but I have not seen him for years."

"And why not?"

To this question Dane made no reply. He sat very still, looking down through the trees into the valley below. The Colonel at first became impatient, then angry.

"Look here, young man," he began, "if you are to have my daughter, I must know something more about who you are, and where you have come from. Why do you not wish to tell me about your father?"

Had any one else spoken in such a peremptory manner he would soon have learned his mistake. As it was, Dane found it difficult to control himself.

"I cannot tell you now," he quietly replied. "I must explain nothing, so please do not press me further."

The Colonel was now thoroughly aroused. His fighting blood was stirred, and he turned angrily upon his companion.

"Are you ashamed of your father?" he roared. "Who is he? and what has he done that you won't tell me about

him? Surely−−−−−−" He paused abruptly, while a look of consternation leaped into his eyes. He reached out and clutched Dane by the arm. "Tell me," he demanded, in a voice that was but a hoarse whisper, "is your father an Indian? Speak, quick. I must know the truth."

With a gesture of impatience, Dane threw aside the clutching hand, and sprang to his feet, his eyes ablaze with anger.

"No, my father is not an Indian," he cried.

He was on the point of saying more, but restraining himself, he picked up his gun and slipped swiftly away among the trees. Down into the valley he moved, hardly caring where he went. For the second time in his life he was afraid of himself; for the second time he fled from an angry grey−haired man, not through fear of what might happen to himself, but what he might do. His soul was stirred within him, and the blood surged madly through his veins. But now, as on that other occasion, he was saved by a mighty influence from being one with the beasts of the forest, and that influence was the prevailing power of love.

At length he stopped on the edge of a wild meadow, and threw himself down upon a bed of moss under a fir tree. He remembered how he had done the same five years before when he had fled from the face of the man from whose loins he had sprung. It was love then which had restrained him and held his hand, the love he bore to a woman whose memory was enshrined in his heart, and that woman was his mother. So now his love for the fairest maiden at Loyal kept him from laying violent hands upon her father, the man who had insulted him.

And as he lay there his calmness gradually returned, until he once again felt master of himself. He could not remain longer at the settlement with the Colonel's anger hot against him. Something would be sure to happen which might separate him forever from the girl of his heart's choice. He must go away and lose himself for a time in the heart of the forest. But before going, he must see Jean once more, see her unknown to her father, and ask her to wait and be patient. The thought of going to the Colonel for a reconciliation never once entered his mind; such a thing was most foreign to his independent nature.

Time passed unheeded as he remained there lost in thought. At length he was startled by the report of a gun, followed almost immediately by a ringing cry of fear. Leaping to his feet, he dashed into the open, and looked intently up across the wild meadow. Nothing unusual was to be seen, but a great crashing could be plainly heard among the bushes. To Dane that sound was similar to a discordant note to a trained musician's sensitive ear. He had often heard it before, and knew its meaning. It always meant danger, and never more so than now.

Bounding forward in the direction of the sound, in a few seconds his eyes fell upon the cause of the disturbance. A great bull moose was charging, and the object of his rage was the Colonel, frantically striving to free himself from a tangle of fallen tree−tops into which he had plunged. That the man had fled a short distance after wounding the moose was quite evident. But to escape now by flight from that infuriated animal was utterly impossible. This the Colonel realised, so his only hope lay in seeking refuge amidst the tops of the fallen trees. This position, however, was most precarious, for the branches were half rotten and brittle, absolutely unable to withstand the terrific goring impact of those wide−spread antlers, impelled by insensate rage and over one thousand pounds of flesh, bone, and sinewy muscles.

In an instant Dane comprehended the seriousness of the situation. He knew that there was no time to lose, so bringing his musket to his shoulder, he took a quick, careful aim and fired. The great antlered demon was but a few feet from the tree−tops when the bullet tore into its side just back of the shoulder. It charged and crashed into the branches, but where it charged it fell, and after a brief convulsive struggle remained still. The fighting days of the monarch of the trails were ended.

Hastening at once to the spot, Dane found the Colonel pinned down amidst a tangle of branches and antlers, and unable to help himself. With considerable difficulty the courier at last assisted him to his feet. Apart from

several bruises upon the body, the only injury was in the left arm, on which one of the prongs had struck a glancing blow. An instant later this same arm had been caught under the huge body and held as in a vise. The Colonel was weak, and trembled as he endeavoured to stand upright. Blood oozed from several scratches on his forehead and trickled down into his white beard. But he maintained a brave spirit, and smiled as Dane questioned him about his injuries.

"I shall be all right shortly," he said. "There are no bones broken, for which I am most thankful. I am somewhat weak, that is all."

"Suppose we go down to the brook and let me bathe your face," Dane suggested. "It is not far, and you can lean on me."

Supported by the courier, the Colonel slowly made his way along the border of the meadow to the little brook which flowed sluggishly through a mass of wild grass and alders. Here Dane brought forth a piece of soft cloth from one of his pockets, with which he washed away the blood stains from the Colonel's forehead and beard. Then from a small wooden tube he produced some salve−like ointment which he applied to the wounds, thus giving immediate relief.

"I see you are well prepared for emergencies," the Colonel remarked, both interested and pleased at the young man's skill and attention.

"Experience has taught me to be always ready," Dane replied. "One never knows what is going to happen in the woods, so a few bandages are very handy. That ointment, too, is useful. It is a simple Indian remedy, but very effective."

The Colonel made no further comment, but lay upon the ground lost in thought. There was a far−away look in his eyes, which caused Dane to wonder what he was thinking about. At length he aroused and turned toward his companion.

"Young man," he began, "I am greatly indebted to you for saving my life to−day. But for your prompt action that moose would have crushed me to death in a short time. I now ask your forgiveness for my impatience and anger toward you to−day."

He held out his hand, but to his surprise Dane stepped quickly to the other side of the narrow brook.

"What is the meaning of this?" the Colonel asked. "Shall we not be friends?"

In reply Dane smiled and stretched out his hand, which the Colonel immediately grasped.

"This is the Indian custom," Dane explained. "While the grass grows, the sun shines, and the water flows, we will be friends."

"Amen," broke fervently from the Colonel's lips.

And there across that little stream youth and age clasped hands, and a bond of friendship was formed which not even death itself could break.

CHAPTER XI

THE SUMMONS

There was a flutter of excitement at the settlement when the betrothal of the Colonel's daughter and the King's courier became known. The young people, especially, were quite excited, and discussed it in the most animated manner. But it did not end in talk, for they decided to celebrate the event that very evening. In every home preparations were soon under way, and the women vied with one another in the culinary art. Jean was to know nothing about what was taking place, hence a careful watch was kept upon her movements. Old Mammy was let into the secret, and her face beamed with pleasure as the news was whispered into her ear.

"And you must not tell, Mammy," was the warning. "We want you to know so that you can help us to keep the secret from Jean until the right minute."

"Why, bress yo' life," the faithful servant replied, "dis ol' colored woman won't say nuffin'. She nebber knows nuffin', anyway, 'cept to hol' her tongue at de right time, which is more'n mos' folks kin do. An' doan yo' worry 'bout Missie Jean takin' any hint of what's goin' on. She's in lub, an' when a pusson's in lub, she's so near to heaben dat she doan pay much heed to what's goin' on 'round her. An' dat's de way wif Missie Jean."

Of all this excitement and innocent deception Jean was totally unaware. Part of the morning she played with the little Indian child along the shore, and rambling in the woods a short distance from the house. Much of the afternoon she spent in the canoe upon the water. She visited again the place up the creek under the big maple, and recalled the happy day when she and Dane had been last there, and the words of love which had been breathed into her ears. Taking the arrow−pin in her hand, she looked at it for some time. The words "Love's−Charm," kept running through her mind, and she wondered in what way that little trinket would be a Love−Charm to her. Suddenly and impulsively she raised it to her lips. Then she gave a quick, startled glance around, fearful lest she had been observed. She smiled at what she considered her foolishness, replaced the pin, and pushed the canoe from the shore.

When she reached home she was surprised that her father and Dane had not returned. The days were much shorter now, so the shades of night were stealing over the land as she entered the house. She had noticed a great heap of drift−wood piled upon the shore, but thought little about it, as it was a common occurrence on these cool nights for the young people to have a bonfire. She found Mammy preparing supper, with the child playing upon the floor nearby. The fire−place was aglow, and the flames, licking about several sticks of white maple, illuminated the room. It was a cheery, homelike scene, but Jean's first thoughts were for the hunters. She expressed her anxiety to Mammy, and asked what could be keeping them so late.

"Doan yo' worry 'bout dem, chile," the old woman replied. "Dey's well able to take care of demselves. Yo' might hab reason to be anxious if yo' daddy was alone. But he's got Mistah Dane wif him, an' dat young man knows de woods better'n I used to know my cookin'−stove in Ol' Connec. No, yo' needn't worry one bit. Dey'll turn up all right, 'specially when dey's good an' hungry; dat's jes like men."

But Jean did worry, especially when another hour passed and the men had not returned. Supper had been ready for some time, and even Mammy was beginning to show her impatience. She fussed with the baby, glanced often toward the fire, where the dishes were being kept hot, and at last lighted the dip−candles which she had placed upon the table.

"De Cun'l likes to hab de room bright," she remarked, "'specially when he comes home. He kin see yo' pretty face all de better, Missie Jean. An' Mistah Dane'll need a good light when he comes in, an' he'll be 'sprised when he sees how yo' look. I nebber saw yo' look better'n yo' do jes now, wif yo' hair fixed up so nice, de lobely col'r in yo' cheeks, an' wearin' dat beau'ful dress yo' brung from Ol' Connec."

Jean turned and smiled upon the woman. She had been standing at the open door for some time, watching and listening for the hunters.

"You must not flatter me, Mammy, or you will make me vain," she replied. "Oh, I wish they would come! I

am getting so anxious."

Scarcely had she finished speaking when the absent ones appeared suddenly before her. Seeing her father leaning heavily on Dane's arm, she gave a slight cry of fear, and darted to his side.

"Daddy, daddy, what is the matter?" she asked. "Are you hurt?"

"Let me get into the house, dear, and I shall tell you," the Colonel replied. "I feel very tired."

Seated before the fire, and later at the table, the story of the fight with the moose was told. The Colonel described the scene most vividly, and gave the courier great credit. He said nothing, however, about the quarrel, neither did Dane refer to it. That had passed with the running water over which they had clasped hands of enduring friendship. It was well, they were both aware, that none should know of it but themselves.

Jean was greatly interested in this adventure, and she watched her father with beaming eyes, forgetting at times her supper. Dane thought that he had never seen her look so beautiful. He admired the dress she was wearing, and he was pleased to see the Love−Charm at her throat. He observed the flickering light dancing upon her soft, wavy hair, and the varying expressions playing upon her face as she listened to her father. His heart was full of joy, and he realised more than ever before how pleasant it was to return from the hills to the light and warmth of a home where love dwelt.

They had finished their supper, and the Colonel was resting upon a settle near the fire, when a knock sounded upon the door, and a number of young people at once entered. They were in the gayest of moods, and surrounding Jean and Dane, they led them out of the house. Down to the shore they hurried, where the big bonfire was blazing merrily, and great forked flames were leaping high into the air.

"What is the meaning of this, Mammy?" the Colonel asked, as soon as the young people had left. "What is going on to−night?"

"It's a dance 'bout de fire, Cun'l," the old woman explained. "De young folks hab been plannin' all dis bressed day to s'prize Missie Jean an' Mistah Dane t'night. Dey's been cookin' an' cookin', an' whisperin' mysterious like, an' laffin' an' laffin' to split dere sides."

"What about?"

"Why, doan yo' know, Cun'l?" and Mammy looked her surprise. "Jes as soon as de young folks heard de news 'bout Missie Jean an' Mistah Dane dey made plans to cel'brate, so dat's what dey's doin' now. An' listen, Cun'l, to de music. Simon's settin' on a log, playin' fo' all he's worf, an' de young folks is a dancin'. Yo' bett'r come an' see fo' yo' set."

"I can see from where I am, Mammy, if you will move aside," was the reply. "I can't see very well through you."

With the woman's bulky body out of the way, the Colonel was enabled to view all that was taking place near the shore. The fire lighted up the ground for a considerable distance, so he could see the young people moving to and fro, and hear their chatter and happy laughter. And in their midst were Jean and Dane, the happiest of all. Occasionally a young man would throw some wood, or a great root upon the fire. As the flames leaped up anew, and masses of sparks were hurled in all directions, shouts of merriment ascended, followed by shrieks of laughter as the maidens fled from the falling, fiery shower. The Colonel smiled as he watched the merrymakers. He liked to see them happy. Their sojourn in the wilderness had not dampened their spirits, and he knew that such people were the right pioneers for a new land.

Jean and Dane thoroughly enjoyed themselves. They were pleased at the interest taken on their behalf, and entered heartily into the spirit of the gathering. As the evening wore on, and the dancing subsided, they gathered in little groups around the fire, far enough away to escape the intense heat. And here upon the ground they sat while the good things which had been cooked that day were passed around. Then it was that the older members of the settlement came to partake of the repast. Several jugs containing West India spirits were produced, and all drank to the health of the young couple they delighted to honour. The use of this beverage was almost universal, being dispensed as an ordinary act of hospitality, and no festive occasion was considered complete without the flowing cup. Snuff−boxes were then brought forth, and their contents liberally sampled, while those who smoked filled their piles and lighted them with small burning embers. Snuff, like Jamaica spirits and New England rum, was in more general use than tobacco. Various were the shapes and designs of the snuff−boxes, some being of considerable value. They were carried in the pockets, and two men meeting would exchange whiffs as a matter of course. True hospitality was deemed lacking where the friendly box was not passed around. It was the custom, and custom makes all things proper.

While this genial spirit of contentment and good will prevailed around the fire, a tall Indian stood within the shadow of the forest, and watched the scene with much interest and curiosity. At length he stepped forth into the flame−lit circle, and walked deliberately over to where Dane was seated. His presence was at once noted, and a sudden hush fell upon the gathering.

"Hello, Pete!" Dane exclaimed in surprise. "Where have you come from, and what do you want?"

The native replied in the deep guttural Indian tongue, and what he said caused Dane to start, while an expression of anxiety overspread his face. He asked a question in the same language, with which he was quite familiar, and when it had been answered, he turned to the intensely interested group around him.

"I am sorry to have to leave you," he announced, "but I must go at once, as I am needed up river."

"Is it anything serious?" Jean asked in a low voice.

"I am afraid so," Dane replied. "I told you that Pete would suddenly turn up with important news, and I was right. The rebels are stirring up trouble."

"But you must see daddy before you go," Jean said. "He will be greatly disappointed if you don't."

"Certainly I must see him. Let us go at once, as there is no time to lose."

Together they made their way to the house, leaving the people around the fire gazing curiously after them. As they entered, they saw the Indian bending over the sleeping child, and watching it most intently. Mammy was standing by on the defensive, fearful lest she was about to lose her little charge.

"Doan let him take her, Mistah Dane," she cried. "I can't spare Babby. Drive him out ob de house."

Pete at once straightened himself up to his full height, and smiled as he looked upon the agitated woman.

"Injun no tak' babby," he said. "Injun no cabin. Babby no mamma."

"Bress de Lo'd fo' His goodness!" Mammy fervently exclaimed, lifting on high her hands, "and let all de earf gib t'anks unto His holy name fo' ebber an' ebber."

The Colonel was greatly interested over Dane's departure, and asked him several questions.

"I can tell you very little now," the young man replied. "That the rebels are up to some mischief is quite

certain. Pete has found out where they are to meet to−morrow night, so we must be on hand to learn their plans."

"Is it far from here?"

"Quite a distance. We shall take the canoe, and make it in several hours."

"Why not wait until daylight?"

"That would not do, as we need darkness for such work. The rebels must not know of our presence."

"Will there be any danger?" Jean enquired.

Dane smiled as he looked upon her sober face, and saw the anxious expression in her eyes.

"Nothing to worry about," he replied. "To some it might be a dangerous undertaking, but Pete and I have been at it so long that it has become almost second nature to us."

Jean said nothing more just then, but while her father and Dane talked, she whispered something to Mammy. At once the colored woman became very busy, and when at last Dane bade the Colonel good−bye, a basket filled with provisions was set before him.

"It's fo' yo' an' de Injun," Mammy explained. "I hope de Good Lo'd'll be wif yo', an' help yo' skedaddle dem rebels. But yo' can't do nuffin' wifout grub, Mistah Dane. No matt'r if yo' is in lub, yo' mus' eat to lib."

Dane smiled as he took the basket, and thanked the big−hearted woman.

"I shall not forget your kindness, Mammy," he told her. "And neither will Pete. He has a great memory for such things. Why, all the Indians along the river know already what you have done for his little child, and they will also hear of this."

The memory of that night never passed from Jean's mind. She accompanied Dane to the shore, and stood there for a few minutes after the two couriers had left, She knew that Dane loved her with all the strength of his manly nature, and she never felt this more than when he had held her in his arms and kissed her ere stepping into the canoe. She did not want him to go, and how unfortunate it was that the summons should come to him in the midst of the merry−making, and when she was so happy. A spirit of depression suddenly swept upon her, which was foreign to her nature. She tried to banish it even after she returned to the house. But neither the cheerfulness of the fire, nor the conversation with her father and Mammy could dispel the strange feeling of some impending calamity.

CHAPTER XII

PLOTTERS IN COUNCIL

Leaving Jean standing upon the shore, Dane settled down to work and headed the canoe for the main channel. His time of idleness was now over, and he knew that stern duty lay ahead. Although it was hard for him to go away from the girl he loved, yet the spirit of a new adventure thrilled his soul. It was a call, insistent, imperative, and never had he disobeyed the voice. To him danger was a tonic, and the great wild with all its mystery and uncertainty was his playground. His nature demanded activity, and the lure of something beyond was as breath to his being.

The bark canoe seemed like a thing of life as it cut through the water and the night, straight for the open. It trembled as with excitement, impelled by the strong arms wielding the paddles. It was well seasoned to such work. It was Pete's favourite craft, and it knew all the streams for leagues around. It had poked its nose into every creek, cove, and tributary of the St. John River from the Kennebacasis to the Shogomoc. It knew the windings of the Washademoak, and the rolling billows of windy Grand Lake had tested its endurance. It had battled with running ice; it had been borne over innumerable portages; and it had lain concealed in many secret places while enemies had sped by in the darkness but a few yards away. It bore the scars of ice, rocks, and bullets, and its long, lean body had been patched and repatched. But notwithstanding all these years of hardships, it was as eager now as the hardy men who drove it forward to rush into new adventures.

Steadily Dane and Pete urged the springing craft onward. Seldom did they speak, and hardly a sound did they make as their paddles dipped rhythmically into the cold water. The sky was overcast, and not a star was to be seen. No lights gleamed along the shore. They were completely enwrapped by night and silence, securely enfolded in Nature's great secret embrace.

Reaching at length the upper end of an island which divides the river, they ran the canoe ashore, rested, and ate some of the food Jean and Old Mammy had so thoughtfully prepared. They talked in low voices, and Pete explained the cause of his long absence, where he had been, and how for some time he had been trailing the rebels until he had at last discovered the place and night of meeting to arrange plans for united action.

"How did you know where I was?" Dane asked. "I didn't tell any one where I was going."

"Me know, a'right. Me know white woman. Me know Dane."

"You were sure that I couldn't keep away from her?"

"A−ha−ha."

"But I never did such a thing before, Pete. When did you ever know me to run after a woman?"

"Dane find good white woman. Dane mak' no mistake."

"I have made no mistake," was the emphatic reply. "I am glad you like her, Pete."

"White woman good; tak' care babby, all sam' mamma. Bimeby Pete−−−−"

He suddenly paused, and laid his right hand upon his companion's arm. But Dane's ears were as keen as his own, and he, too, had heard the sound of an approaching canoe. It was coming down river, and in a few minutes it was abreast of them. Nothing could the two concealed men see, but as the strange craft was sweeping by, a voice broke the silence.

"Is everything ready?" was the question Dane heard asked.

"Yes, Seth's looking after the plans," came a reply.

Nothing more could Dane distinguish, although he strained his ears to hear something further. To him that canoe speeding through the night, and the words he had overheard, had a sinister meaning. That it was Seth Lupin to whom reference had been made, there could be no doubt. So the villain was still lurking around. What were the plans he was looking after? Had they anything to do with Jean? He believed they had, and the thought caused him to give the canoe a savage thrust from the shore, which sent it reeling back into midstream, He must get through with this task, and then hurry as quickly as possible to the girl he loved. But who were the ones in the canoe? From their words he felt sure that they were white men. In what way were

they connected with Seth Lupin, and whither were they bound?

He thought of all this as the canoe moved swiftly up the river, and he racked his brains in an effort to solve the problem of the plans Seth was looking after. He questioned Pete closely, but the Indian had not seen the villain nor heard anything about him.

In about an hour's time they came to a narrow channel which connected the river with a lake−like body of water several miles in extent, and known by the Indians as the "Wedneebak." Here they ran the canoe ashore, drew it out of the water and carried it up the bank and a short distance into the forest. Breaking off some fir boughs, they made for themselves beds upon the ground. Then taking off their jackets, they placed them over their bodies, and, lulled by the wind among the tree−tops, they were soon fast asleep.

Early dawn found them both awake, and watching with the keenest interest the narrow entrance to the Wedneebak. They ate sparingly of the food from the basket, hoping to make it last throughout the day. The morning was cold, but they did not dare to light a fire lest it should betray their presence. They took turns in watching the river and in moving about, so in this manner they were able to keep fairly warm.

During the morning Dane made a trip to a hill some distance inland, where from the upper branches of a large tree he obtained an excellent view of the upper stretch of the Wedneebak. He wished to learn if any of the rebels had already arrived for the council. From this elevated position his eyes scanned the shore, and soon detected several wreaths of smoke curling up into the air. How many men were there he could not tell, as the crowding trees hid them from view. He wondered if the pow−wow had already begun, or were the men waiting for others to arrive? He longed to go down to the shore, creep up close, and spy upon the rebels. This, however, he knew would be foolish, as it would be impossible in broad daylight to approach near enough to learn anything of importance. No, he must wait until night.

Pete was much pleased when Dane returned and told of the discovery he had made.

"Good, good," he said. "Plenty canoe come bimeby."

"But perhaps they are all there now," Dane suggested.

"No, more come bimeby. See 'm soon."

And in this the Indian was right, for as the day wore away, and darkness once more began to steal over the land, the canoes began to arrive. There were a dozen in all, and each contained a number of men, some of whom were Indians. They all came down river, entered the narrow channel, and sped up the Wedneebak.

As the last canoe disappeared around a bend, Dane and Pete slipped away from their place of watching. They moved rapidly through the forest, and hardly a sound did they make as they advanced. Their ears and eyes were keenly alert, for they were well aware that the critical time had now arrived, and that much depended upon their caution.

The darkness had now deepened, and no trail guided their steps. But to them this mattered little. The forest was their home, and their course was as unerring as birds in their flight or beasts in search of prey. A life−long training to one, and years to the other had developed the sense of instinct which always served when sight and hearing were of little or no avail.

And this stood them in good stead now, for when others would have detected nothing, they suddenly stopped dead in their tracks, dropped upon their hands and knees, and crept cautiously forward. Never did panthers move more warily than did those two human sleuth−hounds approach the unsuspecting men gathered from various places for the important council. From creeping they dropped into crawling, with their bodies close to

the ground. In this manner they ere long came near the water, and not far from where the rebels were assembled. Here, concealed by night and a thick clump of small fir bushes, they were able to watch all that was taking place, and to hear every word uttered.

Ever since Pete had brought him word of this council a great fear had been tugging at Dane's heart. He said nothing, however, about it to his companion, but as he rapidly and anxiously scanned the faces of the men gathered about the big main fire, he breathed a sigh of relief. The one he feared might be present was not there. A weight was now lifted from his mind, so he felt in a better mood to spy upon the band before him.

He knew them all, Indians, English−speaking renegades from New England, and half−breeds. It was a motley gathering, and as he listened to the drifting conversation before the actual pow−wow began, he realised how bitter was the hatred to the English that rankled strong in every breast. The half−breeds had an old score to settle, and this was another desperate attempt on their part to arouse the dissatisfied natives against the Loyalists.

For a time it was an orderly gathering, and as the men ate of the abundance of food which had been provided, they talked in a quiet manner. But when the rum, of which there seemed to be no end, was passed around all became more talkative. They harangued, cursed, and wrangled with one another until it appeared to the concealed watchers that the whole affair would end in a fizzle. But Flazeet, the half−breed leader, seemed to be perfectly satisfied, and at times a grim smile overspread his dark brutal face.

Leaping at length to his feet, he ordered his companions to be silent. When he spoke in such a peremptory tone, they knew that it was well for them to obey, so after a little grumbling they settled down to listen to what he had to say.

Flazeet understood the Indian language, and was also well acquainted with the natives, so it was to them he now addressed his words. He told them first of all of the greatness of their race, and that the Great Spirit had given to their forefathers the land on which they lived. It was theirs, and no one had any right to take it from them. But strangers were coming in, and King George was going to take their hunting−grounds away and give them to others. And who were these newcomers? They were people who had been driven out of their own country for their badness. They had fought against the great white chief, George Washington, who had been so good to the Indians, and had sent them many presents during the war. These strangers had been defeated, and thousands of them had already arrived in ships, and were coming up the river to take possession of the hunting−grounds. The Indians would be driven out. They would die, because the newcomers would kill all the moose, deer, and caribou, cut down the trees, and destroy the fish on the various streams. These were some of the things they would do, and the Indians would have no hunting−grounds, so they, their wives and their children would starve. Would the Indians allow this? Would they let these bad men come in and take their lands? No, they must fight, drive these people out, and keep the country which was theirs by right. And now was the time to fight, before too many strangers arrived.

This in brief was Flazeet's long harangue. It made a deep impression upon the Indians, and they voiced their sentiments by occasional grunts of approval. So excited did several become when the speech was ended, that they leaped to their feet, and inflamed by the words and the rum, they were ready to march at once against the strangers. But Flazeet told them to wait, as the newcomers were many and well armed. It would be necessary to move slowly, and to be very careful. And, besides, there were Indians who would stand by the treaty which had been made with King George at the mouth of the river, and they would have to fight against them. This matter must be kept a profound secret, and when they did attack, it must be swift and deadly.

With considerable difficulty Flazeet managed to calm the warlike natives. Then more rum was passed around, followed by much talking and squabbling. All this was most gratifying to Flazeet, and especially interesting to the two couriers concealed among the bushes. Pete's great body quivered with excitement, and Dane could hardly control himself. How he longed for a score of tested men, that he might spring upon the rebels, and

give them the surprise of their lives.

When at length the excitement had subsided, Gab Rauchad rose slowly to his feet. He was a wiry little half−breed, with a cunning, fox−like face. He spoke in French, and he addressed himself chiefly to his own people. He took them back to the expulsion of the Acadians by the English in 1755, a tale old and yet ever new. In vivid language he described the happy condition of the Acadians at Grand Pré, the lands they had cleared, and the peaceful lives they led. Then came the English monsters, broke up their domestic hearths, confiscated their property, and drove them from the country. He described in detail the privations the expelled Acadians endured, how they wandered from place to place, and the ills which overtook them.

For some time he spoke, and every word told of the burning rage which filled his heart. His hatred to the English was intense, and he declared that the time of vengeance had now arrived. With the aid of the Indians they would serve the newcomers as their fool of a king had served the Acadians. He became greatly excited as he talked, dancing about, waving his arms, and shrieking forth words of defiance and revenge. He cursed King George and the English in general, and called upon all present to unite now in a great effort to free the land from the newcomers, and to hold it for the expelled Acadians and the Indians who were their brothers and comrades in distress.

All this was hard for Dane to endure, and as he listened his nimble mind was forming some definite plan of action. That it must be immediate he was well aware, as no doubt these rebels would not be long in carrying out their evil and treacherous designs upon the newcomers. His mind naturally turned to Jean. Suppose that band of men before him should sweep down unexpectedly upon the little settlement below Oak Point, how much mercy would they be likely to grant the Loyalists? He imagined what would be the fate of the women, especially Jean and other maidens. He shuddered as he thought of Joe Flazeet and his companions gloating over their victims.

"The English took the lands of the Acadians at Grand Pré because they wanted them for themselves." It was Rauchad speaking, and he was appealing to the Indians as Flazeet had done to the half−breeds. "And as they took those lands, so they will take your hunting grounds and drive you out. The Acadians had happy homes; what have they now? Nothing. They had plenty; now they are starving. And who did this? King George, our mortal enemy. France and England are now at war. But France will win, and this land will belong to us once again, and then the Indians will be well treated, and we will all live as one brother. Let us do our part now in fighting for the good King of France."

His words met with much approval, and when he had ended, Flazeet arose and outlined the plan of attack. This was just what Dane was waiting to hear, and he missed not a single word. He was greatly excited, and he controlled himself with difficulty as he listened to Flazeet. The Loyalists down river were to be wiped out first of all, especially those below Oak Point and at Kingston Creek. They would then move rapidly up river and have the entire country conquered ere assistance could reach the newcomers from Fort Howe. It would be a clean sweep of the objectionable strangers, and what could Major Studholme do with the few men under his command?

When Dane had gained all the information that was necessary, he touched Pete on the shoulder, and in another minute they were away from the scene of wild revelry which had now begun. It did not take them long to reach the narrow channel, and launch their canoe. This they headed up stream, and with strong arms drove it through the water, straight for Oromocto miles beyond.

CHAPTER XIII

THE KING'S RANGERS

Several days had passed in quiet contentment at the little settlement of Loyal after Dane's departure. Jean missed him very much and longed for his return. The evenings were now dark and cool, so as she and her father sat before the fire they often talked about the absent one, and wondered what could be detaining him. Neighbours at times joined them, and discussed the possibility of an attack by the Indians and the slashers. But the Colonel scoffed at such an idea. He maintained that the natives were at peace with the English, and would not be aroused by the rebels to molest the Loyalists.

Each day anxious eyes were turned upon the river, hoping to see the white sails of the *Polly* bearing up stream. Captain Leavitt had promised to return before winter to bring the needed supplies for the long, hard months ahead.

Something, however, at length occurred which diverted their attention from the *Polly*, and gave them considerable concern. This was the arrival of several canoes filled with men. There were a score of men in all, and they received a most hearty welcome. The leader was William Davidson, the King's purveyor, who, with several others, was entertained at supper by the Colonel and his daughter. That evening a bonfire was built upon the shore, and around this the visitors and most of the people of the settlement gathered. It was a pleasant assembly, even though the night was cool. A liberal supply of Jamaica rum was passed around, and this was supposed to add greatly to the comfort of all.

Jean sat by her father's side, deeply interested in all that was taking place. Her heart was light, for Davidson had told her that Dane would be with her in a day or two. He and Pete were at present away on special business, the nature of which he did not say. Jean liked the looks of these visitors. They were all hardy, keen, well−built, and fearless−eyed rangers in the service of their King. They had to be all that, for their leader would employ no others. But they were full of life and spirit when they met together, and many were the stories told of their various adventures. This night, notwithstanding the seriousness of the business which lay ahead, they were like a number of boys just out of school. It was something new to them to meet so many interesting strangers such as they found at Loyal.

William Davidson was a worthy leader of such a band of men, and they held him in the highest regard. He was a man in the prime of life, and had led a stirring career. Coming from Scotland, he had settled on the Miramichi River, where for a time he engaged in the fishery and fur trade. During the war his Indian neighbours, incited by certain rebels, made his life so unbearable that he was forced to flee to the St. John River where he settled near the mouth of the Oromocto River. Even here he could not find peace, for the following summer he was plundered by the Indians, who took all his goods upon which they could lay their hands. Davidson was a marked man owing to his loyalty to King George, and the rebels here also aroused the natives against him. Little wonder, then, that when he was appointed the King's purveyor in supplying masts for His Majesty's navy that the hostility between him and the rebels, as well as many Indians, still continued.

But Davidson was a man not easily daunted. His courage, combined with his cool judgment, was well known all along the river. And since his entrance into the King's service he had given many outstanding proofs of his bravery and ability. He was quick to act, but never more so than when Dane Norwood brought him word at Oromocto of the plot against the Loyalists.

When he at length rose to speak, all talking ceased, and the people of the settlement felt that they were now to learn the reason of the rangers' presence in their midst. And neither were they mistaken. After Davidson had thanked them for their kindly reception, he told them of the danger which threatened their homes, and perhaps their lives. He mentioned the council which had been held on the shore of the Wedneebak, and how Dane Norwood and Pete, the Indian, had brought him the news. He and his men had accordingly hastened down river as fast as possible to ask the men of Loyal to join them in overcoming and putting the plotters to rout.

"But why should they attack us?" the Colonel asked when Davidson had ended. "They do not know us, and we have never harmed them."

"Simply because you are loyal to King George," was the reply. "The half−breeds, who are descended from the Acadians, think they have a great grievance against England for expelling their forefathers from Grand Pré in 1755. During the war they made no end of trouble, and did their best to stir up the Indians to rebellion. I know only too well what they did, for they drove me from my home on the Miramichi, and caused me a great deal of annoyance up river. They are at their old tricks again, and this is their last hope.

"But have they not reason for being angry at what England did to their forefathers at Grand Pré?" Henry Watson, a Loyalist, asked. "We have heard much about that transaction, and it was all very unfavourable to England. Perhaps there is another side to the story."

"Indeed there is," Davidson replied, "although it is very difficult to separate the truth from the fiction. It was a very sad affair, and it is a pity that it ever happened. Perhaps England made a mistake and acted hastily, but we must consider how serious was the situation when the expulsion took place. Sentiment has played an important part, and the thought of thousands of people deprived of their lands, and driven out to wander as exiles in strange countries has naturally stirred many hearts."

"But were the Acadians disloyal?" the Colonel asked. "We have been told that they were not, and that all were punished for the indiscretions of a few."

"That may be so," and Davidson looked thoughtfully before him. "But the English contend that when the Acadians settled on their lands over forty years before it was with the distinct understanding that they could only retain them by becoming British subjects. But they had not complied with those terms. The English contend that the Acadians did everything in their power to assist the French and embarrass the English. Many of them joined with the Indians in the attacks on the garrison at Annapolis, and on other English fortified posts. They supplied England's enemies with cattle and grain at Louisbourg, Beauséjour, and elsewhere. They acted the part of spies on the English, and maintained a constant correspondence with the French. They were on friendly terms with the Indians, who were such a menace to the English that an English settler could scarcely venture beyond his barn, or a soldier beyond musket shot of his fort for fear of being killed or scalped. That is the English version of the affair which I heard in Halifax. The Acadians deny it, and say it is all false."

"We heard," one of the settlers said, "that the Acadians were expelled because the greedy English colonists looked upon their fair farms with covetous eyes, and that the government was influenced by these persons."

"I have heard that, too," Davidson replied, "and I have made enquiries about that matter. But I do not believe it is true, because those abandoned farms were not settled by the English until years after the Acadians were expelled, and the lands at Annapolis were not occupied until nine or ten years after the French had left them. Why did not the English colonists settle upon those abandoned farms at once, if they were so anxious to have them? They did nothing of the kind, so I do not think that had anything to do with the expulsion."

"What was the real cause, then?" Henry Watson asked.

"It was the seriousness of the whole situation. England was just entering upon a great war with France. It was a death−struggle, so there was no room for half−way measures. Feeling ran high, and the English may have become panicky. There was a bitter hatred, too, which may have had something to do with it. The English believed that with so many concealed enemies in the country, and such a large number of open enemies on the borders, their position was far from secure. They thought that the Acadians were beginning to show their real feelings, especially so whenever a rumour reached them that a French fleet was in the Bay of Fundy. Anyway, they at last became so much worked up that they ordered the Acadians to give up the arms they had in their possession, and to take the oath of allegiance to King George. Refusing to take the oath, the Acadians were expelled. You now know both sides of the pathetic affair. The story of the expelled people is generally believed, partly, no doubt, for sentimental reasons. The English may have acted hastily and unwisely, but they

contend that there was nothing else to do under the circumstances."

"So some of those expelled people came here, and are now trying to make trouble for us; is that it?" the Colonel asked.

"Some of them are. Others are living very quietly, and behaving themselves in a proper manner. But there are several very bitter and unscrupulous agitators, chief of whom are the half breeds, Flazeet and Rauchad, who will stop at almost nothing. They are full of hatred and long for revenge. They have not only drawn with them a number of lawless Acadians, and English−speaking traitors, but they are now inducing too many Indians to unite with them. I have suspected them for some time, and watch has been kept upon their movements. They have been plotting all summer, and now they are about to act. But thanks to our couriers, Dane Norwood, and Pete, the Indian, I know of their plans. We are, therefore, here to ask you to assist us. Others, we believe, will come to our aid, so we should be able to put the rebels to rout without much difficulty."

The conversation now became general. The Loyalists were thoroughly aroused, and all the men agreed to help the rangers against the enemy. Davidson did not explain what he intended to do, but asked all to trust him for the present. With this the Loyalists were satisfied, and they went back to their houses to make preparations for their march against the rebels.

Davidson and his men slept upon the ground that night, wrapped in their blankets. This had been their life for years, so they thought nothing of it. These rangers who knew every trail and stream in the country, were at home wherever night overtook them. Possessions they had none. A life of indolence and ease they despised. The spirit of adventure animated their souls, and their only creed was loyalty to King George. With such men Davidson wielded a strong influence in a region where the King's regular forces could not penetrate. It was largely due to such bands of men that England's prestige was maintained in the heart of the wilderness.

CHAPTER XIV

WHERE THE RANGERS LED

The next day there was considerable stir at the settlement. The women were busy cooking, while the men spent some time cleaning their muskets and "running" bullets. All felt anxious, and serious faces were seen among the Loyalists. Old Mammy was greatly disturbed, and Jean found it difficult to calm her fears.

"Why, Mammy, you never made such a fuss all during the war when daddy was in danger every day," the girl chided.

"Ah, chile, dat was different. Yer daddy was fightin' white men den. But dese are Injuns, an' dey'll scalp de wounded, an' den tie 'em to a tree an' burn 'em alive. Den dey'll come an' carry off de women fo' wives. I'll die befo' I'll be de wife of any ol' Injun, I sure will."

"Don't you worry, Mammy," Jean assured. "The Indians are not going to come here. The rangers and our men will be able to handle them. I am not one bit afraid."

As the shades of evening were stealing over the land, the men gathered for their march against the enemy. They were a formidable band, and Davidson was much pleased as he watched them fall into line. The Colonel had charge of the little squad of Loyalists, and his old spirit possessed him as he drilled and instructed them for a few minutes in front of his house. The rangers watched this performance with interest, and smiled indulgently.

"I am afraid that won't do much good in wilderness warfare," Davidson reminded. "General Braddock tried it, and you know what happened. However, I am hoping that there will be no fighting, so it won't make much

difference."

Half an hour later the men were swinging on their way through the woods. No one spoke, and all walked as warily as possible. As night shut down travelling became more difficult for the men of the settlement, although the rangers seemed as much at home in the darkness as in the daylight. For over two and a half hours they moved steadily forward, and at length stopped by the side of a little brook which flowed down to the river. Here they rested and ate some of the food which they had brought with them. They had not been long here ere a low whistle sounded up the valley. Davidson at once replied, and a few minutes later soft approaching footsteps were heard. Then a dim form emerged from the darkness, and stood in their midst.

"I am glad to see you on time, Dane," Davidson accosted. "How many men did you get?"

"Twenty−five," was the reply. "Pete is bringing them up. I slipped on ahead to see if things are all right."

"Yes, everything is working well so far. Have you found out anything new?"

"Nothing except that some of the rebels have gathered at Pine Lake, and others are expected to−morrow. Pete and I were trailing them to−day, and it was rare sport."

"I hope you were careful, Dane."

"We are always careful, though it wasn't necessary to−day. The Indians were quite cautious, but some of the white men lumbered along like oxen, cursing and complaining at a great rate. Flazeet and Rauchad had quite a time with them, and kept encouraging them with promises of rum and the fun they would have with the Loyalists."

"They'll get a different kind of fun from what they expect," Davidson replied. "And the more rum they swig, the better it will be for us. How far is it from here to the lake?"

"About five miles in a straight course. We can do it easily in an hour and a half."

"Oh, you could do it all right in that time, and less, for that matter. But all here are not so well accustomed to the woods at night. Isn't that so, Colonel?"

"It certainly is," was the emphatic reply. "I shall need two or three hours, for I find the walking very difficult. And, besides, one has to be careful not to make any noise."

"Whatever noise we make will not trouble the rebels," and Davidson laughed. "They'll be sleeping as sound as babies by daylight."

In a short time Pete arrived with the recruits from Kingston, and they were given a hearty welcome. It was a glad meeting for the Loyalists, and they spent several hours in earnest conversation about their various affairs, and exchanging bits of information concerning the old homes they had left. The men from Kingston described the progress they were making in clearing their lands, and building their houses.

Several small fires had been started, and around these the men gathered. The night was cool, and a stiff wind from the northwest swayed the tops of the great trees. Had it not been for the serious business upon which they were bent, the Loyalists would have enjoyed the outing immensely. But the thought of what lay ahead was ever with them. There was something uncanny about this camping−spot in the forest, and they often glanced apprehensively toward the walls of blackness which surrounded them. They were not cowards, for their courage had been fully proved in many a hard fight. Even the Colonel felt somewhat depressed as the night wore on. It seemed weird and unnatural, this mode of warfare against a skulking enemy. If he could only

lead his men against the rebels out in the open it would have been different. But this waiting for hours, and with no apparent method of attack, was hard for him to endure.

The rangers, on the other hand, did not mind it in the least. This was their life, and they took it as a matter of course. Dane, especially, was at his ease. He was glad of the rest, as he had been on the move all day. But he was anxious to get through with the job that he might return to Jean. He had asked the Colonel about her, and they had talked apart for some time.

"I hope she is not too much distressed over this affair," he said.

"She is naturally worried," was the reply. "But she has great confidence in the rangers−−and in you," he added after a slight pause. "I agree with her, and feel greatly indebted to you and Pete for what you have done. I hope we may be able to settle the rebels once and for all."

"I don't think there is any doubt about it. So far, our plans have worked without a hitch, and Davidson is an old reliable hand at such work. Strategy with him is the main thing, and it has proven useful on many occasions ere this. He always avoids bloodshed as far as possible."

It was a great relief to the weary Loyalists when Davidson at last bestirred himself, and told all to get ready for the march to the lake. The band was at once divided into five groups, each containing several rangers, who were well acquainted with their leader's plans. Dane stayed close by the Colonel, carried his musket, and assisted him when his steps lagged. It was a slow, toilsome journey through the forest on that cold, frosty morning. There were hills to climb, and swamps to cross. It would have been hard work even in the daytime, but night added to the difficulty of the undertaking. The Loyalists, not accustomed to such travelling, often stumbled and tripped over stones and snags. But the rangers walked as if on a beaten highway, and proved of great assistance to the less skilful. No one complained, however, and when any one spoke, it was in a subdued voice. The Colonel strove bravely to hold his own with the younger men. But he was becoming very weary, and more than once he leaned on Dane's arm for support.

"I am sorry to burden you" he said, "but this trip is almost too much for me."

"I am afraid it is," was the reply. "You should have stayed at home and let us attend to the rebels."

"I suppose I should have done that," and the Colonel sighed as he paused for a minute on the brow of a hill they had just climbed. "But I want to do my part. I did it during the war to the best of my ability. Jean was proud of me then, and I do not want her to be ashamed of me now."

Dane was about to reply when a slight sound from one of the rangers sealed his lips. He knew that it spelled danger, and that caution was needed.

"We are close to the lake," he whispered. "It is just over there. We are to remain here for a while."

The men were glad enough to rest, so throwing themselves down upon the ground, they refreshed themselves with some food. Anxiously they awaited the coming of the dawn, and through a break in the trees they often turned their eyes eastward. At length the far−off horizon rose slowly into view, the darkness began to melt away, and objects about them grew more distinct. This was the signal for them to continue their journey, and once again they set their faces toward the lake. It was easier travelling now, and seldom did any one stumble. This was well, for the strictest silence had to be maintained as they neared their goal. They were walking in single file, and the rangers were doubly alert, peering here and there, and listening to every sound.

At length they separated, Dane going alone with the Colonel somewhat to the right. Each ranger took one or two of the settlers, and in another minute all had disappeared among the trees. Dane led the Colonel slowly

along, until presently an opening appeared before them.

"It is the lake," Dane whispered. "We must creep now to the edge of the woods, and keep ourselves well hidden."

Dropping upon their hands and knees, they worked their way along until they came right to the border of the forest. Here they stopped, and by the dim light of the morning they could see before them a band of men lying upon the shore, wrapped in their blankets. There were fifty or more, including Indians, and they were sound asleep.

"We've got them this time, all right," Dane again whispered. "Here is your gun; you may need it. We must now wait for Davidson to make the next move."

It was a beautiful spot which the rebels had chosen for their place of meeting. The lake was not large, but it lay like a gem amidst its setting of great dark pines. The shore where the plotters were lying was sandy, and from all appearance they had spent much of the night in a wild carousal. They were huddled in various grotesque shapes, and several were snoring loudly.

In about fifteen minutes a sound, scarcely audible, was heard near Dane's side, and glancing around, he saw Davidson creeping toward him.

"The trap is all set," the leader whispered as he came close. "It only waits to be sprung."

"Are the men all arranged?" Dane asked.

"They are in fine order, and all in line, only a few feet from one another. The Loyalists caught on in no time. I am surprised that the rebels are all asleep. It's a wonder they didn't place some one on guard."

"I believe they did. Look," and Dane motioned to a huddled form somewhat apart from the others. "There is the guard, but the rum must have affected him like it did the rest. Anyway, they were not suspicious, and had no idea that their plot was known."

"Now get ready," Davidson ordered. "We must round up this bunch before any more arrive."

Then from his lips sounded forth a clear peculiar whistle. Almost immediately wild yells from a score of rangers rent the air, followed by ringing cheers of defiance. Dazed and startled, a number of rebels threw aside their blankets, scrambled to their knees, and looked around. Flazeet and Rauchad were the first to comprehend the situation. Yelling to their still sleeping comrades, they leaped to their feet, and were about to seize their muskets, when Davidson sternly ordered them to desist.

"Hands up," he commanded.

The ringleaders instantly obeyed, for they at once recognised the King's purveyor, the one man they so greatly feared. But one dare−devil rebel sprang for his gun a few feet away. He never reached it, however, for from the border of the forest two muskets spoke, and he crumpled in his tracks upon the sand. This was sufficient warning to the rest, and all now awake stood sullenly and silently staring hard at their captors who had come into full view.

"Get over there, and be quick about it," Davidson ordered, motioning to the left.

The rebels at once obeyed, and standing huddled together, awaited further developments. Most of the men had no heart for any opposition, even if they had the opportunity. They had been promised plenty of rum, a good

time, and no end of fun with the Loyalists. Such a disastrous outcome as this had been far from their minds. The Indians now realised that they had been led into a trap, and their hearts were full of rage, more against their leaders than their captors. But Flazeet and Rauchad were not in the least repentant. Their eyes and faces expressed their anger and hatred as they watched Davidson coming toward them.

"What is the meaning of all this?" the purveyor asked.

"It's none of your business," Flazeet replied with a savage oath.

"I've made it my business, though, and so have the men with me." A smile lurked about the corners of Davidson's mouth as he watched the confounded rebels. "You didn't expect this, Joe, did you?"

"And why should I? Why can't we meet here without being disturbed? What right have you to come upon us like this? What do you want, anyway?"

"I want you and a few others, and you know very well what for, so don't begin any nonsense."

"This is an outrage," Flazeet stormed. "I always thought this was a free country, where men can meet together if they want to without being held up like this."

"It is a free country, Joe, and we are trying to keep it so. But when men start plotting against peaceable people, they must be restrained. That is the reason why we are here."

"Do you mean to say that we are plotters?"

"Yes, and the meanest kind at that. You have been stirring up the Indians and others for some time. You will be surprised, no doubt, to know that every word that you and Rauchad uttered at your big council by the Wedneebak was overheard and reported to me. I know what you said to the Acadians and the Indians who were there that night, and how you cursed King George. You planned to wipe out the Loyalists, though that was easier said than done."

Flazeet and Rauchad stared dumbfounded at the speaker. Their rage was changing now to a nameless fear. They thought of that night by the Wedneebak when they imagined that only those concerned in the plot were present. Had they been betrayed by one of their number? they asked themselves. They could not believe it, for they had kept in close touch with all the men ever since. There must have been spies surrounding them that night, and this thought sent cold chills up and down their spines, causing their faces to turn a ghastly hue.

Davidson noted their confusion, and smiled. He knew that they were greatly puzzled, and it pleased him. The Acadians and Indians were deeply impressed, and showed it by the expressions of fear and awe upon their faces. Their respect for the King's purveyor had always been great, but they considered him now as more than human. That he knew of every word which had been spoken at their council by the Wedneebak, was beyond their comprehension. That they were completely cowed, Davidson knew. He turned to the Indians and addressed them in their own language. He told them how their false leaders had led them into trouble, and caused them to rebel against King George's people. But if they were willing to behave themselves, he would let them go. He wished to take only the ringleaders with him, and hand them over to Major Studholme at Fort Howe.

"King George will treat you well," he said in conclusion. "There is plenty of land for both you and the white people. You will still have your hunting−grounds, so you and your families will have plenty of food. But if you listen to such men as Flazeet and Rauchad here, and make any more trouble, King George will send soldiers as many as the trees of the forest, and will drive you all out. He does not want to do that. He is anxious to be your great chief, and help you. Are you willing to obey him?"

When Davidson had ended, he waited until the Indians had consulted one another. Then their chief speaker stepped forward, and declared that from henceforth he and the Indians with him would be loyal to King George and make no more trouble. The Acadians also gave a reluctant assent. But as these latter were few, and were by no means representative of the loyal Acadians in the land, Davidson was little concerned about what they said. He was chiefly anxious to have the Indians on his side. The slashers were becoming very troublesome up river, and he wanted to keep the natives from joining them against the King's mast−cutters. By breaking up this band of rebels, he believed that much had been accomplished.

"I am going to treat you well," he told the Indians and Acadians. "I am going to give you back your guns and let all of you go except your leaders here and two or three more. When you have buried that man over there, go home and be forever thankful that you have got out of this trouble as well as you have."

CHAPTER XV

THE LINE IN THE SAND

Taking with them the two ringleaders and two other rebels as witnesses, the victors marched back to the settlement. There was no need for secrecy now, so the forest re−echoed with shouts, laughter and songs of the care−free rangers. They were somewhat disappointed at the outcome of the affair, as they longed for a fight with the plotters. But down in their hearts they knew that Davidson had taken the wisest course in dealing with the Indians. With Flazeet and Rauchad out of the way, they felt certain that the gang would give no further trouble.

The Colonel found it impossible to keep up with his companions, so he and Dane walked more slowly some distance in the rear. It was difficult for the young courier to restrain his steps, as he longed to speed like the wind to the one he believed was anxiously awaiting his coming. But he would not leave the Colonel who was weary after his trying experience.

"This has been too much for me," the latter confessed, as he paused and rested for a few minutes. "I am sorry to detain you, for I know how you long to be on ahead with the others. It is good of you to stay with me."

"Don't you remember our agreement?" Dane asked.

"What agreement?"

"The one we made out in the hills, of course, that 'While the grass grows, the sun shines, and the water flows we will be friends.' Friends help one another, do they not? Although I am anxious to get to the settlement, yet I could not think of leaving you to lose yourself in the woods. I would never forgive myself, and what would Jean think of me?"

"She thinks a great deal of you now, young man, and I believe you are worthy of her regard."

"I hope I am, and for her sake, at least, I am glad that my life has been clean. I have travelled in strange ways, and lived at times among base and vicious men, but I have always kept myself apart from their evil doings. I owe it all to my mother's teaching and influence."

"She must have been a noble woman," the Colonel remarked, as he resumed his journey.

"She was," Dane replied, "and I know of but one who resembles her. You know to whom I refer. Until I met Jean, I thought that my mother was the only one who reached my ideal of what a woman should be. Since meeting her, I have been very happy. Without her, the world would be very dreary to me. But perhaps you cannot fully understand what I mean."

"I understand better than you imagine," was the quiet reply. "When I say that Jean is just like her mother, you can be assured that I understand exactly what you mean."

The Colonel was very tired when he at length reached the settlement. He and Dane were both surprised at the silence which reigned about the place. They had expected to hear sounds of the rangers and others making merry over the success of their march against the rebels. But everything was as quiet as a funeral, causing an ominous feeling to steal into their hearts. Had anything of a serious nature happened during their absence? they asked themselves, although they did not express their thought in words. What was the meaning of those little groups of men and women talking so earnestly? And why was Davidson advancing alone to meet them? Something surely was wrong.

As, Davidson approached, they noted the serious expression upon his face. The Colonel stopped, and with fast−beating heart waited for the purveyor to speak.

"We have been watching for you," Davidson began. "I am afraid you are very tired."

"I am somewhat weary," the Colonel replied. "But, tell me, is anything the matter? What is the meaning of this strange quietness? And why do you meet us like this?"

"We are anxious about your daughter," Davidson explained. "She has been missing since last night."

At these words a cry escaped Dane's lips, and he wheeled impetuously upon his leader. But the Colonel did not utter a sound. His face grew white as death, and his body trembled. He stared at the ranger as if he had not heard aright. Then he raised his left hand, and pressed it to his forehead.

"You say that Jean is missing?" Dane asked. "What has happened to her? Tell me, quick."

"Yes, she has disappeared, and no one here knows what has become of her."

With a groan Dane looked beseechingly at Davidson.

"Surely some one must have seen her," he declared. "Was she alone? Was she out on the water? Was she in the woods? Perhaps she is lost, and is wandering about trying to find her way home."

"That is not it, Dane. She was visiting at one of the houses early last night, and stayed for about an hour. She left there for home, and has not been seen since."

Dane made no reply. His brain was in a tumult. He tried to think, to find some solution to the problem. Jean was gone! Where had she gone? What had happened to her? His thoughts suddenly darted to Lupin, the cowardly villain. Then he recalled what he had heard a few nights before on the river as that mysterious canoe sped by in the darkness. "Seth's looking after the plans," were the final words which had reached his ears. Had those plans anything to do with Jean's disappearance? he asked himself. Forgotten was everything else as with lightning rapidity these thoughts surged through his mind. He came to himself with a start, and was surprised to see that the Colonel had left him, and was with Davidson at the door of his own house. He hurried after him, and entered the house just as the bereaved father dropped upon a seat near the table, and buried his face in his hands. He went to his side and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"I will find Jean," he said. "Don't get too much discouraged."

"You will find Jean?" the Colonel eagerly asked. "Have you any idea where she is?"

"I do not know, but Pete and I will find her."

At these words Old Mammy lifted her bowed head. She had been swaying to and fro, and moaning in the most doleful manner.

"Oh, Mistah Dane, find Missie Jean," she pleaded. "Bring back my sweet lamb. I'se 'fraid de Injuns or bears has toted her off. Oh! oh! oh! What will I do wifout my darlin' chile!"

"We will find her, Mammy, never fear," Dane comforted. "Get some food ready, and Pete and I will begin the search at once."

"I'll have it ready fo' yo' in a jiffy, Mistah Dane," and the old woman toddled to her feet. "I'se been cookin' all day fo' I knew de men would come back wif big ap'tites. I'll put up 'nuff to las' yo' fo' a week."

In another minute the faithful servant was busy filling a capacious basket with the good things she had stored away in the cupboard. Dane turned to Davidson, who had been talking with the Colonel.

"Where is Pete?" he asked. "I have not seen him since coming back."

"He is down on the shore," was the reply. "He went there as soon as he heard the news, and has been there ever since."

Dane walked to the door and looked out. Down among the trees he saw the Indian, moving slowly around, with eyes intent upon the ground. Leaving the house, Dane hurried across the open, and he had almost reached the native when the latter dropped upon his hands and knees, and examined something he had just discovered.

"Have you found anything?" Dane asked.

"A−ha−ha," Pete replied, lifting his head, and holding forth a tiny shred of cloth.

Dane seized it and examined it most carefully, while his heart gave a great bound.

"It is a piece of Jean's dress!" he exclaimed. "I would know it among a thousand. Where did you find it?"

"On dat," and the Indian laid his hand upon a sharp−pointed prong which jutted out from the great root of a fallen tree. "White woman carried off, eh?"

"It seems like it, Pete. Her dress must have caught on that snag. Have you found anything else?"

"A−ha−ha. Injun track, see," and he pointed to the ground just in front of him.

Dane stooped and without much difficulty he was able to discern the imprint of a moccasined−foot where it had pressed a small mound of sand. He straightened himself up and looked around.

"Any more such tracks, Pete?"

"A−ha−ha, down on shore. Canoe come dere. Injun carry off white woman, eh?"

"There is no doubt about it. And we've got to find her. Are you ready to help me?"

"A−ha−ha, Pete ready. Pete get canoe, eh?"

"All right, and I'll be with you in a few minutes."

Half an hour later Pete's canoe, the old reliable, which the rangers had brought back to the settlement, was again headed up river. Dane sat astern and drove his paddle into the water with the force of a Titan. He had been greatly stirred at times in the past, but never such as now. The blood surged madly through his veins, and the muscles of his bared arms stood out like whips of steel. He thought of the cowardly attack upon the helpless girl, the one he loved better than life. Where was she now? Perhaps already she had become the victim of Seth Lupin. The idea was horrible, and his paddle bent as the glittering blade carved the water. But the base Lupin should not escape. He would track him, if necessary, to the farthest bounds. He would find him, and when he had found him . . .

The sun of the now shortened day dipped below the far−off western horizon. A chilly breeze drifted up with the tide. Gradually the trees along the shore became indistinct. The stars tumbled out one by one. Silence reigned on water and land. But still the canoe sped noiselessly onward. Not once had Dane spoken to the Indian; his mind was too much occupied with other things. The picture of a white head bowed with grief as he had last seen it at the settlement, rose before him. What agony of soul was that silent man now undergoing. He emitted a slight groan, which caused Pete to glance quickly around.

"Dane seek, eh?" he queried.

"Not sick, Pete; only mad. I'm in hell."

"A−ha−ha, me know. Bad, eh?"

Dane's only reply was a more vigorous stroke than ever, which caused the canoe to quiver as it leaped forward. He was too much excited as yet to form any definite line of action. He thought only of the Indian encampments along the river and the various tributaries. Surely at one of these he would find out something which would guide him in his search. There was no time to be lost. Winter was not far away, and the river would soon be frozen from bank to bank. Already the wild geese had gone South in great wedge−like battalions, and any day the wild nor'easter might sweep down, and with the blast of its cruel breath strike rivers, lakes, and babbling brooks into a numbing silence.

For days and nights they continued their search. From camp to camp they sped with feverish haste, but not a clue could they find. The Indians had heard nothing of the missing girl, and Dane's heart sank within him at each fresh disappointment. What was he to do? Where was he to go? These were the questions he asked himself over and over again. Both he and Pete were weary, for they had slept but little, and had only eaten what they could obtain at the various encampments. How much longer could they continue? Soon the river would be frozen, and then the search would have to be carried on by land. And all this time what untold hardships was Jean undergoing, providing she was still alive?

At length when hope was almost gone, an Indian passing up river gave him a glimmer of light. He had been at the mouth of the Washademoak the night the white girl had been carried off. A strange canoe had passed by swiftly in the darkness, and he had heard a slight moan of distress. This was all, but it aroused in Dane a new spirit of hope. There might yet be time to follow this clue, and the Washademoak was a likely place to hide the girl.

It was morning, and they were far up the river when this information was received. The setting sun found them resting upon the shore not far from the entrance to the Washademoak. They had just finished their frugal supper, and were about to continue on their way, when the white sails of the little schooner *Polly* hove in sight, bearing steadily up stream. Captain Leavitt was on deck, and catching sight of the two rangers, he hailed them. As the vessel approached, Dane and Pete launched their canoe, and awaited her coming. The wind was not strong, and when the *Polly* at last drew near, they could see the deck filled with men, women, and children. In another minute the canoe was alongside, and Captain Leavitt leaning over the starboard rail.

"Hello, Dane," he accosted. "You're just the man I'm on the lookout for. Here's a letter from Davidson. I didn't expect to find you so easily. Any word of the missing girl?"

"Not much, Captain. We have a slight clue, though. What's the news at Portland Point?"

"Stirring times there, Dane. The town is building up fast, and more people have arrived." He then lowered his voice. "These are some of the late−comers. They are going up river to settle."

"At this time of the year?" Dane asked in surprise.

"Yes, and mighty hard luck, isn't it? We are bound for St. Anne's, but I question whether we can make it with this cold weather upon us. I must get back before the river freezes. Some are following in open boats, just think of that! I don't know what will become of them."

Dane's eyes turned to the Loyalists who were watching him and Pete with considerable curiosity. They formed a most pathetic group of people shivering there upon deck. They seemed weary almost to the point of exhaustion, and yet in their eyes and bearing could be observed a spirit that nothing could daunt.

"Did Davidson get the prisoners down all right?" Dane asked as he was about to let go of the rail.

"Yes, they're waiting trial now. But that letter will tell you all about it."

In another minute the canoe was adrift, and the Loyalists were waving their hands as the *Polly* sped on her way. Dane at once opened the letter, and read its contents. As he did so, his face became very grave, and a spirit of rebellion welled up within him.

"Look at this, Pete," and he held forth the letter as soon as he had stepped ashore. "Davidson has ordered us both to Fort Howe."

"Why?" the Indian asked.

"To tell what we heard at the Wedneebak. We are wanted as witnesses against Flazeet and Rauchad. What do you think of that?"

"We go, eh?"

"How can we? What about Jean?"

"Dane always go when chief call, all sam' wild goose, eh?"

"I always have, Pete. But it is different now. Jean needs me. She is in danger. She may be cold. She may be hungry. She may be−−−−"

Dane did not finish his sentence, for Pete had suddenly stooped, and with a small stick was drawing a line upon the sand, east by west.

"See," he said, "King dere," and he touched the ground on the south side of the line with the point of his stick. He did the same on the north side, adding, "white woman dere. King, white woman, eh?"

"That's just it, Pete. It's between Jean and the King, between love and duty. I must think it out. You sleep."

For over an hour Dane paced up and down the shore, his mind rent by conflicting emotions. He was in the

King's service, and it was his duty to respond whenever called. But why did not Davidson leave him alone now? What right had he to send for him when he knew of the importance of his mission in searching for the missing girl? At times he felt inclined to disobey the summons. He could make a living in some other way. It was not necessary for him to remain in the King's service. Some one else could do the work. But each time a voice whispered that such a course would not be honourable. He had not yet taken his discharge, and so was not free. How could he ever again face Davidson and the rangers? They would consider him a traitor, and he well knew how they would discuss him around their camp fires. To them his deflection from duty would be an unpardonable offence. They would condone almost anything rather than disloyalty to the King. Duty to him overshadowed every other matter, even that of the heart.

As Dane paced up and down thinking of these things, his mother's words flashed into his mind. "Be always loyal to God and the King above all things," she had impressed upon him. "The King is God's anointed one, and he rules by divine right." Dane had never doubted this, neither did he do so now. But he had since learned that love, too, is a divine thing, and cannot lightly be disobeyed. What is the King to me? he asked himself. A mere name. But Jean is a living reality. The King lives in luxury, and has millions to look after his interests. But Jean is now wandering somewhere in the wilderness, in great need, and with no one to help her. Why should I not go to her first of all? I can live without the King, but not without Jean.

The more he thought, the fiercer became the battle. Night had closed around him, and the steadily increasing nor'east wind sang the prelude of a coming storm. Dane glanced at the moon riding high above the tops of the pointed trees. He knew the meaning of its overcast appearance, and the circle which surrounded it. There was no time to be lost. He must decide at once. But which should it be? Pete was asleep, and the fire was low. Mechanically he stooped and threw a few sticks upon the hot coals. As the flames leaped up they illuminated the ground for some distance around. They brought into clear relief the line made by the Indian upon the sand. This primitive symbol arrested his attention, and a sudden fancy entered his mind. Picking up a small stick, he wrote in the sand on the south of the line the word "King," and on the north "Jean." These he compared with critical eyes.

"Same number of letters in each," he mused. "One stands for duty, the other for love. K−i−n−g, J−e−a−n," he spelled. "They both sound good, and have a fine ring about them. I am bound to both, and must decide now. Oh, Lord, which shall it be!"

The perspiration stood out in beads upon his forehead, so intense was his emotion.

"I can't decide against Jean!" he groaned. "And I can't be disloyal to the King!"

Again his mother's words came to his mind. "Be loyal to God and the King above all things." How would she choose if she were in his place? Yes, he knew. Not for an instant would she have hesitated. For a few minutes he stood staring straight before him. His face was pale, and his hands clenched hard, and his lips were firmly compressed. At length he turned, walked over to where Pete was lying, and touched him upon the shoulder. The Indian opened his eyes and looked around.

"Come, Pete, it's time we were away."

"Where, Dane?"

"Down to the Fort."

"Geeve up white woman, eh?"

"Give her up? No," Dane savagely replied. "I'll never give her up. But don't ask me any more questions now."

In a few minutes they were on their way, wind and tide being favourable. They had gone but a mile, when rounding a bend a big camp fire upon the shore attracted their attention. People were moving about, and these Dane surmised were the Loyalists Captain Leavitt had mentioned who were following in open boats. Some were seated before the fire in a most dejected manner. The cries of children reached him, accompanied by women's soothing words. Dane had no desire to stop, for his own trouble was all that he could now endure. So on the canoe sped, past the forlorn exiles, and forward to the Fort beyond.

CHAPTER XVI

UNDER COVER OF NIGHT

With a mingled feeling of anxiety and relief Jean watched the Loyalists and rangers march forth against the rebels. She had no doubt as to the outcome of the undertaking, but she felt uneasy about her father, and how he would stand the journey. On the other hand, she cherished the thought that on the morrow Dane would be with her, and all would be well.

For a while she stood in the doorway, looking out upon the river over which the mantle of night had settled. Mammy was crooning to the Indian baby before the fire. It was an old darky lullaby, and the faithful servant had sung it to her when she was a child. It brought back memories of her youthful days, which now seemed so long ago and like a dream.

"Doan stan' dere, chile," Mammy at length reminded. "Yo'll get yo' deff a col'."

Jean turned, picked up a shawl and threw it over her head.

"I am going to run over to see Mrs. Watson for a while," she said. "Danny was not well to−day, so I am anxious to know how he is getting along. With her husband away, Mrs. Watson must be very lonely tonight."

Mrs. Watson was greatly pleased to see the girl, and offered her a seat near the fire.

"How is Danny?" Jean asked.

"He is much better, I think, and is sleeping soundly," the mother replied, as she stole on tip−toe to the side of the rough cradle, and looked down fondly upon the little white face. "John was so sorry to go away with the baby sick," she continued, coming back to the fire. "I do hope there will be no fighting. Suppose some of our men should be killed!"

"I have great confidence in the rangers, and Mr. Davidson told me that not likely there would be any fighting," Jean comforted. "I believe he has some plan to entrap the rebels."

"Let us hope that he is right," and Mrs. Watson sighed as she rose and placed a big stick upon the fire. "How cold the nights are getting. I wonder how we shall manage through the winter."

"We have plenty of wood, anyway, Mrs. Watson, and so should keep warm. And we have enough meat to last us for months. When the *Polly* brings our supplies, we shall have an abundance of everything."

"I wonder what can be keeping that boat, Jean. We expected her before this. I hope Captain Leavitt has not forgotten us."

"He will come in time, never fear. We should have news, too, from our old home. How strange it is to be shut off for months with no communication with the great world beyond."

"It is like being buried live, dear. And just think of the long winter ahead, with snow and ice everywhere."

"But we shall make our little world right here, Mrs. Watson. I am looking forward to the winter. We are going to have a cosy, happy time, and lots of fun at Christmas. The children are talking about it already, and I know that wonderful presents are being made. I have been working at mine for some time, and I suppose you will have something for Danny."

Mrs. Watson smiled as she rose and took down a little basket from a rude shelf on the wall. From this she brought forth several little home−made articles, and laid them in Jean's lap.

"John is handy with his knife," she explained, "and made this boat, horse, and cart. He is going to make something else when he gets time. I made that doll out of some odds and ends, and John carved the head. We shall also make some molasses candy of funny shapes. Danny will be delighted. Poor little fellow, he talks so much about Santa Claus, and the things he is going to get."

"I am sure he will not be disappointed," Jean replied, as she examined each present. "You and Mr. Watson have done remarkable work."

For some time they sat and talked before the fire, and when Jean at last rose to go, Mrs. Watson looked at her with admiration.

"This life certainly agrees with you," she said. "I never saw you look better. And you are the envy of all the girls, too. I do not wonder at that."

Jean blushed, for she knew very well to what the woman referred.

"If they envy me, they never show it," was the cheery reply. "They are as kind and sweet to me as can be."

"They couldn't be anything else, dear. They would give worlds to be engaged to a young man like Dane Norwood, and to wear such a brooch as the one he gave you. All the girls look upon him as a hero."

In order to hide her embarrassment, Jean kissed Mrs. Watson and left the house. It was dark outside, but she did not mind this as she had often come that same way alone at night. In fact, no sense of fear entered her mind, for she was thinking of the words she had Just heard. As she raised her right hand and touched the Love−Token at her throat, a feeling of joy thrilled her heart. She recalled the day it had been given to her, and Dane's avowal of love. To−morrow he would be with her again, and her happiness would be complete.

She had gone but half way home when, without the slightest warning, she was seized by strong arms, a big hand was placed over her mouth, and she was borne bodily away. Desperately she struggled to free herself, and made frantic attempts to call for help. But her efforts were all in vain, for those entwining arms held her fast, and that hand still pressed firmly her mouth. At length she ceased her struggles, for a great terror rendered her limp and helpless. She knew that she was being carried through the bushes toward the river. After that she remembered no more until she found herself lying in the bottom of a canoe which was being driven through the water at a great speed. With a startled cry, she raised her head and looked around. Dark though it was, she could dimly see the forms of two men swaying strongly at their paddles.

"Where am I?" she asked in a trembling voice. "What are you going to do with me?"

For a few seconds there was intense silence. Then the men spoke to each other, and although Jean could not understand what was said, she knew from the deep guttural words that her captors were Indians. After a brief conversation, nothing more was said, and the girl had not the heart to question further.

Her fears were now greatly increased. She had heard of people being carried off by Indians, and tales of cruelty and insult worse than death lingered in her mind. What was the fate in store for her? Why had the Indians carried her off? She had not harmed them. The more she thought, the more puzzled she became. She shivered as she sat crouched there. The night was cold, and the wind piercing as it whipped across the water. For protection she drew around her shoulders a blanket which had been placed over her body when she was unconscious. That the Indians must have done this was a faint ray of light in the darkness of her despair. There must be some spark of feeling in their savage hearts, at any rate. She longed to see their faces. Were they hard and brutal, or did they exhibit some signs of friendliness? She thought of Dane and Pete. How soon they would hasten to her assistance if they knew of her trouble. But how would they know where she was? She pictured the consternation of all, and the grief of her father and Dane upon their return home. She knew how the latter would spare no efforts to find her. And her poor father! A moan escaped her lips as she thought of his agony of soul. She looked wildly around, but only the blackness of night could she see. Her eyes sought the stars. How far away and cheerless were those twinkling lights. What did they care for her troubles?

And as she looked, there came into her mind the opening lines of one of the psalms, "Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens." How often she had heard those words at church, but never until now had they meant comfort and hope. They were a light to her in her darkness. There was One who could and would help and to Him alone she must now turn. Bowing her head, she appealed to Him, and asked Him to watch over her, to keep her from all dangers, and to take her safely back home.

A sense of security such as she had never before known possessed her. A great presence seemed near, overshadowing her, and giving her a new strength and courage. Despair was replaced by hope, and she felt that she could face the future with confidence. No longer did the stars seem cheerless. Instead, they were eyes smiling down upon her, telling her to be brave, that the One who guided them in their course would not forsake her. She determined not to lament. She would show the Indians that a white girl could suffer and be strong.

Slowly the dawn of a new day edged into the night, and the stars faded one by one. Jean could see her captors now quite distinctly. They were great stalwart natives, whose faces betrayed neither friendliness nor hostility. They never even glanced at her, but seemed entirely bent upon their work.

As the sun was about to appear above the tree−tops, the steersman headed the canoe for the shore. After they had landed, a small fire was started, and a kettle containing cooked meat was placed over the flames. Jean watched with interest all that was going on around her. This seemed to surprise the Indians, and when she pointed to the kettle, their faces relaxed into the faint semblance of a smile. Presently one of the men dipped a cup into the kettle and handed it to the girl. She took it, not without some hesitation, and after it had cooled a little, placed it to her lips. It tasted good, so she drank it all. The Indian next thrust a sharpened stick into the kettle, and brought forth a piece of the partridge which he placed in her cup. This was tender, and Jean enjoyed it as much as she did the broth. It brought a renewal of strength to her body, and she felt less weary.

Breakfast ended, the Indians took their few dishes to the water, washed and scoured them with sand, and left them upon a big stone for the sun to dry. The cleanliness of these natives was a surprise to Jean, and this touch of civilisation gave her some encouragement. She had often heard of the uncouth Indians, but here were men who could put many white people to shame.

For about two hours they remained there, and while the Indians dozed in the sun, Jean walked up and down the shore, or sat upon a rock looking out over the water. It was a beautiful morning, with not a breath of wind astir, and the mirror−like river reflected the great trees along its border. Where she was she had no idea. That she was some distance inland she felt certain. But how far? Whither was she bound? and what were the Indians going to do with her? Over and over again she vainly asked herself these questions as she gazed pensively out over the water.

All through the morning they continued on their way, and only stopped once to rest and to eat a hurried meal. Then on again, hour after hour, with nothing to break the monotony of vast forests crowding to the very shores. The river was quite narrow now, and very crooked. This led Jean to imagine that they were nearing the headwaters of the St. John, for never once had she suspected that they were ascending one of its tributaries. She was weary, and her body ached from her cramped position. It seemed an age since she had last slept in her own little bed far away. At times during the day her eyes had closed through drowsiness, but she had always aroused with a start. She felt that she must keep awake until night, at least−−and what then?

At length, rounding a bend, her eyes rested upon two people standing upon the shore not far ahead. That they were Indians, a man and a woman, she could easily tell. Her captors saw them, too, so they ran the canoe close to where they were standing, and began to converse with them in the native language. That they were talking about her Jean was fully aware, for at times the woman looked at her in a manner not at all unfriendly. They seemed to be disputing about something, and their voices grew quite loud, and their words most emphatic.

Presently the woman stepped up close to the canoe, reached out and touched the little brooch at the girl's throat. "Su−wan! Su−wan!" she exclaimed. After examining it most carefully, she turned upon the captors and addressed them in an angry manner. They merely grunted at what she said, and pushing the canoe from the shore, once more continued on their way. Jean longed to know what had been said, and the meaning of the woman's sudden interest in the little arrow. She looked back several times and saw the two still standing upon the shore. When another bend hid them from view, a great loneliness swept upon her. She felt that those two were friendly, and had rebuked her captors for what they were doing.

For about another hour they pushed forward, the river becoming narrower all the time. Suddenly before them appeared several Indian lodges, entirely covered with great strips of birch bark. The place was evidently deserted, for no sign of life was to be seen. Here the canoe was run ashore, and landing made for the night.

Supper over, one of the Indians handed the captive a blanket, and motioned to the nearest lodge. Jean understood his meaning, took the blanket, and did as she was bidden. The lodge was empty, so placing the blanket upon the ground, she sat down and watched the Indians through the opening which served as a door. A few minutes later her captors pushed off their canoe, stepped lightly on board and started down the river. With fast−beating heart the girl watched them until they had disappeared from view. Then a terrible feeling of desolation came upon her. She was in the wilderness, alone, with untold dangers surrounding her. Had they deserted her? Had the Indians brought her there to perish? The thought was horrible. What had she done to deserve such a fate? With straining eyes she watched the river, hoping to see the Indians return. But night again shut down and they did not come. Certain was she now that they had left her to die. Burying her face in her hands, she sobbed out her grief, the first time since her capture. She had tried to be brave, but in all her imaginings she had never dreamed of such a fate as this.

And as she cowered there in the night, listening fearfully to every sound around her, the canoe, bearing her two captors stole noiselessly by, and sped onward through the darkness. The grief and loneliness of the girl meant little to them. Their work was done, they had received their reward, and far off around various camp fires they would relate to their own people the tale of the pale face captive girl.

CHAPTER XVII

THE UNKNOWN QUANTITY

While Jean was crouching there alone in the desolate lodge, several men were gathered around a small fire over half a mile down stream. They had been drinking, and their words were loud and coarse. Seth Lupin was the leader, and he was in great spirits. Three of his companions were the slashers who had attacked Dane Norwood at Portland Point, and they, too, seemed much pleased.

These brutes in human forms firmly believed that they were safe from all prying eyes, and that their words of lust and revenge were lost amidst the forest depths. Little did they realise that not far away the form of an Indian was pressed close to the ground, that keen ears were listening to every word, and that flashing eyes were watching their slightest movements.

When, however, Lupin at length stepped into the canoe lying on the shore, and began to paddle rapidly up the river, the prostrate Indian rose to his feet, and glided swiftly among the trees, straight for the lodge where Jean was crouching. As the canoe touched the shore a short distance below the encampment, the native was silently standing near a large spruce tree. No sooner had Lupin landed, than like a catapult the Indian was upon him. With a wild gurgling cry of fear the surprised man reeled back, and tried to ward off the attack. But his efforts were all in vain, for the Indian's fingers were upon his throat with a vise−like grip. Notwithstanding his frantic struggles, he was borne steadily to the ground, and there he lay with his assailant perched upon his body, and his fingers still clutching hard.

Seth Lupin had run his course. He knew no mercy, so no mercy was vouchsafed to him. In his diabolical mind he had planned the ruin of an innocent girl. But in his blind passion he had forgotten that the Great Avenger of the just uses many strange instruments in defending His own. He, like others, had left out of consideration the Unknown Quantity. The mighty forest had witnessed numerous tragedies, but none more swift and sure than the one this night on the bank of that narrow inland stream.

Within the lodge Jean heard that wild cry of fear, and it caused her to spring to her feet in terror. Her eyes stared out into the night, and unconsciously she lifted her right hand and struck at the blackness as if to drive it away. Listening intently, she could hear fearful sounds as of a desperate struggle, and then all was still. What did it mean? What unknown horrors were surrounding her? With cold clenched hands, and body rigid with terror, she strained her eyes into the darkness. She imagined that she could see forms creeping stealthily toward her, and the faintest outlines of great tree trunks were to her hideous monsters.

And as she looked and waited, something did appear suddenly before her. With a cry she started back, and raised both hands to defend herself. But a voice at once reassured her, causing her heart to leap with hope.

"White woman safe now," it said. "Injun tak' care white woman. Come."

"Who are you?" Jean asked in a trembling voice.

"Me Injun Sam. White woman no 'fraid Sam. Come."

"Will you save me?" the girl asked. "Will you take me home?"

"A−ha−ha. Bimeby. Come."

A feeling of security now swept upon Jean, so leaving the lodge she followed the Indian, who at once led her away from the river into the forest. It was difficult to see her guide, and so hard was the walking that she often stumbled, and several times fell. At length the Indian took her by the arm.

"Sam help white woman, eh?" he queried.

"Thank you," Jean panted. "You are very good."

With the native's assistance, she was thus enabled to make much better progress. How strong he was! He kept her from falling, and lifted her bodily at times over a root or a fallen log. And he was gentle, too, stopping to rest as they climbed some hill, and speaking words of encouragement.

"White woman no strong," he said. "White woman all sam' Injun bimeby."

To Jean it seemed as if their journey through the forest would never end. She was so tired, and her feet very sore. Gradually her strength and courage weakened, and her steps lagged. At length she stopped, and her body trembled. She could go no farther. She just wanted to lie down and rest. Then she tottered, and would have fallen had not the Indian caught her in his powerful arms.

"White woman all sam' babby," he said. "Injun tote white woman, eh?"

"No, no, you must not carry me!" Jean protested. "I am too heavy."

The Indian's only reply was a grunt of amusement, as he started forth with the girl in his arms. What a tower of strength he seemed as he moved through the forest and the night. Not once did he stumble, and his going was almost noiseless. Jean wondered where he was taking her. But she did not worry, for this native inspired her with confidence, and she firmly believed that he was really her friend. Anyway, she was too tired to think. She only longed to lay down her weary body and aching head and rest.

The Indian did not have to carry her far, for suddenly a light pierced the darkness, and in a few minutes they were by a camp−fire. A woman was standing there, and Jean recognised her immediately as the one she had met that afternoon, and who had examined the little arrow−brooch. She glanced quickly at her rescuer, and knew him, too. A sigh of relief escaped her lips. Never were friends more welcome.

Near the fire was a brush lean−to, and gently the Indian laid the girl down upon some soft furs and blankets. He smiled with satisfaction as he did this, and so overcome was Jean with gratitude, that she caught his great rough brown hand in both of hers, and held it fast. Tears were in her eyes as she looked upon his honest face.

"Thank you, oh, thank you," she murmured. "You have saved my life. How can I ever repay you?"

"Sam no want pay," was the quiet reply. "Sam glad save white woman."

The woman now came and knelt by the girl's side. She looked into her eyes, stroked her tangled hair, and touched the Love−Charm at her throat.

"Poor babby! Poor babby!" she crooned. "Hard tam, eh? white man bad, ugh!"

"Why do you say 'white man'?" Jean asked in surprise. "Indians carried me away. You saw them this afternoon."

Suddenly a suspicion flashed into her mind, which caused her to sit bolt upright. Did a white man have anything to do with it? And was that man Seth Lupin? But why had she not seen him? Then she thought of that wild cry of despair outside the lodge, which had caused her such terror. She looked into the Indian woman's face.

"Tell me," she said. "Was it Seth Lupin?"

"A−ha−ha. Seth. Bad. Ugh!"

"Where is he now?"

The woman merely shook her head, and spoke a few rapid words to her husband. She then turned to Jean and placed a light hand upon her shoulder.

"No mind white man now. Babby tired."

Jean smiled as the woman pressed her gently back upon the soft furs, and then stooped to take off her shoes. The latter were torn, and her feet were sore. It felt good to lie there, and to have some one attend to her needs. When the shoes had been removed, and a pair of soft moccasins placed upon her feet, she felt more comfortable.

"Why are you so good to me?" she asked. "You are just like a mother."

The woman only smiled in reply, and placed extra rugs about the girl. She then turned and cut a slice from a piece of moose meat. Through this she thrust a sharp−pointed stick and held it over the glowing coals. When it was browned to her satisfaction, she sprinkled it with a little salt, let it cool for a few minutes, and then handed it to her guest.

"Eat, eh?" she queried. "Good."

Jean smiled as she took the meat in her fingers and tasted it. She was hungry, and the steak was tender. It seemed so strange to be lying there in the wilderness, eating in such a primitive manner. She thought of her old home in Connecticut, and how carefully her mother had trained her. She remembered how when a child she had been rebuked because she had taken a piece of meat in her fingers. But it was the custom here in the wild, and she rather enjoyed it. And as she ate, the two Indians watched her with much interest. Such a novelty did she seem to them, that she could not refrain from smiling.

"Am I eating right?" she asked.

"A−ha−ha," the woman replied. "Babby all sam' Injun bimeby."

"Why do you call me baby? I am very big."

But the woman shook her head.

"White woman no beeg, no strong, no hunt, no feesh, no pack; all sam' babby."

"Oh, I see," and Jean's eyes twinkled. "I know I cannot hunt, fish, or pack. But you will teach me, will you not?"

"A−ha−ha. Injun teach babby bimeby. Sleep now."

Jean did feel drowsy, and the bed was so soft and comfortable. For a while she watched the friendly Indians as they sat near the fire, and talked low to each other. It all seemed like a wonderful dream−−the leaping flames, the dancing sparks, and the gentle sighing of the wind in the tree−tops. Her thoughts drifted away to her father and Dane. How anxious they must be about her. But the Indians would take her home, and all would again be well. What a story she would have to tell of her capture and experience in the wilderness. How could she ever repay her rescuers for what they had done for her? She tried to think of what she might give them. But her thoughts became confused, and she drifted oft into a peaceful sleep with the problem unsettled.

Occasionally the Indians turned and watched the girl. When they saw that she was asleep, they looked at each other and smiled. Then they brought forth their blackened clay pipes, which they filled and lighted. For a time they smoked in silence and contentment. At length they began to converse softly in their own language. That they were talking about the sleeping girl was evident, for several times they glanced in her direction. Once Sam ceased in the midst of his talk, leaped to his feet, and clutched an imaginary object with both hands. He then squatted down again, and continued his tale of the tragedy that night by the shore of the forest stream.

When he was through he rose to his feet, picked up his musket, and looked again at the girl. He then plunged into the night and the forest, leaving his wife to keep guard alone by the fire. The dawn of a new day was breaking when he returned and threw two snared partridges down upon the ground for his wife to prepare for breakfast. But something more important than birds had kept him abroad that night. His face was serious, and his eyes glowed with anxiety and anger as he laid aside his gun, and spoke a few commanding words to his wife.

CHAPTER XVIII

LOYAL FRIENDS

It was broad daylight when Jean opened her eyes and looked curiously around. It was a still, frosty morning. The sun sifted down through the branches of the trees, and formed a fantastic net−work of light and shadow upon the ground. A deep silence prevailed, and as the girl looked dreamily at the lordly pines, birches, and maples, her eyes wandered far up among their overhanging branches. They reminded her of some majestic cathedral, with stately pillars and crowning arches, pictures of which she had at times seen. She remembered how her father had once told her that the forest was the original cathedral, and that along the silent woody aisles primitive people used to worship the Great Spirit. She understood now, as never before, how the designs for the first cathedral had been copied from the forest.

Lowering her eyes, they rested upon the Indian woman kneeling before the fire. It was a fascinating scene, and in keeping with the solemn grandeur of the place. There was the humble worshipper at the altar−fire, offering her devotions in a simple reverent manner. Jean smiled at this fancy, for she was certain that the idea of worship was not at all in the woman's mind. She was merely cooking the partridges her husband had brought in several hours before.

"Good morning," Jean at length accosted.

The woman turned quickly, and rose to her feet. She smiled as she stood and watched the girl lying there with her hair tossed in rich profusion over cheeks and shoulders.

"Plenty sleep, eh?" she asked.

"Yes, I have had a great sleep, and am much rested. It is very comfortable here."

"Hungry, eh?"

"Why, I believe I am," and Jean laughed. "What are you cooking?"

"Bird. Sam ketch'm. Good. Smell'm?"

"I certainly do, and it makes my mouth water."

The woman at once stooped, dipped a cup into the pot which was simmering over the coals, and handed it to Jean.

"Soup. Good," she said.

"It is good," Jean agreed after she had tasted it. "This will make me strong. You are a fine cook. What is your name?"

"Kitty."

"Kitty what?"

"Kitty Sam."

"Is that all?"

"A−ha−ha."

"But you have an Indian name, have you not?"

"Injun name long. Babby no spik Injun name."

After Jean had finished her breakfast, she felt much refreshed. She washed herself at a little brook which babbled through the forest, and arranged as well as she could her tangled hair. One little pool served as Nature's mirror, and in this she could see her face and the brooch at her throat. She again recalled the happy day it had been given to her. How long ago that seemed, and she wondered where Dane was now. No doubt he was frantically searching for her, his heart filled with grief and fear. She must get home as soon as possible, for she knew how her father's heart must be nearly broken. She would get the Indians to take her back at once. But when she mentioned this upon her return to the lean−to, Kitty shook her head.

"No go now," she said. "Cold bimeby. Snow come. Ribber freeze."

"Will we go then?" Jean eagerly asked.

"Mebbe, Sam come back soon. Sam know."

"Where is Sam now?"

"Sam dere," and she motioned off toward the river. "Sam watch white man. Sam track'm all sam' bear. White man no see Sam."

"What white man? Isn't he dead?"

"A−ha−ha, Seth dead. More white man."

"What, are there others?"

"A−ha−ha. Bad! Ugh! Hunt babby. No find babby. White man mad."

"Will they come here?" A new fear had now come into Jean's heart. So there were other men after her! Who were they? But she had confidence in her dusky friends, and believed that they would save her.

"White man come, mebbe," the Indian replied. "No ketch Injun, no ketch babby. All gone."

"Where shall we go?"

"Way off," and Kitty waved her hand to the right. "Beeg wood, see?"

"And you will take me there? But I want to go home."

"A−ha−ha, go home dat way, bimeby," and she pointed westward. "Beeg ribber, Wu−las−tukw."

"I never heard of that river. Where is it?"

"Way off dere. Wat you call'm?"

"The St. John?"

"A−ha−ha. Injun call'm 'Wu−las−tukw,' beeg ribber."

"And you will take me there?"

"Bimeby, mebbe. Sam know."

They were seated near the fire during this conversation, and the Indian woman was busy with a deer−skin garment. It was a warm looking jacket, and she was sewing on an extra string of bright−coloured beads. When this had been accomplished to her satisfaction, she held it forth for Jean's inspection.

"Good coat," she said. "Try'm on, eh?"

Jean at once stood up, and when she had slipped on the jacket, the Indian woman viewed her with pleasure.

"Wear'm, eh?" she queried. "Warm?"

"Indeed it is," Jean replied. "Is this for me?"

"A−ha−ha. Keep babby warm. Kitty mak' more bimeby. Babby no cold."

A mistiness came into the girl's eyes as she stood there. The kindness of this woman affected her deeply.

"Why are you so good to me?" she asked. "You never saw me until yesterday, and yet you are doing so much for me. I don't understand."

"Kitty tell, eh?"

"I wish you would," Jean replied as she seated herself upon the rugs and furs. "I want to know."

The Indian woman threw a couple of sticks upon the fire, and then faced the girl. She reached out and touched the little arrow−brooch with the forefinger of her right hand.

"Dane geeve babby dat, eh?" she asked.

"Why, yes, how did you know that?"

"Injun know much," and the woman smiled as she spoke. "Injun know Dane; Dane know Pete. See?"

"Did Pete tell you about this?" and Jean touched the arrow.

"A−ha−ha. Pete tell Injun. Pete, Sam, all sam' mamma. See?"

"What, are Pete and Sam brothers?"

"A−ha−ha, all sam' mamma."

A new light now began to dawn upon Jean's mind, and she understood certain things which had been puzzling her since yesterday afternoon. She also recalled Dane's words when he gave her the brooch. "It is Love's−Charm," he had said, "and it may mean more to you than you now imagine." She realised how much it had meant to her, and no doubt it had saved her from a terrible fate.

"You knew me by this?" she asked, again touching the arrow.

"A−ha−ha. Kitty see quick. Kitty know Dane geeve babby arrow. Pete tell Injun."

"Didn't those Indians who carried me away from home know? Didn't Pete tell them?"

"Dem bad Injun. Bah! Porkeepine! Fight King George!"

"What do you mean by porcupine?"

"Micmac; all sam' slasher. Fight King George."

"But all the Indians are not rebels."

"No, no. Plenty good Injun no fight King George. All sam' Dane."

"You have known Dane quite a while, I suppose!" Jean asked, while a conscious flush stole into her cheeks.

"A−ha−ha, long tam. Dane leetle babby, so beeg," and she spread out her hand, palm downward, about two feet from the ground. "Kitty know Dane; Kitty know Dane mamma."

"What, you know his mother?"

"A−ha−ha. Good woman. Dead now."

"Do you know his father?"

The woman turned suddenly toward the fire without replying. Jean noticed this, and wondered. She also remembered Dane's peculiar manner when she had mentioned his father. Her interest and curiosity were now aroused more than ever. There must be some mystery connected with Dane's father, she felt certain. She longed to know, and hoped to find out something from this woman. There was no opportunity, however, just then as Sam appeared unexpectedly before them. He was much excited, and addressed a few rapid words to his wife. Jean rose to her feet, her face pale with fear.

"Are the white men after me?" she asked in a trembling voice.

"A−ha−ha." Sam replied. "White man chase babby."

"Why?"

Jean knew why, but she wanted to hear what the Indian had to say.

"White man find Seff dead by ribber. White man act funny, much 'fraid. Bimeby find babby gone. White man much mad."

He paused, picked up his musket which he had laid aside, and examined the priming.

"Did you see them?" Jean asked.

"A−ha−ha. Sam see'm. White man no see Sam."

"Are they coming this way?"

"A−ha−ha."

"Will you shoot them?"

"Sam shoot bimeby, mebbe. White man no ketch babby."

Of this Jean had no doubt. What a tower of strength this Indian seemed to her just then. The day before she had given up all hope of earthly aid, yet here was one, and a native at that, who was ready to protect her. How wonderful it all appeared. And it was against men of her own race he would defend her. Of the savage Indian she had heard and read much. But here were two of the despised race putting white men to shame.

In the meantime the Indian woman had been very busy. She had gathered the few cooking utensils together, and was now rolling up the blankets and skins. Presently Sam assisted her, and in a remarkably short time they were ready for their journey.

Jean begged to be allowed to carry something, but Sam shook his head as he pointed to her shoulders and feet.

"No strong," he said. "Feet leetle. Bimeby Injun pack babby, mebbe, eh?"

"Oh, I hope not," the girl smilingly replied. "I must walk to−day."

With their packs strapped upon their backs, Sam picked up his musket, and Kitty the axe. With a final glance around to see that nothing was overlooked, Sam led the way among the trees, with Jean following, and Kitty bringing up in the rear.

All through the afternoon they pressed forward along the silent forest ways. Occasionally the Indians halted that the girl might rest. Their care of her was remarkable, and to them she seemed like a mere child. It was quite evident that they had taken her to their hearts, and that nothing was too good for her.

Jean was surprised at herself for standing the journey so well. Although very tired at times, she never once complained. She was not accustomed to moccasins, and the roots and stones bruised her feet. Up hill and down they moved, across valleys, swamps, and wild meadows. There was no trail, but Sam led the way with an unerring instinct. He chose the smoothest spots, but even these were hard for the girl's tender feet. Very thankful was she when at length he halted by the side of a little forest lake, and unstrapped his pack.

"Camp here," he announced. "Plenty water."

Jean dropped upon the ground, weary almost to the point of exhaustion. Her body ached, and her head throbbed with a dull pain. But after she had rested a while, and eaten the supper which Kitty speedily prepared, she felt better. Sam erected a cosy lean−to, and when the rugs and blankets had been spread out upon the fresh, fragrant spruce boughs, he insisted that Jean should occupy the choice place near the fire. So lying there, she watched her kind−hearted companions as they moved about making ready for the night.

It was a beautiful spot where their camp was built. The little lake, covered with a thin coating of ice, mirrored the great trees in its glassy surface. It was one of Nature's gems tucked away in the heart of the mighty forest, known only to the wandering Indians, and their feathered and furry kindred of the wild.

As day faded, and night cast its mantle over forest and lake, the stars appeared and twinkled down their welcome. As Jean watched them, she thought of the night she had been stolen from home, and how cold and cheerless those same stars had seemed. She also recalled the prayer she had uttered in her distress, and the sense of peace which had come upon her. In what a remarkable manner her prayer had been answered. A feeling of intense gratitude welled up in her heart, and almost unconsciously she began to sing an old familiar hymn.

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want, He makes me down to lie In pastures green; He leadeth me The quiet waters by.

Her voice was not strong, but exceptionally sweet. Her singing attracted the Indians, who left their work, and squatting near her side, listened with rapt attention. Jean, seeing their interest, paused at the end of the second verse, and smiled.

"Do you like singing?" she asked.

"A−ha−ha," Kitty replied. "More, eh?"

Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale, Yet will I fear no ill; For Thou art with me; and Thy rod And staff me comfort still.

When Jean had ended singing this verse there was a mistiness in her eyes. How wonderfully true were those words in her own case. The Shepherd had been with her through death's dark vale, He had comforted her, and led her to this quiet woodland lake.

"Babby seek?" Sam asked, noticing her emotion.

"No, not sick, but very thankful," was the quiet reply. "My Great Father in heaven has sent you to save me and to take me home. Do you know Him?"

"A−ha−ha, me know'm. White man tell Injun long tam ago."

"Missionary?" Jean asked.

"A−ha−ha. Long black robe. Cross, all sam' dis," and Sam made the form of the symbol of salvation with his forefinger.

Jean knew that he referred to some French missionary who had visited the country.

"And he taught you about the Great Father?"

"A−ha−ha. Long black robe come up Wu−las−tukw in canoe. Sam no forget. Sing more, eh?"

Jean did as she was requested, and sang several of the hymns she remembered. At times she glanced at her dusky companions. Their eyes shone with pleasure, mingled with admiration as they watched the reclining girl, and listened to the words of hope and comfort. They were but unlettered natives of the wild, yet their hearts responded readily to the concord of sweet sounds. Often the good lying in such hearts needs but a gentle fanning to burst forth in the beauty of love, service, and devotion. Little did Jean realise the influence she was exerting upon those two friendly Indians in that quiet lodge in the depths of the great forest.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SMOKE SIGNAL

When Jean awoke the next morning she was stiff and sore. She longed to stay there all day and rest. But Kitty informed her that they must move on at once, for not only were the slashers hot upon their trail, but that a storm was coming, and they would need better shelter than their rude brush lean−to could give. In a short time Sam returned and reported that their pursuers were floundering about in a valley several miles away. They had evidently lost the trail, and it would take them some time to find it again.

"Will they keep on following us?" Jean asked.

"A−ha−ha," Sam replied. "Stop bimeby, mebbe. See?" and he laid his hand upon his musket.

"Will you shoot them?"

"Mebbe. Bimeby."

"Oh, you mustn't!" and Jean shuddered. "That would be murder."

"White man kill Injun all sam' dog. Ugh!"

"Would they?"

"A−ha−ha. Sam know."

"You killed one white man, remember. But you must not kill any more. Will you promise me?"

"Sam no say. See bimeby."

After Jean had eaten a hurried breakfast, the few belongings were again packed up, and once more they started forward. The morning was cold, and the trees were swaying and creaking like great masts at sea beneath a whipping wind. Jean shivered as she bravely and patiently followed Sam through that trackless wild. All through the morning they toiled onward, and the afternoon was waning when the rain swept down upon them. It froze as it fell, and ere long the ground was covered with a coating of ice. At times Jean slipped and would have fallen but for Kitty, who caught her by the arm and helped her over the rough and treacherous places. The clothing of the three wayfarers soon became stiff with the frozen rain, and resembled ancient armor. But still they pressed onward, and night was again shutting down when another and a larger lake burst suddenly into view.

On the shore of this fine body of water were several Indian lodges, completely deserted. To Jean they looked cold and forbidding, so very glad was she when Sam led the way to a dense thicket of young fir and spruce trees. Nestling in their midst was the cosiest lodge Jean had ever beheld. In fact, it consisted of a couple of lean−tos, facing each other, between which was an open space a few feet in width. This latter served as the fire−place, the smoke ascending through the opening above.

In a short time a bright fire was burning, and Jean comfortably ensconced upon the blankets and furs. Not a drop of rain touched her, for the roof of this abode was covered with long strips of birch bark. This, so Kitty explained, would be their home until the streams froze hard enough to carry them. How pleasant it was to Jean to lie there and rest. She felt that she could not endure another day of travel through the forest. She had been tired the night before, but it was little compared to now. Every bone in her body ached, and her feet were sore and blistered. It was good to lie there listening to the rain beating its tat−too upon the roof, and watching the

smoke scurrying upwards. She could hear the wind howling among the trees, and vainly striving to force an entrance into their snug retreat.

Nearby Sam had his cache among the lower branches of four spruce trees, and high enough from the ground to be safe from prowling animals. From this he brought down some provisions, including a piece of moose meat, tea, and a little flour. With the latter Kitty baked several bannocks before the fire, which tasted especially good to Jean after her sole diet of meat. These were eaten with the honey of wild bees which the Indians had gathered during the summer.

"These are good," Jean remarked, as she helped herself to a second bannock. "Where did you get this honey?"

Kitty laughed as she pointed to her husband, who was dragging in several large sticks.

"Sam get'm last summer. Bees bite Sam, see?" and she put her hands to her face and neck. "Sam head beeg. Hurt." Again she laughed at the recollection of her husband's swollen face.

When Sam had finished his task of bringing in the wood, he squatted before the fire and ate his supper. Then he brought forth a plug of tobacco, whittled off several slices with his hunting−knife, filled his blackened pipe, and lighted it with a small brand from the fire. His wife did the same, and soon the two were smoking in great contentment. Jean, watching, thought how little it took to satisfy such people. Their belongings were few, and their places of abode many. She longed to know more about these two Indians, why they were living apart from their tribe, and whether they had any children. They must have mingled with white people, for they readily understood everything she said, although they themselves spoke in broken English.

She thought of these things the next morning as she and Kitty were comfortably seated near the fire. The rain had ceased during the night, the clouds had rolled away, and the ice−laden trees, touched by the sun, shone and sparkled with surpassing loveliness. It seemed like fairy−land to Jean when she first looked forth that morning, and she exclaimed with delight. From the lake to the high peak off toward the west millions of icy diamonds had caught the bright beams, and were scintillating their glory far and wide.

"I never saw anything like it" Jean told Kitty. "Have you seen it?"

"A−ha−ha, me see'm," the Indian woman replied without the least sign of enthusiasm. "Kitty see plenty. Trail bad. Ice heavy. Branch hang down. Bad. Ugh!"

"Perhaps it will keep back those men who are following us," Jean suggested. "They may not be able to get through the forest."

Kitty shook her head as she looked out upon the lake.

"Ice no stop white man. Trees beeg, no ice, trail good. Sam come bimeby. Sam know."

"Where is Sam now?"

"Sam watch slashers. Sam gone long tam. Come bimeby."

"What will he do if the white men come here?"

"White man no come."

The woman rose to her feet and looked off to the high peak in the distance. Then she sat down near the opening where she could watch the hill without too much trouble. Jean wondered at this, although she made

no comment. No doubt she would understand in time.

"Have you lived long in this place?" she asked.

"Two, t'ree winter, mebbe."

"Where do you live in the summer?"

"Many place; Wá−sit−um−ó−wek; Wu−las−tukw; Beeg Lake, some tam."

"Where is Big Lake?"

"Way dere," and Kitty motioned westward. "Go dere bimeby."

"You often meet white people, I suppose?"

"A−ha−ha."

"Do you and Sam always travel alone? Are there other Indians around here?"

"Plenty Injun sometam'. See'm bimeby, mebbe." Again she glanced toward the distant hill.

"Have you any children?" Jean asked.

"No babby now. Babby all die."

"But Pete has children, has he not?"

"A−ha−ha. Pete plenty babby."

"Why, then, did he bring his baby to me when its mother died? Why did not you take care of it?"

Kitty looked quizzically at the girl before replying.

"Dane no tell, eh?" she queried.

"Tell what?"

"Why Pete leave babby."

"No, he never told me. Perhaps he didn't know."

"Pete know. Pete find out 'bout King George peep'l. See?"

Noticing the puzzled expression upon the girl's face, the woman smiled.

"Pete no sure 'bout white peep'l," she continued. "Pete leave leetle babby. All good t' leetle babby. Pete trust King George peep'l. Pete no forget."

A new light now came into Jean's mind, and she partly understood why the baby had been left at the settlement. It was simply a plan on Pete's part to learn whether the Loyalists were worthy of his trust and special attention. Never for an instant had she thought of such a thing. When that little waif had been brought

to her home that night of the wild storm, she and old Mammy had taken it to their hearts, and had done all they could for its welfare. But how much it had meant to her. Pete had spread the word abroad among his own people, and because of the care of a little Indian child, she herself had been saved from a terrible fate. She thought of the arrow Dane had given her. She knew that it had a great deal to do with her rescue, but not all. The care of the baby was back of that. But did Dane know? Had he any idea that the baby and the arrow were so closely connected? Was that the meaning of his words when he had given her the arrow? Did he think that some day she might need protection, and that the Love−Token would prove of great value?

"Dane told you about this, didn't he?" and she touched the brooch.

"A−ha−ha. Dane tell Injun."

"And you knew me by this?"

"A−ha−ha. Injun know all sam' white woman take care babby."

She paused abruptly, sprang to her feet, and pointed excitedly to the high hill.

"See! See!" she cried. "Pu−kut! Pu−kut!"

Jean hastened to her side, and her eyes followed the woman's outstretched arm. Up on the dazzling, sun−crowned peak a wreath of smoke was ascending beyond the tops of the highest trees. It rose straight into the air like a tall shaft ere it spread and fell in wavy, fairy−like curls, and slowly disappeared from view.

"What is it?" the girl asked, feeling certain that it meant something important.

"Slashers come," Kitty explained. "Sam call Injun."

"Now I understand," Jean replied, while a great fear smote her heart. "The slashers are near, and Sam wants help; is that it?"

"A−ha−ha. Smoke call Injun."

"Will the Indians see it?"

"A−ha−ha."

"Will they know what it means?"

"Injun know."

"But suppose there are no Indians near?"

"Plenty Injun see pu−kut. Beeg hill. Injun know."

"Will the Indians come?"

"Bimeby."

"In time to save us from the slashers?"

"Mebbe. Sam come bimeby. Sam know."

Curiously and anxiously Jean watched that signal flaring from the high hill. She asked Kitty many questions, and learned how in times of danger the Indians sent up the smoke−wreath from certain hill tops. At night a blazing fire was used, and in this manner news was carried many miles in a remarkably short time.

Several hours wore slowly away as the two anxious women kept watch upon the hill. When at length the smoke ceased to ascend. Kitty's face brightened.

"Sam come soon," she said. "Injun come bimeby."

"How do you know?" Jean asked.

"Injun mak' pu−kut. Injun say 'come.'"

"Did the Indians reply by sending up smoke? Is that what you mean?"

"A−ha−ha. Sam come soon. Injun bimeby."

And in this Kitty was right, for in less than an hour Sam appeared before them. He smiled as he entered the lodge, laid aside his musket, and helped himself to some meat from a pot near the fire. As he ate, he told about the slashers. They were not far away, and were waiting to make the attack that night. How he learned this he did not explain, and Jean asked no questions. It was sufficient for her that he knew, and she had great respect for his knowledge of the ways of the wild, and his practical common sense.

Slowly the afternoon edged into evening. The Indians were late in coming, and often Sam cast anxious glances along the shore of the lake. Several times he made short journeys into the forest, lest the enemy should come upon them unawares. Jean, too, was greatly agitated. Suppose the slashers should arrive, what could Sam do alone? What would become of her? She recalled Dane's words that night at Portland Point when he had saved her from Seth Lupin. "Do you know how beautiful you are?" he had asked. "If you don't, then you are not aware of your danger. That villain, Lupin, knows of your beauty, so he followed you here. The slashers and others will soon know, too, and I might not always be on hand." That was months ago, but she remembered every word. She thought then that Dane had spoken rather plainly, and had told him so. But she knew now how well he understood the risks she would run, and that he was speaking for her welfare. Oh, if Dane and the rangers were with her in the forest how soon they would put the slashers to rout, and take her home. But they were far off, so her only hope lay in the arrival of the Indians, from where she did not know.

CHAPTER XX

TEMPERED PUNISHMENT

Darkness came, and with it the long−expected Indians. They were a score in all, and they glided like spectres along the shore and up to the lodge in the thicket. It was a joyous greeting they received as they gathered around the fire, and for a few minutes there was a regular babel of tongues, although Jean did not understand a word that was being said. At length the visitors ceased talking and listened to Sam, who spoke with great earnestness, and motioned at times eastward. That he was speaking about the slashers, and why he had sent for assistance, Jean was certain.

These newcomers were a sturdy and formidable band of hunters. They were of powerful physique, in the prime of life, and their faces inspired Jean with hope and confidence. They were clad in buckskins, and armed with muskets, hatchets, and hunting−knives. They were warriors now, ready for the fray with the slashers, their enemies of years. They were King George's men, as well, true and loyal. Several of them had the proud distinction of kneeling at Fort Howe five years before and taking the oath of fidelity to the King. They never wearied of telling about that event, and of the grand pow−wow which followed the signing of the treaty. It had

been a notable time for them. After they had taken the oath of allegiance, they delivered to Colonel Francklin a string of Wampum as a solemn confirmation of their deed. Following this there was great mirth when they had drunk the King's health, and received a liberal supply of presents. The next day they had been taken on board the man−of−war lying in the harbour, when they again drank the King's health, and were presented with a pound of gunpowder each. When they at last left for their wilderness homes, they were saluted by the cannon of Fort Howe and His Majesty's ship *Albany*, and they in return had given three huzzas and an Indian war−whoop. Such attention and good will had made a deep impression upon those who had attended the peace−parley. After that they were ever ready to fight against King George's enemies, and they did all in their power to convert the Indians who still remained rebellious.

The story Sam now told the newly−arrived warriors about the capture of the girl by the two rebel Indians aroused their wrath, and they determined to punish the cowardly Micmacs as soon as possible. As for the slashers, they hoped to settle with them at once, which would prove a warning to others. Occasionally they glanced at Jean as she sat watching them. They knew her history now, and they admired her, for Sam had told them of her courage on the trail, and of her bright, cheerful disposition. They were much interested, too, in the little arrow at her throat, and when Jean handed it to them, they examined it intently, and talked to one another in quite an excited manner.

Not for long, however, could the Indians remain at the lodge. There was stern work ahead of them this night, and Sam was becoming uneasy. When he at length rose to his feet and picked up his gun, the visitors did likewise. They examined the priming of their weapons, the bullets in their pouches, and the quantity of powder in their powder−horns. Finding everything to their satisfaction, they were about to leave the lodge, when Jean sprang to her feet and laid a hand upon Sam's arm.

"Don't kill the white men," she pleaded. "Drive them away, but, please don't kill them."

Sam turned and looked at her in silence for a few seconds. His eyes were filled with an expression of admiration for this fair girl. He was willing to do anything for her, but he knew that she did not understand the importance of the mission upon which he and the other warriors were bent.

"You won't kill them, will you?" she asked, noting his silence.

"Slashers bad," Sam replied. "Slashers hurt babby."

"I know they would if they got the chance. But can't you drive them away without killing them? Oh, it would be terrible if you should shoot them! You killed one man, and isn't that enough?"

Sam was in a quandry. He longed for the blood of the slashers whom he hated. This was a great chance to wipe them out of existence. Never before had he had such a just cause against them, and why should he not make the most of it? But it was hard for him to resist the request of the white girl. He turned to the other Indians, and spoke to them in quick, short syllables. They replied, but what they said Jean did not know. She could only hope.

"No kill slashers, eh?" Sam queried, turning to the girl.

"Please don't. Drive them away; frighten them, but do not kill them."

"Sam no say now. See bimeby, mebbe."

To Jean Sam was the very embodiment of good nature and gentle care. And she had good reason for this high regard. But as a great bear has been known to bestow a remarkable affection upon a lost child, notwithstanding its savage nature, so it was with Sam. Could Jean have seen him that night as he led his score

of followers against the slashers she would not have believed him to be the same Indian who had been so kind to her. The wild nature within him was aroused. He was on the warpath against a hated enemy. As he glided through the forest, his eyes glowed like living coals of fire, and his great body quivered with excitement. His companions, too, were intensely stirred. The slashers were against King George, and that was all−sufficient. Like weird spectres they moved through the night. Not a word did they speak, and not a twig snapped as their moccasined feet pressed the ground. Never did a girl have a more determined and thoroughly−trained body of men speeding forth on her behalf than did Jean Sterling that night in the heart of the great northern forest.

For a little over half an hour the Indians continued on their way, up hill and down, with no abatement to their speed. At length, after climbing a higher hill than usual, they paused on the eastern slope and held a low−whispered consultation. This took but a few minutes, and when they again advanced it was not in single file, but spread out to the right and left like two wings, with Sam in the centre. Down in the valley were the slashers, and toward them they moved, silently and stealthily as the panther stalking its prey. With bent, crouching bodies, and every sense keenly alert, they glided toward the unsuspecting slashers. Nearer and nearer they approached, and at length when the light of a camp fire winged its way into the forest depths, they lessened their speed, dropped upon their hands and knees, crept cautiously forward, and then stopped but a bow−shot away. Here they remained as silent and rigid as the great trees, keenly observing all that was taking place before them.

Near the fire about twenty−five men were gathered, talking in the most animated manner. They were an evil−looking group of creatures, dirty, unshaven, their clothes ill−fitting and torn. They formed the dregs of the wild, lower than the Indians and the dumb beasts of the trails. They were parasites, a menace to law and order. Honor was unknown among them, and the purity of such a girl as Jean Sterling only aroused the base passions within them. The rangers they feared, as well as the Indians who were loyal to King George. They were cunning woodsmen, subtle as the serpent, and sly as the fox. They were hard to catch, being in one place to−day, and miles away the next. When food was plentiful they were gluttons, but when it was scarce they starved for days. They had a craze for rum, and when drunk they were ugly, maudlin brutes. They were fond of a fight, and fought like demons on the slightest pretext.

Only one thing seriously affected them, and that was a superstitious fear. It hounded them wherever they went, as is so often the case with low, base minds. They had signs many, in the heavens above and the earth beneath, and to these were slaves. Therefore, when they saw Seth Lupin lying dead on the bank of the river with the marks of the clutching fingers upon his throat, some trembled with fear, and glanced apprehensively around. It was the work of the devil, so they said, and they were anxious to leave the place. Others, however, scoffed at them, declaring it was none other than Sam, the ranger, who had been seen lurking in the vicinity that very day. These latter by threats had induced the fearsome ones to accompany them into the wilderness where they knew the supposed murderer had his abode. They could easily overcome him, so they believed, and carry off the beautiful girl. But it had been a difficult journey. They had lost their way, and floundered about in valleys and swamps. Fear still possessed the hearts of more than half their number, and time and time again they were on the point of turning back. But as Sam and his followers watched from the darkness of the woods, the slashers were in better spirits. They were to attack at midnight, and carry off the girl. They discussed their plans for some time, and then curled up near the fire for a short sleep ere beginning the march.

The lurking Indians waited patiently until silence reigned around the fire. Then like unleashed hounds they swept forward, each with a musket in one hand and a hunting−axe in the other. With blood−curdling yells they leaped into the midst of the prostrate men, and as the slashers sprang to their feet, amazed and stricken with fear, they went down before the blows of their assailants like grain before the reapers. Only a few managed to escape by darting aside and losing themselves in the blackness of the forest. The others lay still where they had fallen, with their conquerors standing over them. The Indians had accomplished their task, so with grunts of satisfaction they stripped the slashers of their powder−horns, hunting−knives, muskets, and all the provisions they could find. Loaded with these, they sped back to their former place of waiting, where they cast their booty upon the ground. Here they squatted and watched the unconscious men near the fire.

For some time the Indians remained in this position, and when they began to think that their blows were heavier than they had intended, the slashers showed signs of life. First one and then another lifted his head and looked about in a dazed manner. Presently all but two or three were sitting bolt upright staring at one another. Then as the recollection of what had happened dawned upon their confused minds, they staggered to their feet and groped for their guns. Being unable to find them, they threw a few small sticks upon the dying fire. When their search for the muskets proved in vain, and when they also found that their powder−horns, knives, and provisions were also gone, they stared at one another in profound amazement. They paid no heed to their still prostrate comrades. Their only thought was for themselves. A wild insensate fear swept upon them as they huddled there, peering into the forest. This was something they had never before experienced, and it was beyond their comprehension. It could not have been the work of Indians, so they believed, for then not one of them would have been left alive. But the yells which had awakened them sounded like the yells of Indians, and several had faint recollections of dusky forms hovering over them.

"It was not Indians," one of the men declared. "It was a legion of devils which struck us. Who ever heard of Indians doing such a job? Why, they would have finished every man−jack of us. It's a warning to us to get out of this place and leave that girl alone. I said so at the first when I saw those marks upon Seth Lupin's throat. There's something d−−−− uncanny about this, and I'm done with it. Let's get away before anything else happens."

Seeing that the slashers were now thoroughly frightened, and would trouble them no more, Sam and his companions picked up their belongings and booty, and glided away silently among the trees. They were not altogether satisfied with their night's work, and so little was said as they sped onward. Their savage nature demanded complete revenge upon their old−time enemy. The partial knock−out blows were not to their liking. Little did the slashers realise that they owed their lives that night to the very girl whose ruin they had sought, who through her gentle influence upon her dusky defenders had caused them to stay their hands and temper their punishment toward their hated enemies.

CHAPTER XXI

THROUGH THE WILDERNESS

Jean learned about her defenders' success upon their return to the lodge. She had been anxiously awaiting their coming, and when they did arrive and she saw the booty they carried with them, her heart sank within her. The slashers must all have been slain, so she imagined. When Sam, however, told her what had happened, she was greatly relieved.

"Will they trouble us any more?" she asked.

"No more now," and Sam smiled. "White man head hurt. Sore. Slashers much 'fraid. Go 'way queek."

"Oh, I am so glad," and Jean gave a sigh of relief. She felt quite secure now, and she looked with admiration upon the hardy Indians who had done so much for her. She thanked them, and they were pleased at her words. To see this white girl happy made up somewhat for their disappointment of the night.

The next day the visitors left for their own lodges, so once again Jean and her two companions were alone. The days that followed were busy ones for the Indians. There were many things to do before starting on their long journey overland of which Jean had no idea. First of all, there was a travelling−suit to be made for the white girl. From the cache Sam brought down some soft, tanned caribou skin, and upon this Kitty began to work. Jean watched her with great interest and admiration.

"What do you call that?" she enquired, pointing to the skin. "Will you teach me some of your words? I want to speak Indian."

Kitty looked at the girl and laughed.

"Injun talk hard," she said. "Babby spik Injun, eh?"

"Yes, will you teach me? Now, what do you call this skin?"

"Mu−ka−lip−we−u," was the reply.

"And what is the name of that sinew−thread?"

"Tun−u−wan."

Jean repeated these words, and so well did she speak them that Kitty was much pleased.

"Babby learn queek," she encouraged. "Babby spik all sam' Injun bimeby."

"I am going to learn Indian," Jean declared, "and I want you to tell me the names of many things."

The studying of the Maliseet language was a new pleasure to Jean, and she made excellent progress. She asked the names of various things about the camp, and in a few days she had stored up in her mind quite a stock of words. She now spoke of the fire as "skwut," firewood as "Skwut−o−e−to'tch," the mouth as "hu−ton," eyes as "u−si−suk," hair as "pi−es." There was no end to the words she learned, and both Sam and Kitty vied with each other in teaching her. When Sam brought in a rabbit he would hold it up and say "Ma−tu−kwes," or if a partridge, "se−se−ka−ti−ke−es." Then he would laugh as Jean tried to pronounce the words.

When the ice was firm enough to venture upon, Jean watched Sam as he cut a hole, dropped down a line, and brought forth a fine speckled trout. As the fish flopped about, he exclaimed, "Sko−tum! Sko−tum!"

One day he produced a piece of ash wood, and began to make the frames of a pair of snow−shoes.

"Ha−kum−mul," he said.

"What is that?" Jean asked.

"Snow−shoes for babby. Long trip bimeby."

"What! am I to use them?"

"A−ha−ha. When wast come."

"What is wast?"

"Snow. Plenty bimeby."

When Sam had finished the frames of the snow−shoes, Kitty set at once to work to weave the web of strips of dried caribou skin. Jean was even more interested in this than she had been in the making of her travelling−suit, and she was never tired of watching the woman's skilful fingers as she fashioned the warp and woof upon the frames until the perfect webs were completed. What strong snow−shoes they were, and how graceful! Jean was anxious to try them, and longed for the snow to come.

But during this time of waiting Kitty began the training of the girl for the hard march overland. Every day she

would take her into the woods for a walk. At first Jean was quite tired when she returned to the lodge, but ere long she was able to travel much farther, and came back fresh and unwearied. She understood the meaning of these trips, and enjoyed them. The harder she trained the more fitted she would be to contend with the difficulties which lay ahead. Her body thrilled with excitement, and her cheeks glowed with animation whenever she thought of the joy of going home. Seldom were her loved ones out of her mind, and she pictured her father's delight when she opened the door and walked in, clad in her caribou−suit. How the people of the settlement would throng around her, and what a story she would have to tell. She wondered what had become of Dane. She believed that he was frantically searching for her, and the hope dwelt in her heart that he might find her and they would go home together.

After a week of steady training Jean was anxious to begin the journey. When she mentioned this to Sam he shook his head and looked up at the moon which was shining above the tree−tops.

"Pu−sa−nuts se−pa−wun−ok," he said.

Seeing the puzzled expression upon the girl's face, he laughed.

"Beeg snow soon."

"How do you know?"

"Ni−pauk−set−−moon−tell Sam."

"How does the moon tell you?"

"Ring round moon, see? Bimeby no moon. Beeg snow."

And in this the Indian was right. Toward morning a wind sprang up and wailed through the forest. When Jean opened her eyes the next morning the trees were swaying beneath a strong nor'easter. The sky was leaden, and the air already flecked with fine snow. In another hour the storm was upon them in full intensity, driving across the lake, and blotting out the opposite shore from view. It beat against the thicket in its frantic efforts to reach the little lodge. To keep out the stray gusts which did occasionally escape the barricade of trees, Sam hung skins and blankets across the two ends of the abode. Thus within all was snug and warm. The fire burned brightly, and the smoke poured up through the wide space overhead. The roar of the storm in the forest sounded like the raging of the sea, and the waving of the tree−tops resembled the rolling and heaving of mighty billows. It was an exciting day to Jean. Never before had she witnessed such a storm. The fiercer it raged, and the more furiously it howled and beat against the sheltering trees, the more delighted she became. From a small opening on the south of the lodge she could see the snow swirling along the shore of the lake and piling up in long drifts against several fallen trees. It was good to be in such a cosy place where she could watch unharmed the trumpeting legions of the great nor'easter.

All through the day the storm continued, and night brought no abatement. It was still raging when Jean curled herself up in her blankets and lay there watching the dancing flames and the two Indians quietly and contentedly smoking on the opposite side of the fire. At length her eyes closed, and lulled by the tempest, she was soon fast asleep.

When she awoke the next morning the sun was shining brightly, and a great peace lay upon forest and lake. It was a new world upon which she opened her eyes, a world of dazzling glory, somewhat akin to the vision vouchsafed to the ancient seer in his lonely island when he beheld a new heaven and a new earth.

Jean was all eagerness now to assay her first venture upon her new snow−shoes. The simple breakfast ended, and clad in her woodland suit, Sam taught her how to arrange the magic slippers upon her moccasined feet.

How Dane's heart would have thrilled could he have seen her standing before the lodge, her lithe, supple body drawn to its full height, her face aglow, her eyes sparkling, and her furry cap poised lightly upon her head surrounded by a wealth of soft, billowy hair. The rude lodge, the great trees, and the fair girl standing there formed a scene of surpassing charm which many an artist would have given much to capture.

At first Jean found the walking on the snow−shoes somewhat difficult, and many a tumble did she receive which caused Kitty much amusement. But directed by the Indian woman, she soon overcame her awkwardness and ere long was able to move forward gracefully and rapidly. In two days she was quite an expert, and could even run upon the springing snow−shoes, much to the delight of the two natives.

"Ka−lo−ut. Ka−lo−ut−−Good. Good," was Sam's comment as he watched her coming off the lake at the end of the second day of training. "Babby walk all sam' Injun now."

The next morning the Indians began to pack up their few belongings, and Jean was delighted when they told her that at last the long overland journey was to begin. The streams were now frozen, and the travelling good.

"How long will it take us to make the journey?" Jean asked Sam.

"Long tam. Wan moon, mebbe. Two moon, mebbe."

"What! two months?"

"A−ha−ha, mebbe. See bimeby."

It was near mid−day when at last everything was ready and they left the little lodge by the lake and plunged into the forest. A pang of regret smote Jean's heart as she cast a backward glance upon the humble abode. She had spent happy days there, and it had been to her a place of refuge from her pursuers. She knew that she would never see it again. Suppose Dane should come to the lodge and find it deserted!

The journey through the forest was of necessity slow. With a pack upon his back, and drawing a small sled loaded with blankets and food, Sam went ahead and broke the trail. Kitty followed, also carrying a heavy load and the musket. Jean brought up the rear, and she found the walking quite easy owing to the excellent trail beaten down by her thoughtful companions. She had insisted upon carrying something, so a small pack had been made up for her and strapped in Indian fashion across her shoulders. This pleased her, as she felt that she was doing a little, at any rate, to help.

It was a wonderful region through which they moved. Up hill and down, across wild meadows and frozen swamps. Most of the time they travelled through great forest tracts, unharmed as yet by fire or axe. The trees, thick−set and tall, reminded Jean of great masts. A brooding silence reigned in these sombre depths, broken only by an occasional chatter of a surprised squirrel, the whirr of a partridge, or the cheepings of the little chickadees as they hopped from branch to branch. Once during the afternoon they stopped and ate a little of the cooked food Kitty had brought along. Jean was glad of this rest, for notwithstanding the training she had received, she was quite weary. She was most thankful when that evening Sam halted by the side of a little brook, unslung his pack and laid it upon the snow.

"Yut−ku−lo−wut," he said.

"What does that mean?" Jean asked.

"Good camp−place."

Then he turned to his wife.

"Mu−tu−o−to," he said, which the girl knew as the order to build a fire. She was pleased that she understood this command, and it encouraged her to continue the study of the native language.

While Kitty, with Jean's assistance, gathered some dry wood, and lighted the fire, Sam erected a lean−to. Thus by the time darkness enshrouded the land they were ready for the night. It was good to lie down and rest after the march of the day, and Jean soon feel asleep.

Thus for several days they continued their journey, travelling by easy stages. Jean was more accustomed now to the trail, and the stiffness of the first two days had worn away. It was welcome news to her, however, when Sam one night told her that by sundown on the morrow they should be at the big river, the Wu−las−tukw.

"Oh, I am so glad," she fervently replied. Once on the noble St. John it would seem almost home.

The next day they passed through a wonderful forest of great white pines. Never had Jean seen anything like them. They were as straight as arrows, and their tops seemed to her to reach the clouds drifting overhead. Ere long she noticed that many of them bore the axe blaze, and examining more closely, she saw the form of a broad arrow cut deep into the bark. "What is that?" she asked.

"King George arrow," Sam explained. "All King George tree," and he waved his hand in an eloquent gesture. "White man cut'm bimeby."

"Oh, I know," Jean exclaimed as she recalled what Dane had told her. "These are for masts for the King's navy, are they not?"

"A−ha−ha."

"Are there mast−cutters near here?"

"Off dere," and Sam motioned westward.

"Will we see them?"

"No see'm now. Bimeby, mebbe."

"Where are they?"

Sam stopped, stooped and with his forefinger made two parallel lines in the snow several inches apart.

"A−jem−sek," he said, touching the nearer line. "Wu−las−tukw," and he touched the other. He next placed his finger between the two. "White man here," he explained. "Plenty King George tree."

"Is A−jem−sek a river?" Jean asked.

"A−ha−ha."

"Will we soon be there?"

"Wan sight, mebbe."

Jean had learned that these Indians measured short distances according to sight, and that they said "one sight," "two sights," "three sights," instead of miles. She now knew that the A−jem−sek, whatever that river might be, was not far away, and that it must be a branch of the St. John. And between the two, farther on, were the

King's mast−cutters. Her hopes rose high. How good it would be to see white men she could trust. They would help her to reach home, she felt certain.

They were moving down a gentle slope now, and making fair progress. Suddenly Sam stopped, and examined strange straggling tracks in the snow. Kitty and Jean also looked, the latter asking what they meant.

"White man," Sam explained. "No snow−shoe."

"Are they slashers?" Jean anxiously enquired.

Sam shook his head, and examined the tracks more closely.

"No slasher, no snow−shoe," he said. "Funny track, all sam' lost."

As they proceeded, they came across other tracks, showing where men had been walking through the snow, wandering here and there, in an apparently aimless manner. Sam became very curious now, as well as cautious. He took the musket from Kitty, and carried it in readiness for any emergency. Jean was quite excited, and peered keenly ahead, not knowing what to expect next.

Except for the creaking of the snow−shoes, not a sound did they make as they sped onward, and in about half an hour the trees seemed suddenly to part and present an open space to their view. It was the A−jem−sek, a narrow stream connecting Lake K'tchi−kwis−pam with the Wu−las−tukw, so Sam explained to Jean. As they stepped out upon this river they saw two men but a short distance away, drawing a small sled loaded with wood, who stared with startled amazement at the sudden appearance of the three travellers.

CHAPTER XXII

IN DESPERATE STRAITS

As they advanced toward where the two men were standing, Jean was somewhat afraid lest they might be slashers. This fear, however, was at once removed when she beheld their pitiable condition. Their clothes were in tatters, and their bearded faces were drawn and haggard. They stared at her with eyes from which all hope had fled, and so weak did they seem that they could hardly stand. Their backs were bent as if through age, and they rested their hands upon the loaded sled for support. As Jean paused, smitten by a sudden feeling of awe, one of the men wearily lifted his hand and beckoned to her.

"Who are you?" she asked, when she had drawn near.

"We are as dead men," was the hollow reply. "But in God's name, who are you?"

"I am Jean Sterling, daughter of Colonel Sterling. I was carried away from home, but was rescued by these Indians, who are now taking me back to my father."

"Ay, we heard of you, did we not, James?" the man enquired, turning to his companion.

"Ay, we heard of you, Miss, on our way here, as William says," the other replied, "But so great have been our own cares and sorrows since then that we have forgotten about you."

"Do you live here?" Jean asked, wondering who these men could be.

"No, no, not living, but dying here, we and our wives and children. We are Loyalists, Miss, who arrived with the Fall Fleet. We came up the river in open boats, mistook this river one night for the main channel, and were

frozen in here before morning. Our sufferings have been great. We are starving to death. Though," he added after a slight pause, "there are not so many to provide for now."

"What! have some died?" Jean asked.

"Seven, Miss, mostly little ones. They are all under the snow, and the rest of us will soon be with them."

"Come, come, you must not give up yet," the girl encouraged. "Sam and Kitty will help you, I am sure. Where do you live?"

"Just over there," and the man motioned to the right. "It's a poor place, and the last storm was terribly hard on us."

"Take me there, then," Jean ordered. "I want to see your women and children."

A feeling of responsibility had suddenly come to her such as she had never before known. These two men before her were in the depths of despair, so something had to be done to arouse and stimulate them with courage. Hitherto she herself had been dependent upon others, and followed their guidance. But now it was different. Here were people in a strange land, and in difficult circumstances who had for the time lost their grip of things, and needed special assistance. It all came upon her in a flash, transforming her from a follower to a leader; from dependent girlhood to the glory of responsible womanhood.

Guided by the two men, they soon reached the encampment but a hundred yards away. At sight of this Jean stopped and stared in profound amazement. It was no wonder that the women and children huddled there were cold. The ones who had fashioned these rude abodes were evidently unacquainted with life in the open, so desolate was the place, and with very little protection from the driving storms.

There were about ten families in all encamped here, and at the first glance Jean could tell that they were actually starving. The women, who received her kindly, presented as brave an appearance as possible. But their faces were worn and haggard, showing plainly the sufferings they had endured. The children, especially the younger ones, looked better, having no doubt received extra food and attention.

The arrival of the visitors caused considerable excitement and interest among the Loyalists. Men, women, and children all crowded around one fire, and listened with wonder to the tale Jean related of her capture, and how she was rescued by the two good Indians. She in return heard the pathetic story of these unfortunate people from the time they left their old homes until the present.

"It was bad enough," one woman said, "when we were all well. But when the babies began to pine and die for want of proper nourishment, then it was terrible. We gave them the best of everything, and tried to keep them warm, even pressing them against our own bodies. But it was all in vain, so we laid the little darlings to rest one by one. They are better off, I suppose, but it was very hard on us."

Her eyes, and the eyes of all were brimming with tears. Jean was deeply affected, and her heart went out in sympathy to these unfortunate people. She glanced about the rough brush abodes, and noted how few and thin were the blankets.

"You have very little bedding, I see," she remarked.

"Not nearly enough," was the reply. "We had no idea that winter would come so soon, so sent most of everything on the *Polly*."

"Are you out of provisions, too?"

"We have been out of food for days, excepting the few rabbits the men caught. There are moose in the woods, but our men have not the skill or strength to get any."

During this conversation Jean's mind had been very active. She knew that something had to be done, and at once, if these people were to be saved from starvation. She turned away and walked over to where Sam and Kitty were erecting a little lean−to in the midst of a small thicket of fir and spruce trees.

"Sam, I want you to do something for those people," she at once began. "They are starving."

"White man all sam' crazee," the Indian replied. "Camp bad, ugh!"

"I know that, Sam, so you must show them how to build good ones like your lodge by the lake. Will you?"

"A−ha−ha, bimeby, mebbe."

"They are starving, too, Sam, so I want you to get something for them to eat. Will you go at once? Kitty and I will finish this lean−to."

Sam, however, made no reply, but went on with his work.

"You will go, won't you?" she pleaded. "They are King George's people, and were driven out of their own country. I know you will help them."

These words had the desired effect, and electrified the Indian to keen interest. That they were King George's people was all−sufficient. He spoke to Kitty, who produced two wire snares from one of their bundles, and handed them to her husband. Sam then picked up his gun and turned to Jean.

"Me go now," he said. "Come bimeby. Get bird, mebbe."

In another minute he was away, and Jean turned her attention to the building of the lean−to. As the Indian woman began to prepare supper, Jean longed to take some of the meat to the needy ones. But it was so small that it would be of little use. She could only hope that Sam would return with a good supply of birds.

Neither was she disappointed, for shortly after dark the Indian appeared carrying several plump partridges he had snared. These were soon prepared and speedily cooked, so this night the Loyalists had a better supper than usual.

Sam now directed his attention to the rude abodes, and as he examined them he emitted several grunts of disgust. Early the next morning he found an excellent camping−spot, and took Jean over to see it.

"Good camp here," he told her. "Plenty tree, plenty wood."

"Will you help those people to build new lodges?" she asked.

"A−ha−ha, Sam help."

"And can you get more meat? Perhaps you can shoot a moose."

"Sam get feesh bimeby. Kai−u−hus, mebbe."

"What is that?"

"All sam' rat. Swim in water, build house."

"Do you mean muskrat?"

"A−ha−ha. White man call'm 'Injun turkey.' Good."

"You are a great man, Sam. You saved my life, and now you are saving the lives of those poor people."

"Sam glad," was the quiet reply. "Sam King George man. Sam help King George peep'l."

Jean went over and explained to the Loyalists Sam's idea about building the new abodes. They were much pleased at this suggestion, and the men at once followed Sam to the spot he had chosen, and began work. After he had given them full instructions, and helped them to make a start upon their new homes, he provided himself with a small supply of food, and started forth upon a hunting expedition. He took with him his sled and a single blanket.

"Will you be away all night?" Jean asked as she stood watching him ere his departure.

"Mebbe. See bimeby."

"Don't stay too long, Sam, for if you do we shall all starve. Kitty says that we have very little food left."

The Indian smiled as he stooped and arranged his right snow−shoe.

"Kitty no starve, Babby no starve," he replied. "Sam come bimeby. Plenty grub."

This was an anxious day for Jean, as she was well aware that the entire camp was on the verge of starvation. The children were already picking and sucking the bones of the partridges, and there was no food in the place. Even the little they had brought with them was gone, so she and Kitty went without any dinner. She did her best to cheer and encourage the dispirited Loyalists, telling them that Sam would soon return with plenty of meat. He was their sole dependence now, and suppose anything should happen to him! But she had confidence in his skill and judgment, so hoped for the best.

Much of the day she spent with the women and children, listening to the hardships they had endured, and playing with the little ones. At times she visited the men, and watched them as they toiled bravely at their houses. They were weak and hungry, but they uttered no word of complaint. Occasionally she saw them gnawing and chewing the bark of tender birch twigs, while some tried to find sustenance in pine, spruce, and cedar cones. But for the hope that Sam would return with a supply of food, they would have given up in despair.

The day was drawing to a close when the women and children were transferred to their new abodes. Fires were burning brightly, and fresh fir boughs made soft beds. The children were delighted with this change, and the expression in the women's eyes showed their pleasure. As Jean watched the mothers making up the beds for the night she noticed how few and thin were the blankets. She well knew that they must have more clothing if they were to be kept from perishing during the long winter ahead. And other food they must have than meat, especially the children. Her mind turned naturally to the King's mast−cutters. She must go to them, for no doubt they had a supply of provisions on hand, as well as extra blankets. She was sure that they would be willing to help these needy people.

At first she thought of getting Sam and Kitty to go. But thinking the matter over, she decided that it would be better to go herself. The Indians might not be able to explain fully the serious condition of the Loyalists, or else the mast−cutters might not pay much attention to what they said. She mentioned this to no one, however,

preferring to wait until Sam returned that she might talk it over with him.

There was little rest that night for the older ones. The hungry children had cried themselves to sleep, while the helpless parents watched and listened with heavy hearts. They were beyond tears now, having shed so many in the past. The men were weary to the point of exhaustion after their day's work without any food. As they huddled there they often cast anxious glances out into the night, hoping to see the Indian coming from the forest. They themselves had done the best they could to provide game, but they were unused to hunting, and when they became weakened through lack of food, they were able to do but little. All they could do now was to trust to the Indian and await his return.

Jean decided to watch with Kitty, as she felt sure that Sam would come back before morning. But as the hours wore on, her eyes became heavy. The bed of fir boughs and blankets was comfortable, so at length she passed into a sound sleep, leaving Kitty awake and watchful.

When she opened her eyes it was daylight, and the delicious odor of frying meat pervaded the air. Kitty was stooping before the fire, while Sam was squatting but a short distance away. They both turned and smiled as the girl awoke and spoke to them.

"When did you get back, Sam?" she asked.

"Short tam' go. Plenty meat now."

"Oh, I am so glad! What did you get?"

"Feesh, Injun turkey, hut−tok."

"What, a deer!" Jean exclaimed, for she knew the meaning of the Indian word.

"A−ha−ha, hut−tok. Beeg."

"Good for you, Sam! You are a great hunter. Where is the deer?"

"White man eat'm," he replied with a smile.

"And did you haul it into camp?"

"A−ha−ha. Sam strong, beeg."

This supply of meat was a God−send to all, and there was great rejoicing among the Loyalists. They praised the Indian for what he had done, and he was looked upon as a hero, especially by the children.

When breakfast was over, and Sam was enjoying his pipe near the fire, Jean spoke to him about going to the mast−cutters for assistance. The Indian listened intently, and when the girl had finished speaking, he remained for awhile in deep silence.

"Can we do it?" Jean at length asked. "How far is it?"

"Sam go wan sleep, babby two sleep," was the reply.

Jean smiled as she drew herself to her full height.

"Don't you think I can do it in one sleep as well as you?" she bantered. "Why, I am strong now, almost like an

Indian."

"Babby no all sam' Injun yet," Sam reminded. "Bimeby, mebbe."

"But will you go, Sam?"

"A−ha−ha. Wan sleep, Sam go."

"In the morning?"

"Mebbe. Sam see."

With this Jean had to be content. She was pleased that the Indian was willing to go with her, although she was well aware that he would start only when he was ready. She talked it over with the women, and a new hope rose in their hearts when they learned about the King's mast−cutters.

"What should we have done without you?" one woman remarked with a sob in her voice. "The Lord surely must have sent you and those Indians just when our needs were so great. We can never repay you for what you have done for us."

CHAPTER XXIII

SIX CANDLES AND ONE

The short winter day was drawing to a close as Jean and her two Indian companions moved down the western side of a long hill. They were making for the valley below through which ran a small brook, where they hoped to camp for the night. They had been abroad since morning, and Jean was now very tired. Her strength was not so great as she had imagined, and she recalled with amusement her proud boast the day before. Sam had been right, and she was glad that he did not try to reach the mast−cutters in "one sleep." She could not possibly do it, although it would have been easy for the Indians. They had this day regulated their speed to her feeble steps. But without her how they would have sped through the forest. They were both wonderful snow−shoers, and on several occasions she had watched them as they bounded over the snow with great swinging, tireless strides. Her admiration of these faithful, self−reliant people was unbounded.

They had almost reached the valley when the report of a gun rang through the forest, followed in a few seconds by a cry of distress. Sam stopped dead in his tracks, gripped hard his musket, and peered keenly among the trees. The next instant he was bounding forward, leaving Jean and Kitty staring after him.

"What is it?" the girl asked, her face white with fear.

"Kitty no say now," was the reply. "See bimeby."

And as they waited and listened with fast−beating hearts, another report echoed through the forest, and then all was still.

"Sam shoot," Kitty explained. "Come."

Hurrying forward, they soon reached the valley, and ere long they saw Sam bending over some object. Nearby was a large moose, with its great body and branching antlers half buried in the snow. But to this Sam gave no heed. His attention was centred upon a human being, moaning and writhing in pain. Jean saw at once that it was a man, with white hair and long, flowing beard. With a cry she rushed forward and knelt by his side.

"Are you hurt?" she asked in a tremulous voice.

At this question the man started, lifted his head, and looked curiously at the girl. An expression of defiance glowed in his eyes, which caused Jean to wonder.

"Are you hurt?" she repeated. "Can we help you?"

"Am I hurt?" the man growled. "Do I look hurt?"

These words instead of frightening the girl only tended to make her somewhat angry. She wished to do what she could to help the man, but she did not like his sarcasm. It was altogether uncalled for, so she thought.

"You look as if you are hurt," she replied. "But, then, you are the best judge of that. We are willing to do what we can for you, but if you do not want our help we shall leave you alone."

Her tone was severe, and this the man noted.

"I am hurt," he confessed in a milder voice. "That devil over there nearly made an end of me. O, Lord!" He placed his hand to his side, and his brow contracted with pain. "I guess I'm done for, anyway."

"Where do you live?" Jean asked. "We must get you home."

"Just down the valley. Sam knows where. I think I can walk with his help. He's a good Indian, and he saved my life to−day. He was just in time."

With considerable difficulty the injured man was lifted out of the snow where he was half buried, and helped to regain his feet. One of his snow−shoes was gone, but Kitty found it several yards away.

"It was that which caused all the trouble," the man explained. "When the moose charged, something went wrong with that snow−shoe, and before I could do anything the brute was upon me."

After Sam had fixed and arranged the snow−shoe upon the man's moccasined foot, he took him by the arm and started forward, with the women following. Their progress was slow, for the injured man often stopped and pressed his hand to his side. That he was suffering greatly was most apparent, and Jean felt sorry for him. She wondered who he was, and the reason for the look of defiance in his eyes. That he had called Sam by name puzzled her, for the Indian had never spoken of him to her.

She was more mystified than ever when ere long they came in sight of a log cabin nestling on the hillside at the entrance of the valley. In front of the house was a small clearing surrounded by a rough pole fence, causing Jean to believe that the owner had lived there for some time, and did a little gardening.

When, however, she entered the building her surprise was greater than ever. The main room was as comfortable and cosy as hands could make it. The floor was covered with fur rugs of various shapes and sizes. The walls, too, were adorned with skins of the bear, fox, otter, wolverine, and other animals. At the farther end of the room was a large fire−place, above which was a fine moose head with great branching antlers. Several hardwood sticks were burning upon the hearth, showing that the owner had not been long away from home. There were also other articles on the walls, such as Indian curios, bows and arrows, as well as a few pictures. In the middle of the room was a table, covered with a cloth of rich design. In the centre of this stood a candle−stick, made of wood, evidently hand−wrought. It had seven branches, and in each was a dip−candle. A well−polished silver tray, containing a pair of snuffers, was lying near. There were several books upon the table, one of which was lying open, as if the reader had hurriedly laid it down as he rose from the deep, comfortable chair nearby. There were other chairs in the room, as well as stools and benches, but this big chair

excelled them all in size and quaint workmanship. It was evidently the owner's special favourite, for it showed signs of much use.

To the left of the fire−place was the one couch the room contained, and to this the injured man at once made his way. He sat upon the edge and rested for a few minutes. He was breathing hard, and most of the time he kept his right hand to his suffering side. He seemed to pay no heed to what was taking place around him, but stared straight before him as if in a dream. He aroused at length, and glanced at the three standing before him.

"Make yourselves at home," he said. "There is plenty of food in the next room. It is quite warm there, for I always keep a fire going. The women, I think, will find it comfortable. Sam, I want to speak to you alone."

Jean was not slow in taking this hint, so she opened a door to the right of the fire−place and passed into the adjoining room. This was somewhat similar to the one they had just left, excepting that it was not so cosy. The table had no cloth covering it, and upon it stood a single candle stuck in a wooden candle−stick. This she lighted with a coal from the fire−place, and then looked curiously around. Along one side of the room was an abundance of provisions, all in bags, and carefully arranged. There were blankets, too, piles of them, and nearby a stack of furs. Jean thought of the Loyalists on the A−jem−sek. Here was sufficient food and clothing to last them for some time. And why should they not have them? She would speak to the owner just as soon as possible, and no doubt he would be willing to send something to the needy ones.

As she looked toward a corner of the room opposite the food and blankets, she was astonished to see many muskets leaning against the wall. She went over and began to count, and found there were fifty in all. She also saw numerous old swords, bayonets, and boxes filled with bullets. There were cans, as well, which she believed contained powder. She grew more puzzled now than ever. Who could the man be, and why did he have so many guns? Perhaps he was a trader, and dealt with the Indians. But why had not Sam and Kitty spoken about him? Then she recalled the look of defiance in his eyes when she had first met him. What was the meaning of that?

She crossed the room to where the Indian woman was searching among the pots, pans, and other cooking utensils near the fire−place.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Cook supper," was the reply. "Plenty grub, eh?"

"There certainly is, Kitty. I wonder what that man is going to do with it all." She then lowered her voice, and glanced toward the door. "Do you know anything about him?" she enquired. "Why does he have so many guns?"

"Kitty know," was the reply. "White man beeg chief."

"What kind of a chief?"

"Kitty no say now. Bimeby, mebbe."

"Is he a trader?"

"A−ha−ha, mebbe."

This was all the information Jean could gain from the woman, and she was greatly mystified. Kitty evidently knew who the man was, and yet she would tell nothing more than that he was a big chief. She sat down before the fire and tried to puzzle it all out. But the more she thought, the more confused she became, and at last was

forced to give up in despair. Perhaps she could find out for herself. Anyway, she must get food and clothing to send to the Loyalists as speedily as possible.

In the meantime Kitty had found a quantity of Indian meal and was cooking some cakes in one of the frying−pans she had found. There was also a good supply of molasses in a cask, which when served with the cakes makes fairly good eating. It was a change, at any rate, from the constant meat diet.

"Kitty cook plenty bimeby," the Indian woman announced. "Good tam, eh?"

"Some of that food must go to those starving people on the A−Jem−sek," Jean replied. "And look at those blankets. Why, there are enough to keep them all warm. You and Sam will take some, will you not?"

To this request Kitty made no response, and while Jean was wondering why she did not answer, Sam entered the room, and came close to the fire.

"Beeg chief want see babby," he announced.

"How is he?" the girl asked, rising to her feet.

"Seek here," and Sam placed his hand to his side. "Much seek. Bad!"

Jean at once went into the other room, which was lighted only by the fire, and crossed to where the injured man was lying.

"You want to see me?" she enquired. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, light the candles. It is very dark here."

Jean at once obeyed, and in a few minutes the candles were burning brightly. The effect was beautiful, and as she stood watching them she wondered why there were just seven.

"You like them?" the man asked.

"I do," Jean acknowledged. "But I am curious to know why there are just seven."

"Oh, that is a perfect number," the man explained. "It is according to the Bible, you know. Now, take the snuffers and put out six."

Jean did as she was bidden, greatly mystified, until but one candle was left burning.

"There, that will do," the man said. "Now, come over here and sit by my side. That is better," he continued when she had complied with his request.

"How are you feeling?" Jean asked.

"A little easier now. I am somewhat of a doctor, and Sam helped me. But never mind that. I want to know who you are, and why you are travelling with those Indians?"

Briefly as possible Jean told her story, and when she had ended the man remained silent for a few minutes. She could not see the expression upon his face, nor the peculiar light in his eyes owing to the darkness of the corner where he was lying. Could she have done so, she would have been more surprised than ever.

"It is a strange story you have told me, young woman," he at length remarked. "You have been wonderfully delivered. You should consider yourself very fortunate in having such friends as those Indians."

"Indeed I do," Jean declared. "They have done more for me than I can ever repay. I know now how to sympathise with others in distress, and so want to help those unfortunate Loyalists."

"So you are on your way to get food and clothing from the mast−cutters?"

"Yes, but we won't have to go to them now, as I am sure you will help out those poor people. You have plenty of supplies."

"And they will stay here, young woman."

"What! you won't send any to those people in distress?"

"Why should I? They are Loyalists, and that is enough."

Jean started and stared at the man in amazement.

Surely she had not heard aright.

"Do you mean what you say?" she asked.

"I certainly do. Those Loyalists will never receive any help from me. Let them starve and freeze; it is no more than they deserve."

These cold, inhuman words stirred Jean's fighting blood. She rose quickly to her feet, her eyes ablaze with anger.

"I don't know who you are," she began, "and I don't know why you hate the Loyalists. But−−" she paused just for an instant, "some of that food and clothing will leave this place to−morrow morning."

The man sat bolt upright at this declaration, and flung out his right hand as if to hit the girl. Then he sank back upon the bed with a groan.

"You can't help yourself," Jean reminded, "so it is better for you to keep quiet. Some of those supplies are going, whether you like it or not."

"But this is a hold−up, a robbery," the man charged.

"I don't care what you call it, and I'm not worrying about that. I only know that men, women, and children are starving not far away, so while there is food here they are going to have some of it."

Jean was surprised at her boldness. But it was not time for half−way measures. If the owner would not agree to let the supplies go, she would take matters into her own hands.

"Oh, but for this confounded pain in my side I would soon teach you who is master of this house," the man shouted. "You are an impudent hussy, and I believe the story you told me about being carried away is a lie. And how do I know but what you are lying about those Loyalists? You and your Indian companions may keep what you take for yourselves."

"You can believe me or not, just as you wish," Jean quietly and firmly replied. "But those supplies are going

to the Loyalists in the morning. I would be ashamed to be called Colonel Sterling's daughter if I were afraid to use strong measures to save starving people."

At these words the man suddenly lifted himself on his right elbow, and peered keenly at the girl.

"Light the rest of those candles," he ordered. "I must see your face. I want to know if you are telling me the truth."

Jean did so, and then returned to the man's side.

"Stand there," he commanded, "a little to the right, so I can see your face. Ah, that's better. Now, tell me your father's Christian name."

"James," the girl replied.

"Yes, but James what? He has a second name, has he not?"

"Witrow. James Witrow Sterling; that's his full name."

"What was your mother's name?"

"Deborah Ruth."

"But her maiden name?"

"Winslow."

"And your name?"

"Priscilla Jean, although I only get 'Jean.'"

"After whom were you named?"

"A very dear friend of my parents."

"Who was she?"

"Priscilla Jean Norman, so I have been told."

"Where is she now?"

"I do not know. She and her husband disappeared years ago, and no word has been received from them since. They were the dearest friends my father had, and he feels the loss very keenly."

"Is your mother alive?"

"No; she died several years ago."

With a deep sigh the man dropped back upon the pillow, and remained silent for a few minutes. Jean sat down by his side, lost in thought. What was the meaning of the man's sudden excitement? she asked herself. And why did he question her so closely about her parents' names? Perhaps he had known them in the past. At length the man stirred, reached out his right hand and touched hers.

"Young woman," he began, "for your parents' sake alone I give you permission to take food and clothing to those starving people."

"Oh, I am so glad!" Jean replied. "But did you know my father and mother?"

To this question the man seemed to pay no heed. His eyes were fixed upon the seven candles.

"Yes, there were seven of us," he murmured as if to himself, "seven who were all in all to one another. But six went out, and I was left alone. Put them out again, Miss, and leave just one burning. You may go now, as I want to think. Send Sam to me. He can sleep in here to−night. You will find plenty of blankets in the next room. Good night."

Quietly and almost reverently Jean extinguished six of the candles, and then left the room. She felt that there was a deep mystery surrounding this man's life of which the seven−branch candle−stick was but the outward symbol.

CHAPTER XXIV

TIMON OF THE WILDERNESS

Jean awoke the next morning much refreshed after the good night's rest. She slept upon a liberal supply of blankets which Kitty had prepared for her upon the floor. This was a treat after camp−life, and when she opened her eyes the Indian woman was cooking breakfast. It was not yet daylight, but the room was quite bright from the dancing flames of the fire−place. It felt nice to lie there with a roof above her and no weary journey ahead for that day, at least. She recalled the events of the previous day, and wondered how the injured man had passed the night. She had fallen asleep thinking about him, and the mystery of his life. Whoever he was, she was thankful that he had known her parents, and that for their sake he was willing to send food to the Loyalists. The Indians were to start that morning, so she must be ready to assist them in selecting the supplies.

About a quarter of an hour later Sam entered the room. He did not knock, for such etiquette was not in his simple code of Indian manners. He merely looked to see what his wife was cooking, and then turned toward Jean.

"Beeg chief want see babby," he announced.

"How is he this morning, Sam?"

"No good. Bad."

Fearing that the man was much worse, Jean hurried into the other room, and went at once to the couch.

"Good morning," she brightly accosted. "How are you feeling now?"

"None too good," was the reply. "I didn't sleep a wink last night."

"Your side hurt you, I suppose."

"Perhaps so. But never mind about that now. I want you to help Sam pack up the outfit. Don't let him take too much, and see that he doesn't get any of that rum. It's in a keg near the molasses.

"You will have some breakfast, will you not?" Jean asked.

"I suppose so. There's a box yonder," and he pointed to the opposite side of the room. "You'll find some bread and cold meat. You might bring me a cup of strong tea; perhaps it will steady my nerves. Hand me my pipe and tobacco; they're on that flat stone projecting from the fire−place."

About the middle of the forenoon the relief party drew away from the house on their arduous journey to the A−jem−sek. It had taken Sam some time to repair the broken toboggan he had found in a shed near by. When this had been loaded with supplies, Sam threw the rope across his shoulders and started forward, with Kitty following. It would be a hard trip, Jean was well aware, so she told the Indians how grateful she was, and that no doubt King George would hear of their good deed. Her words pleased the simple−minded natives, and they undertook the difficult task in the best of spirits.

"Don't forget to tell the Loyalists about the moose," Jean reminded as she stood watching them from the back door.

"Injun no forget," Sam replied. "White man come bimeby. Sam, mebbe."

The girl watched her faithful friends until they had disappeared from view. All at once she seemed inexpressibly lonely as she stood there. While the Indians were with her she felt secure. But now she was alone with the mysterious invalid in the next room. She might have gone, too, but the man had asked her to stay until the natives returned, and she could not very well refuse his request. Anyway, she would be of more use here than out on the trail. She wondered what was the cause of the feeling of depression that had so suddenly swept upon her, and which was contrary to her buoyant nature. All at once the great silent forest appeared to her like some sinister monster, holding a lurking enemy within its brooding depths. She chided herself for her foolishness, but for all that, she could not entirely banish the strange feeling.

Going into the adjoining room, she found the invalid asleep. Not wishing to disturb him, she sat down by the table and picked up the book lying open there. It was a copy of Shakespeare's works, well−bound, and showing signs of much use. She turned to the front blank pages, hoping to see a name inscribed there. But nothing could she find. She examined two other books, one a copy of Virgil's "Aeneid," and the second "The Tatler," but no clue could she obtain as to the identity of the owner. In one of them, however, she did find where a name had been scratched out, as with a knife.

Taking up again the copy of Shakespeare's works, she glanced at the play where the book was lying open. It was "Timon of Athens," and the page upon which her eyes rested contained Timon's terrible curse outside the walls of Athens. She read it through, and then let the book drop upon her lap, wondering why any one in his right mind could so curse his fellow beings. She glanced toward the man upon the cot. Had he been reading those words ere he laid the book aside? she mused. What connection had that curse with him? Did he hate his fellow men as Timon did of old? Perhaps he, too, had been wronged, and had fled to this lonely place. She recalled what he had said about those starving Loyalists. Surely there must be some good reason for his intense bitterness.

As she thus sat there gazing dreamily into the fire, the man on the cot stirred, uttered a slight moan, opened his eyes and looked at the girl.

"Ah, so you've been keeping watch, have you?" he asked. "Pretty lonely job, isn't it?"

"Not at all," Jean brightly replied, laying aside the book and rising to her feet. "I have been looking at your books. My, what a reader you must be! But why do you read such stuff as that?"

"What stuff? I hope you don't call Shakespeare's works 'stuff.'"

"Oh, I am merely referring to Timon's curse. It is terrible. But, there, I don't want to talk about it. Let me make

you a cup of tea. That will do you more good than any book."

"Make it good and strong," the man reminded. "And while you are about it you might as well bring me a noggin of rum. I haven't had any since yesterday morning."

The invalid drank the tea first, and pronounced it excellent. He let the rum remain by his side while he filled and lighted his pipe.

"Did you have a good sleep?" Jean asked as she again sat down by the table. "I hope you feel better."

"I had a fairly good sleep, Miss, although the pain in my side is no better. However, I am used to suffering. So you don't care for Shakespeare, eh?"

"I didn't say that," Jean defended. "But I don't like reading those terrible passages about curses and such like."

"But I like them, Miss. They just suit me, and I feed on them."

"How can you? It is more than I can understand."

"You would, though, if you had been treated as I have been. I am Timon, and his sufferings were no greater than mine. His so−called friends were false to him, and so were mine. He cursed them, and I have made his curses mine. I am really Timon."

"Suppose I call you 'Timon,' then," Jean suggested with a smile. "I don't know what else to call you, for I do not know your name. 'Mr. Timon' sounds very well, does it not?"

"Yes, you may call me anything you like. I suppose Timon is as good as any other name. And it suits me, too."

"You must have had a hard life," Jean replied, not knowing what else to say. "It has evidently made you very bitter against your fellow men."

"Hard is not a strong enough word, Miss. You see that copy of the 'Aeneid'? Well, I read as much of that as I do Shakespeare. I like to follow the history of Old Aeneas. Many of his troubles were mine, and truly has Virgil sung of them. He was an exile by fate, and so am I. He had many wanderings, and so have I. He was treated with base ingratitude, and so was I. Yes, Timon and Aeneas are my brothers in tribulation. Like them I hate and curse my enemies."

"But this is a Christian age," Jean reminded. "We are taught by our Great Master to love our enemies, to bless and curse not."

"What! love King George, that crazy fool? Love a thing that brought on the war? Love a creature with the brains of a mouse? Nonsense. I don't believe the Lord ever meant us to love such a being."

Jean little expected that her quiet rebuke would cause such an outburst. She had always held the King in the highest esteem, as one who ruled by divine authority. To hear him now reviled, was more than she could endure.

"You have no right to talk about our good King in such a manner," she stoutly defended. "He is a great King, and thousands have died for him in the terrible war."

"A great King! A great King!" the man sneered. "And how great is he? He is so great that he objected to

painting St. Paul's Cathedral as being too much like the Roman Catholic custom. He is so great that he doesn't like Shakespeare, but he laughs to split his sides at farces and pantomimes, where clowns swallow carrots and strings of sausages. He is so great that he spends much of his time learning the exact number of buttons, tags and laces, and the cut of all the cocked−hats, pigtails, and gaiters in his army. Oh, yes, he is so great that he is always meddling in other people's affairs. He pokes his red face into every cottage for miles around. Imagine the King of England going about in his old wig, shovel−hat, and Windsor uniform, hob−nobbing with pig−boys, and old women making apple dumplings, and hurrahing with lazy louts early in the morning! That is the great King of England! How proud you must be of such a creature."

"I am proud of him," Jean retorted, "and you should not misrepresent him. The people love him for his pure and simple manner of living. He goes among them that he might know how they live, for he wants to help them all he can. They call him 'Farmer George,' so I have heard my father say, and I am sure that is an honour for any King."

"Queer honour, I should say, Miss. And he won great honour in his fight with America, didn't he? He was going to teach the colonies a lesson, and whip them into line. I'd like to have seen his old red face when the news of the defeat of his forces reached him. He's getting his punishment now, and he'll get more before he's through. He ruined me, an honest man. But he's getting his turn. I've heard that he goes out of his mind at times, and that his sons are turning out bad. Yes, yes, he's finding out now what it is to suffer. Oh, he'll learn, and I'm glad."

To these bitter words Jean made no reply. She realised that the less she said the better it would be. To oppose this man would only inflame his anger. She knew that his excitement increased his suffering, for at times during his tirades he had placed his hand to his injured side and gasped for breath. As she gazed into the fire she knew that the man was watching her, although she did not look in his direction. For a few minutes a deep silence pervaded the room, and when the man again spoke it was in a much milder tone.

"You must have had a hard time of it," he said. "I can well imagine how greatly worried your father must be."

"I fear he is about heart−broken," Jean replied. "He has been failing of late, and I am afraid this blow will go hard with him. I was his only comfort."

"It was a great trial for him to leave his old home, I suppose."

"In a way it was. But he was very brave through it all. He did what he could to encourage others, and many were helped by his cheerful manner. He told them that it was a great privilege to suffer in a noble cause, and that it was an honour to be loyal pioneers in a strange land."

No sooner had Jean uttered these words than she wished them unsaid. But the man appeared not to have heard them.

"Tell me about your old home," he requested. "Also about the war, and your coming to this country. It will help to pass the time."

Jean was only too glad to do this, so quietly and simply she told about her old happy home in Connecticut, her mother's death, the war, and all that it meant to them, of their arrival at Portland Point, the voyage up the river, and the settlement in the wilderness. Of Dane Norwood she did not speak, for it was not her nature to reveal to a stranger the deep things of the heart. Neither did she mention the rangers and their march with the men of the settlement against the rebels. A natural caution restrained her from speaking of this to one who so hated the Loyalists and King George.

When she had finished she waited for the man to make some remarks. When, however, he did not speak, she

rose, went into the other room, and busied herself in preparing dinner. It was a simple repast, but it satisfied the invalid, and he showed his pleasure by a faint smile, the first that the girl had seen upon his face.

"It is good of you to stay here and wait upon me," he said, "especially after what I said about the Loyalists and King George. I owe my life to you, Miss, and I am not ashamed to acknowledge it."

"It was Sam who saved you, Mr. Timon," Jean smilingly replied.

"Ah, yes, in actually shooting the moose. But for you, though, Sam would not have been on hand at the right minute. It was you who suggested going to the mast−cutters on behalf of those Loyalists."

"The real credit, then, should be given to the ones who plotted to carry me away from home. But for them I would not be here now."

"And my body would be lying out there in the snow, gored, torn and trampled. Wonderful, indeed, is the chain of events."

"It is wonderful," Jean agreed. "I have been thinking so much about it ever since Sam rescued me that night from Seth Lupin. I was in absolute despair, but just when help was needed most it seemed as if God reached out His hand and saved me. The words of that beautiful hymn, 'The Lord's My Shepherd,' have been often in my mind. I sang it one night to Sam and Kitty, and they were greatly pleased."

"Will you sing it to me?" the man asked. "It has been many years since I have heard any singing, except rough camp songs."

Although surprised at this request, as well as the sudden change in the man's manner, Jean did as she was requested. In a clear, sweet voice she sang the first verse, The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want, He makes me down to lie In pastures green; He leadeth me The quiet waters by.

She was about to begin the next verse when a step was heard outside, and then a heavy knock sounded upon the door.

CHAPTER XXV

UNMASKED

As Jean rose and opened the door a man at once entered, who stared at her in amazement. He was of medium size, clad in a short fur jacket, belted at the waist, heavy cap, rough homespun trousers, stuck into coarse socks, and moccasins on his feet. His face was covered with a ragged, bushy beard, flecked with frost, while particles of ice clung to his moustache. His small piercing eyes attracted Jean most of all, causing her to retreat a step or two. This the visitor noted, and laughed.

"I won't hurt ye, Miss," he said. "But, Lord! where have you dropped from? I didn't know there was a wench like you on this side of hell."

"Hold your tongue, Dave, and come over here," the man on the couch ordered.

The visitor at once obeyed, and crossed the room. He looked upon the invalid with surprise.

"Hello! what's wrong with you?" he asked.

"Oh, I met with an accident. But what are you doing here, Dave? What do you want?"

Dave, however, made no reply, but turned and stared hard at Jean who was now standing near the table.

"Did you hear what I said, Dave? What do you want?"

"Guess there's only one thing I want now, chief. Where did ye git her? My! she's a beauty."

At these words the injured man's eyes flashed with anger. He lifted himself to a sitting position, and seized Dave by the arm.

"She's my daughter," he lied, "and if you harm her I'll kill you. See?"

The visitor cowered and shrank back at this fierce threat.

"I didn't mean to harm her," he muttered. "But I didn't know ye had a daughter like that. Where have ye kept her all this time?"

"That's none of your business, Dave. Tell me what you want, and then get out. But, wait, I know you're thirsty. Bring in some rum, daughter," he ordered, looking over at Jean.

The latter was only too glad to get out of the room, and away from the man who in such a short time had filled her heart with fear. Her hands trembled as she picked up a mug and filled it with liquor. She then glanced toward the muskets in the opposite corner, and wondered if they were loaded. She felt more lonely now than ever, and wished for Sam and Kitty. She feared that stranger, and longed to close and bolt the door until he was out of the house. At present, however, there was nothing else for her to do but to be as brave as possible. No trace of fear did she show as she went into the other room, and paused just inside the door. The two men were talking very earnestly, and the invalid seemed to be quite excited.

"You must not let them come here," he was saying. "Keep them away for a day or two, at least."

"I can't," the other replied. "They are on their way now, and should be here sometime to−night."

At this Jean stepped forward and held out the noggin of rum. Dave eagerly seized the mug, and drained it to the last drop.

"My, that's great!" he declared, smacking his lips. "Fill it again, won't you?"

"No more now, Dave," his chief told him. "You may have another, though, before you leave. And you must leave soon and stop those men. They must wait until I am better."

"But I can't stop them, chief. They won't listen to me. They're out for a big time, an' they're goin' to have it. An' besides, there's that gang comin' from the Washademoak, an' they expect to meet them."

"Oh, Lord! I know it," the injured man groaned. "But that doesn't make any difference. I want you to stop that first gang from coming here. Tell them that I am very sick and can't see them now."

"Don't stop them, chief," Dave pleaded. "This is about the last chance they'll have. The rangers are on the way, so I hear, so we must get ahead of them. Davidson, the devil, has got wind of this."

"How did he hear?"

"How did he hear?" Dave repeated with a laugh. "How did he hear about that meeting on the Wed−nee−bak, an' round up that bunch at the lake? I guess you know as well as anybody."

"Never mind about that now, Dave. All I want you to do is to stop those men from coming here to−night. Tell them to leave me out this time, and to march straight overland until they meet the men coming eastward. I can't talk any more now, as my side hurts me very much. Daughter, give this man some more rum."

Jean started at this order, and quickly left the room. She was greatly excited, for she realised that serious trouble of some kind was on foot. She believed that the rebels were about to attack that helpless band of Loyalists on the A−jem−sek as others had planned to do to the ones at Loyal. What she had gathered from Dave's words led her to believe that the latter attempt had failed. This was the first news she had received, and it greatly relieved her mind. But what about the others, those suffering men, women and children but a short distance away?

She was thankful when Dave at last left the house, and she was once more alone with the invalid. The latter was very still, staring straight before him. Jean crossed the room and stood by his side.

"I want to know the truth," she began. "Is an attack to be made upon those Loyalists?"

"What do you mean?" the man asked in surprise.

"Just what I said. The rebels planned to wipe out the Loyalists down river, and it looks to me as if they are about to try the same upon the ones on the A−jem−sek."

"Nonsense, girl," was the impatient reply. "It is foolish to think of such a thing."

"Well, what is the meaning, then, of this gathering of men from various parts who are so anxious to do something before the rangers arrive? They surely intend some mischief."

"Just a little fun, Miss, that's all. The boys like a lark occasionally. It keeps them in good spirits."

"Are they all like Dave?"

"Why, don't you like him?"

"No, I do not. He has evil eyes."

"Dave is not as bad as you think. He is a weak creature, with little brains, and no sense at all. But the rest are not a bad lot, though rather rough at times, especially when they are drinking. But let us forget all about them for the present. Read some to me. Let it be Timon again. I feel in a mood for him to−day. If you knew Latin, I would have you read about Old Aeneas. I like Virgil's full sounding sentences, 'Arma virumque cano.' There's nothing like them."

"Yes, there is," Jean quietly replied, as she rose to her feet, crossed the room, and took down a book from a small shelf on the wall. This she opened as soon as she had taken her seat before the fire, and turned over several pages.

"Here is something better than Virgil," she said, "and I am going to read from it now. It will do both of us much good."

"Is that the Bible, Miss?"

"It is, and from all appearances you have not read much from it of late. It is very dusty."

"That's true, and I don't want to hear it now. I don't like it."

"Neither do we like medicine, Mr. Timon. But when we are sick we take it whether we like it or not. It is for our good."

"So you think I am sick?"

"There is something wrong with you, I am sure, more serious than your injured side. This is the only thing, I believe, that will help you."

"But I won't listen."

"You don't have to. I am going to read it, though. You liked the verse of the hymn I sang, didn't you?"

"Oh, that was different. It was your voice I liked, but not the sentimental mush of words."

"Well, then, you can listen to my voice now if you want to. But I guess you will listen to the words, too, unless you are different from what I think you are."

"What makes you say that?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Certainly."

Jean gazed into the fire for a few minutes, while the man watched her curiously.

"Go on," he ordered. "Out with it."

"I believe you are trying to be what you are not," the girl bluntly charged. "At first I thought you were a brute, and I was afraid of you. But since I have learned what an educated man you are, and watched you after your outburst about the King and the Loyalists, I have come to the conclusion that you are fighting against your best convictions."

"Why, girl, you surprise me!" the man gasped.

"Perhaps so, Mr. Timon. But can you truthfully say that I am not right? You cannot, and I know that you have nothing in common with such a creature as that Dave who was here. It isn't natural for a man like you to be in league with a gang of rebels. There, now, I have told you what I think, so you can say what you like. I am going to read the Master's words, for I believe you need them."

Although outwardly calm, Jean's heart was beating fast. She expected to hear the man deny what she had said, or say something in his own defence. When, however, he remained silent, she glanced at him, and then turned her eyes upon the open page.

"Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you."

"Stop, stop!" the man cried. "I can't stand those words. They are not meant for me. I can't pray for my enemies. Do you think I can pray for King George?"

"That is for you to decide, Mr. Timon. I am sure that I can pray for those who carried me away from home. Don't you think that they need it?"

Jean was about to close the book, when her eyes rested upon some words on the front page. As she looked, her face turned pale, and she gave a slight gasp of astonishment.

"What is the matter?" the man asked.

But the girl did not hear him. Her eyes were fixed upon the words

"To darling Dane, With Mother's best love. May God bless and keep you."

Her heart almost stopped beating as she stared at the writing, especially the word "Dane." What did it mean? she asked herself. It must be her own Dane; there could not be two. Was this his book? Was this his home? Then a sudden thought flashed into her mind, and something which had greatly worried and puzzled her passed like the mist before the morning sun. It must be so, and she understood now why Dane had not told her.

Rising swiftly to her feet, she approached the couch.

"Are you Dane Norwood's father?" she asked in a voice that trembled with emotion and excitement.

With a gurgling cry, the man sat bolt upright, and glared at the girl.

"Why do you ask me that?" he demanded. "How dare you mention that name in this house? What do you know about him?"

"I know him to be one of the best men I have ever met. Next to my father I love him more than any one in the world."

"You do!" It was all the man could say, so great was his astonishment. He dropped back upon the pillow, breathing heavily, and clutching hard at his side.

"Yes, I know him," Jean continued, "and I think I understand now why he never told me about you. And he had good reason, too."

"And he never told you what kind of a being I am?" the man asked in a hoarse whisper.

"He said nothing about you at all."

"Are you sure, Miss? Didn't he tell you how I forced him to leave home, and told him never to come here again?"

"He said nothing to me about it, Mr. Timon. He never mentioned your name, and when I asked him about his father, he always changed the subject."

"My God! Did he!" The man's hands clutched hard at the blanket, and his eyes turned upon the girl's face expressed something of the agony of his soul. "And he never betrayed me," he murmured as if to himself. "Did he tell you about his mother?"

"Oh, yes, he often spoke to me about her, and told me what a noble woman she was. He said that he owed everything to her."

"He did, eh? Well, I guess it's true. She influenced him more than I did, and that was why he left after her death."

"Why was that?"

"He followed her in loyalty to King George. Later he joined the King's rangers, and became Davidson's chief courier, 'The King's Arrow,' as he is called. That was more than I could stand."

"And so you had a fight?"

"No, not a fight, Miss. I was hot, I acknowledge, but Dane never said a word. I can't forget, though, the look in his eyes as he left me, and I have not seen him since."

"But you have heard about him, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, reports of his doings reach me from time to time; that is all." The man sighed, and shifted a little to an easier position.

"Would you like to see him?" Jean asked. "I am sure that he would be only too glad to come to you."

"Do you think so, Miss? But why should he come after what I said to him?"

"Because he is so noble and true. You little know what he is to me. Look," and she raised her hand to the arrow at her throat, "he gave me this. It is a token of our love. He made it with his own hands from a coin given to him by his mother. It was the means of saving me from the slashers. Kitty saw it first, and it told her about me."

"Your story is really wonderful, girl, and I am thankful that you have been saved. It means more to me than you imagine."

"In what way?"

"Don't you know? Because you were saved, you and those Indians were on hand to deliver me from that moose."

"So that is the reason, then, why you are so kind to me, and allowed those supplies to go to those needy Loyalists."

"No it is not," was the curt reply. "My life is of little value to any one. It's because you are James Sterling's daughter; that's why. I would do anything for his sake. He was a good friend of mine, and so was his wife."

"I am thankful that you knew them. Was it for long, Mr. Norwood?"

"Why do you call me that?"

"Isn't that your name?"

"Heavens! No. I am Thomas Norman, your father's old friend."

At this confession Jean uttered a cry of amazement, and stared at the man before her. She was almost too confused to think, so overwhelming was her emotion. She felt that she must be dreaming, so wonderful did it all appear.

"Yes," the man continued, "it is better for you to know all, and it relieves my mind. Dane took the first part of his right name, and merely changed the second. Now you understand all."

Jean did understand, and it gave her cause for much thought. She sat down and gazed silently into the fire. How glad her father would be to know that his friend was alive. And yet he would be greatly distressed when he learned that he was a rebel. Could they ever be friends again? she wondered. This modern Timon, with such hatred in his heart to the King and the Loyalists, was not the man her father had known in the days of old. Loyalty with the latter was a vital thing, and how could he endure a man so bitterly opposed to the King?

The invalid surmised her thoughts as he watched her. She presented a charming picture, ensconced in the deep chair, and he could well understand how Dane must love her. He had always longed for a daughter, and of the many girls he had ever known, the one now before him appealed to him most of all. She was the only white woman who had entered his house since his wife's death, and he had been strongly drawn to her from the first time of meeting. Living so much among rough, rebellious men, he had acquired many of their ways. But in the presence of this sweet, gentle girl these had vanished like ice before the bright sun, and the real nobleness of his nature re−asserted itself. He was tired of the life he had been living for years. He longed for companions after his own heart, and a home such as he had known in the past. And what a home the girl before him would make! And reconciled to his only son, what a heaven on earth it would be!

CHAPTER XXVI

BEHIND THE BOLTED DOOR

When Thomas Norman fled with his wife and child from the restraining bonds of civilisation and became the leader of a band of lawless rovers of the wild, he little realised how far−reaching would be the effect of his rash and hasty action. In the spirit of revenge he had sown the wind, but he had forgotten the whirlwind that one day he would be called upon to reap. For a time he had rejoiced in flaming the embers of rebellion against the King, thinking thus to get more than even for his imaginary injury. The war had filled him with delight, and he did everything in his power to arouse the people, both whites and Indians, against King George. For a while he was certain of success, especially when assistance came from the rebelling states in the form of presents for the Indians and a personal letter from General Washington, accompanied by belts of wampum. For a time he made remarkable progress, and so stirred the Indians that at last they started on the warpath against the English. Ninety canoes filled with warriors headed down river to ravage the country around Fort Howe. But they were met by James Simonds, the trader at Portland Point, and a conference was held along the river. Before giving an answer, the head chief, Pierre Tomah, said that he must consult the Divine being. So throwing himself upon his face in the sand, he lay motionless for the space of nearly an hour. Then rising, he informed the other chiefs that he had been advised by the Great Spirit to keep peace with King George's men. After that a treaty was signed at Fort Howe. General Washington's presents were delivered up, the Indians drank the health of the King, they were feasted and presented with numerous gifts. All this was a great blow to Thomas Norman, although he continued to inflame the few Indians who still remained rebellious as well as the renegade white men.

His wife, a gentle and refined woman, never agreed with him in his disloyalty to the King. At first she pleaded and reasoned, but at last gave up in despair, and devoted herself to her simple household affairs, and the training of her one child, the only comfort of her solitary life. When at length she left him and he laid her body to rest at the foot of a big pine tree, he was a heart−broken man. He understood when it was too late what she had meant to him. Then when Dane, influenced by his mother's teaching, left him to become one of the King's rangers, his cup of sorrow was filled to overflowing. For months after he lived a lonely life within his silent house, dreaded by the slashers and Indians alike. The latter shunned his solitary abode, and always spoke of him on rare occasions as the chief with the "twisted head."

When, however, the English forces were defeated, and the war brought to a close, Norman's hopes again revived. He became active once more, feeling certain that the Indians and others would now side with the conquerors and wrest England's grip from the valley of the St. John River. The King's mast−cutters had been a source of continual worry to him. Why should those great pines be used for the royal navy? he asked. They

belonged to the natives and other occupants of the land, and should be reserved for future needs. The marking of the choicest trees with the broad arrow filled his heart with bitterness, and his words so aroused the rebel brood around him that they decided to drive the mast−cutters out of the country, and put a stop to the business. The arrival of thousands of Loyalists also stirred him deeply, and he spread the report, which was readily taken up, that the newcomers would settle on all the good land, slaughter the game, and force the rightful owners to leave.

The failure of the attempt upon the Loyalists during the fall, and the carrying of Flazeet and Rauchad to Fort Howe had only embittered the rebels who had not taken part in the affair. They roused to action, and determined to wreak revenge upon the mast−cutters between the St. John and the A−jem−sek. They had arranged their plans with much secrecy, but they learned at the last minute that in some mysterious manner word had reached the rangers, who were hastening to the assistance of the King's men. There was, accordingly, no time to lose. They must strike at once, and then vanish into the depths of the forest.

Thomas Norman was well aware of this proposed attack upon the mast−cutters. Although he did not oppose it, he took little interest in the matter. In fact, he had very little ambition for anything. He was feeling somewhat weary during the fall, and the silence of his house was more depressing than ever. During the lonely days, and still more lonely nights, he thought much about the past. He knew that he had made a failure of life, and that he had nothing to live for now. At times he would endeavor to fan the coals of rebellion by reading "King Lear," "Timon of Athens," and the story of Old Aeneas. But the effect was never lasting, and when the artificial stimulation subsided he was more depressed than ever.

Such was his mood the day he rushed forth from the unbearable loneliness of his house and encountered the moose. The accident, and the meeting with the girl had aroused him for a while, and his old−time spirit of rebellion flared up in his passionate outburst against the King and the Loyalists. But it was only temporary, and when he learned that the girl was James Sterling's daughter, he was forced to capitulate. He made a few spasmodic efforts after that, but the gentleness of the girl, together with the fact that she knew and loved Dane, swept everything else away.

His great concern now was about the rebels. They could march against the mast−cutters if they wished, but he did not want them to see Jean. He knew what they were like, and when their coarse brutal natures became inflamed through liquor, there was no telling what they might do. For this reason he had urged Dave to turn them aside, and induce them to march straight overland. Of the success of this plan he had little hope, as the slashers knew of the rum he kept on hand, and for that they would come, if for nothing else.

So that night as he lay there watching Jean as she sat before the fire, he listened intently, expecting every minute to hear the voices and steps of the undesired rebels. Bitterly now he regretted his action in the past, and almost cursed himself for his blind folly. Several times he was on the point of warning Jean of her danger. But how could he tell her, and what good would it do? There was no place where she could go for protection, and he was helpless to aid her. His only comfort lay in the hope that he could influence the men by making them think that she was his daughter. This, he knew, would be but a poor excuse, and it was hardly likely that they would believe him. They were well aware that he had no daughter, and would look upon the girl's presence in the house in one light only. A groan escaped his lips as he thought of this.

"Are you suffering much?" Jean asked, going to his side. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Not for me, I'm afraid," was the reply. "There is something, though, that you can do. I may have visitors to−night, and no doubt they will be hungry. Do you think you could carry those provisions into this room? I don't want the men to disturb you. I hope those sacks will not be too heavy."

"I think I can do it," Jean replied. "Where shall I put them?"

"As near the door there as possible. And the rum; don't forget that, I was going to ask you to pour it out in the snow for fear that the men might drink too much. But that might not be wise. They know I have it, and if they do not get it they might become ugly."

It took Jean some time to carry and drag in the supplies and stack them in a corner near the door. She understood fairly well the meaning of this, and it filled her heart with a nameless fear. This was increased when she had with difficulty brought in the rum, and stood panting after the exertion.

"There is a strong bolt on the door of your room," Norman explained. "It might be well to keep it fastened when the men are here, for one can never tell what might happen."

"You think there will be danger, then?" Jean asked, as she sat down in the big chair.

"There is always danger more or less with those men around. When I was well I could keep them within bounds. But now I am helpless. And, besides, you are here, and that makes a difference."

"I must keep out of sight, then."

"It might be just as well. I am afraid that Dave has told the men about you, so they will be anxious to see my−−my daughter."

Jean asked no further questions, but her face was very pale and her heart beat fast. She felt more helpless than she had been when with her Indian captors upon the river. What could she do to defend herself? She thought of the guns in the other room, and wondered if they were loaded. She might use them, but what could one woman do against a band of lawless men? Anyway, she was determined to do almost anything to defend herself, if necessary.

Slowly the evening wore away, and anxiously Jean listened to every sound. The man on the cot slept, and at times muttered words which the girl could not understand. She felt inexpressibly lonely, and she often glanced toward the small window as if expecting to see faces peering in upon her. She did not dare to sleep lest the slashers should come and catch her off guard. How she longed for Sam and Kitty. What a comfort they would be.

At length she rose to her feet, crossed the room, opened the door and looked out. It was not a dark night, but the moon, now almost at the full, was invisible. A keen wind was driving over the land and it sounded among the trees the same as it did before the storm she enjoyed so much in the lodge by the lake. How weird appeared the great trees, and she imagined she could see menacing forms watching her from their sombre depths. She knew where lay the trail by which the slashers would come, and she kept her eyes fixed in that direction. At the back of the house another trail began, which led to the St. John River, so Sam had told her, and passed the very place where the mast−cutters were at work. This to the lonely girl seemed the trail of hope, while the other was the trail of doom.

She was about to close the door, for the wind was piercing, when casting a final glance toward the forest, she caught sight of dim forms moving swiftly and silently toward the house. That they were the dreaded slashers she had not the slightest doubt. Quickly she shut the door, and hastened over to the cot. Norman opened his eyes and looked at her in a dazed manner.

"They are coming!" she cried. "I have seen them!"

"Where are they?" the man asked, rising to a sitting position.

"Just out there," and she motioned to the right.

"Hurry up, then, and go into the other room. Bolt the door, and put out the light."

Jean needed no further bidding. In another minute she had the door securely fastened, and the candle blown out. She then took up her position in a dark corner, where with fast−beating heart she waited to hear what might take place in the adjoining room.

CHAPTER XXVII

THROUGH THE NIGHT AND THE STORM

In a few minutes the slashers arrived. Jean could hear them quite distinctly, and her heart sank within her as she listened to their laughter and rough talk. They were in a merry mood, she could plainly tell, and although she could not understand all they said, she was well aware that they were asking for her and the rum. From this she knew that Dave had told them of her presence in the house, and she wondered whether they would try to force their way into her room. She glanced in the direction of the muskets, and although she could not see them, the thought that they were there gave her some comfort.

Standing where she was it was impossible to hear plainly, so stepping to the door, she put her ear down close to a crack through which the light was streaming. She listened intently to all that was taking place, although at first it was difficult to make out any sense from the babel of voices. Occasionally she could hear Norman's voice urging the men to be quiet or to leave the house. That the visitors had found the rum was quite evident, for she could hear them dipping the mug into the liquor, followed by expressions of satisfaction.

"Dat's good rum, chief," she heard one say. "Where you get it, eh?"

"Where it all comes from, of course," Norman sternly replied. "You must not drink too much of it."

"Oh, it'll take more'n dat to knock me out."

"Don't be too sure of that. The mast−cutters are no babies, and you'll need to be in good condition when you meet them."

"I don't care for no damn mast−cutters. Rum's my best friend when I fight dem."

"Hear, hear!" another shouted. "Good fer you, Jerry! We're with you on that. Rum puts hell into us, an' makes us fight like the devil."

"But the mast−cutters can fight, too," Norman reminded. "They are well armed, remember."

"'Spose they are, what of it? They won't have time to use their guns. They'll all be asleep when we arrive."

"But what about the rangers?"

"They'll never touch us. We'll have the job done, an' the camp wiped out before they get there. We're no fools."

"They rounded up Flazeet and his men last fall, though. How did they hear about that attack?"

"How did they hear? Flazeet talked too much; that was the trouble. But we're different. We'll not get caught."

"But Davidson has his men everywhere. Perhaps he has already warned the mast−cutters, so they may be waiting for you."

"Well, let them wait. We'll have that bunch with us from the Washademoak, an' you know what devils they are to fight."

"When do you expect to meet them?"

"To−morrow sometime. Then at night we'll drop in to see our friends, the mast−cutters, an' settle up an old score once an' fer all."

What was said further Jean could not distinguish, for several men just then lifted up their voices in a rough song, showing that the rum was already taking effect. But what she had heard caused her great uneasiness. She understood now the object of these men. They were to march against the mast−cutters, sweep down upon them in the dead of night, and murder them all. She shuddered as she thought of this. Something must be done to warn the mast−cutters of their danger. They were the King's men, and it would not do to allow them to be slain without a chance of defending themselves. Why should she not go and give the warning? This idea at first seemed foolish. How could she find the way? Would she dare to traverse the forest alone? But the more she thought of it, the more she felt that she was the one who should undertake the task. If she did not do something she could never forgive herself. And what would her father say if he knew that she had hesitated in the path of duty? It was a hard battle she fought as she crouched there in the dark corner. She pictured to herself the gloomy forest, the uncertainty of the way, and the struggle necessary before she could reach the mast−cutters. Cautiously she crept to the little window and peered out. How dismal and forbidding seemed the forest. She could see the tree−tops waving and the snow swirling before the wind. The prospect of going forth alone on such a night was far from cheerful.

She was about to leave the window when a bearded face was suddenly pressed against the glass. With a gasp of fear she staggered back, and fled to the darkness of her corner. And there she crouched, waiting with wide−staring eyes for what would happen next.

The voices in the adjoining room were becoming louder and more boisterous. What she presently heard caused her to straighten suddenly up, and a chill to sweep through her body. The men were calling for her, and demanding the chief to bring her to them.

"We want the girl," she heard one man say.

"You won't get her," Norman replied. "She is my daughter, and you must not touch her."

"Your daughter, be damned! You ain't got no daughter. You can't git that off on us. She's in the other room, an' we want her quick."

What Norman said in reply Jean could not understand, for the noise the men were making. But she did hear some one trying the door, and cursing because he could not get it open. She knew now that the critical moment had arrived. There was no time to lose. She must leave the place and nee to the shelter of the forest. That was her only hope.

By the dim light of the dying fire she donned the coat, cap and mitts that Kitty had made for her. Then seizing her snow−shoes, she cautiously opened the back door. As she did so she could hear the other door creaking beneath the weight of several bodies pressing against it from the opposite side. That it would soon give way she felt certain, so she must make her escape while there was time. Stepping out into the night, she looked fearfully around. Seeing no one, she sped along the trail, and in another minute was within the sheltering arms of the great forest. Here she paused and looked back. Nothing could she see but the house standing black and drear in the midst of the little clearing.

It took her but a few minutes to arrange her snowshoes on her feet, and she had just straightened herself up

from her stooping position when a crash and a medley of shouts fell upon her ears. She knew the meaning of these sounds, and her heart beat wildly. The door had been burst open, and the men were in the room searching for her. Presently she saw several come out of the house and look around. Waiting to see no more, she sped along the trail which stretched out before her. Never had she travelled with such speed, her great fear urging her forward. Would the slashers follow her? she asked herself. At times she stopped and listened with the strained attention of a hunted animal. But nothing could she hear, so encouraged she pressed onward.

At first she did not find the walking difficult, owing partly to her excitement and the freedom she felt in being away from the house of dread. She had no trouble in following the trail, for sufficient light sifted down through the trees to show the beaten track. She wondered who had travelled that way as she had not heard Norman refer to any one coming from the great river. She had no idea as to the time of night, although she hoped that it might be late for then she could look forward more hopefully to the dawn. That the trail would lead her to the mast−cutters she had not the slightest doubt, so this gave her considerable comfort.

She had been travelling about an hour when the snow began to fall. Among the trees it did not at first impede her progress, but she could tell by the roaring overhead that a heavy storm was abroad. When crossing a wild meadow or a small inland lake she experienced some of the force of the wind, and the snow almost blinded her. She was always glad when the trail led once more into the shelter of the woods.

At length, however, a sudden weariness came upon her. The walking grew heavy, and she was finding much difficulty in following the trail. Occasionally she stepped aside and sank into the deep snow, out of which she struggled with great effort. Each time it was harder to extricate herself, and her feet would slip provokingly off the snow−shoes. And all the time the storm increased in fury, reminding her of that other storm when she was at the little lake. But it had a different meaning to her now. As it tore through the branches overhead it sounded like the voice of destruction rather than grand martial music. The swaying and creaking trees seemed like an army of monsters about to fall upon her. The helplessness of her situation overwhelmed her. What could she do against the fury of the elements? Why had she ventured forth alone and unaided? It was foolish to think that she could reach the mast−cutters. But then she knew that the forces of nature were more merciful than those wretched slashers she had left behind. Better to fall in the midst of the great forest, and let the snow enshroud her body, than to allow brutes in the forms of men to lay their vile hands upon her. But she would win. She must not give up. She would go on.

Step by step she slowly pushed her way through the forest and the night. She longed for morning, for the blessed light of day to dispel the gloomy shades around her. But it was a long time coming, and she was so weary. Often now she paused to rest, each time longer than the last. At length she felt that she could go no farther. She could not find the trail from which she had wandered, and the snow was deep. She floundered about for a few minutes, and then with a cry of despair she looked wildly around. What was she to do? She knew that she was lost, yes, lost in the mighty woods where no aid could reach her. She thought of the mast−cutters. She must reach them, and warn them of their danger. What would her father and Dane think if she failed in her duty? But would they ever know of the efforts she had made? Would her body ever be found? No, no, it must not be. She would not give up. She must not die there. The mast−cutters must be warned.

Under the inspiration of this resolve she again started forward. She pressed bravely on her way, wearily dragging her snow−shoes which now were so heavy. For a few minutes she moved onward. But her strength was soon spent, and a great weakness swept upon her. She staggered from side to side, and fought hard to stand upright. She grew bewildered, and the trees seemed to be whirling around her. The roaring of the storm overhead sounded like the voice of a demon mocking at her despair. She could endure it no longer; she felt that she was going out of her mind.

"Daddy, daddy! Dane, Dane!" she called, but only the wind replied with a wild shriek to her passionate appeal for help.

Against a great tree she leaned her tired body for support. But it was of little assistance in her distress. It could not reach out sheltering arms, neither could it whisper words of comfort and hope. Gradually her body weakened, drooped, and then like a tired child she sank upon the snow at the foot of the lordly pine. The wind continued its roaring in the trees, and the snow sifting down through their branches whitened the still, huddled form below.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WITHIN THE LONE CABIN

The delay which kept Dane Norwood at Fort Howe as chief witness against the two rebel leaders was hard for him to endure. He longed to be away in his search for the missing girl. At times he was like a caged lion just from the jungle, and threatened bodily harm to a number of soldiers of the garrison. When at last free, he and Pete lost no time in heading up the river, straight for the little settlement below Oak Point. Here he was joyfully received by the Loyalists, and the scraps of news he was enabled to impart were eagerly received and discussed for days. He told them of the trial and conviction of Flazeet and Rauchad, and that their punishment would undoubtedly be very severe. He related the hardships of the Loyalists who had come to Portland Point with the fall fleet. Some had gone up river, but others, chiefly disbanded soldiers, were having a serious time. They had pitched their tents in a most exposed place, thatched them with spruce boughs, and banked them with snow. But the suffering was so terrible that numbers had already died. This was sad news to the settlers, and they considered themselves fortunate in their comfortable abodes, with sufficient food and fuel to last them through the hard winter.

Colonel Sterling had aged greatly since Dane last saw him. He was much stooped, and his hair and beard whiter than ever. His eyes expressed the agony of his soul. They, more than anything else, revealed to Dane what he had undergone since the loss of his daughter. He uttered no complaint, and when the young man entered his house he had asked no questions. He knew all too well that Dane's search had been in vain. He said little that evening, but listened with bowed head as the courier related his experiences during the past few weeks. But Old Mammy was not so reticent, and asked Dane no end of questions, and begged him to bring back her lost darling.

"De Lo'd will not let dem Injuns keep my lil'l lamb," she declared. "Yo' kin find her, Mistah Dane, an' bring her back to me. I pray fo' her ebbery night an' all tro de day. I know yo' will come agin, an' bring my los' lamb wif yo'."

The next day Dane and Pete left the settlement and headed up river. They started early and travelled hard. They were well aware that a storm was not far off, so Dane wished to be well up the Washademoak before the tempest burst. He knew of the band of Indians far inland, and there he hoped to find Jean. It was the most likely place where she would be taken, so he reasoned. But if he could not find her there, he would no doubt learn something of her whereabouts.

He parted with Pete at the entrance to this stream early that afternoon, as he wished to send the Indian to Oromocto with a message to Davidson. As for himself he could not take the time to go as every hour was precious. With feverish haste he pressed on alone, planning to travel all night, if possible. It was a dreary and desolate region through which he moved, with not a sign of life anywhere. His snow−shoes bent and creaked beneath his great strides, tossing the snow aside like spray from a ship's bow. The weight of his musket, and the pack of food upon his back impeded him not in the slightest degree. He was a giant of the trail, sturdy of body, sound in wind, and possessed of remarkable endurance. He had to be all these to be chief of the royal rangers in the service of William Davidson. He knew what it was to travel day and night, bearing some message of importance, so the journey ahead was nothing out of the ordinary. But he had a greater mission now than ever before, and this inspired him to more strenuous efforts. The vision of a fair face was constantly with him, and the thought that Jean needed his help drove him forward like the wind.

The short afternoon was waning as he rounded a bend in the stream. To the left was a small cove, and it was here that one of the trails overland to the Great Lake and the river beyond began. Dane knew of the log cabin tucked away among the trees which served as a resting−place to weary travellers. He had often stopped there, but he had no intention of doing so now when every minute was so precious. Keeping straight on his way, he had almost reached the point on the upper side of the cove, when he came across a well−beaten trail leading to the cabin. He examined it carefully and with considerable interest. He knew at once that a large body of men had recently passed that way, and he wondered who they could be.

Dane's suspicions at once became aroused, for who else but the slashers would be travelling in a body from the Washademoak? He did not relish the idea of stopping to investigate, but he knew that this was his duty as a King's ranger. With a slight exclamation of annoyance, he went ashore and plunged into the forest in order to come close to the cabin under cover of the trees. It would not do to follow in on the beaten trail lest the slashers should be near. He must not be seen by his old−time enemies, so caution was necessary.

It took him but a short time to come in sight of the cabin, and when a few rods away he paused and listened. But not a sound could he hear, so thus emboldened, he stepped up close to the door. The snow around the building had been beaten down by numerous moccasined feet, and looking to the right, he saw where the visitors had left the place by the overland route.

And as he stood there a groan from within the cabin fell upon his ears, followed by a weak, wailing cry for help. Quickly he pushed open the door and entered. At first he could see nothing, but as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he detected a form huddled upon the floor, almost at his feet.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"I'm dying!" was the reply. "Fer God's sake, help me!"

"Who are you, anyway? and what has happened?"

"I'm Bill Botreau, an' the slashers have fixed me. Tom's dead. That's him jist over there."

Drawing a small candle from his pocket, Dane stepped over to the fire−place, and lighted it at one of the live coals which still remained. He was thus enabled to see more clearly, and the sight which met his eyes gave him a severe shock. Everything in the room was smashed to pieces, table, benches, and bunks. It was evident that a great fight had taken place, and the victors had departed leaving their two victims upon the floor.

Dane paid no heed to the dead man in a corner of the room, but turned his attention to the wounded one near the door. He could not see his face, and as he looked he gave a sudden start, for lying before him was one of the three men who had attacked him at Portland Point.

"Where are you hurt?" he asked.

"Here," and the man placed his hand to his left side. "One of them devils jabbed me with his knife. Oh!" His hand dropped, and his face became distorted with pain.

Dane felt certain that the injured man could live but a short time, so he must gain all the information possible. He stooped and held the candle low.

"Do you know me?" he asked.

The prostrate man stared hard at his face for a few seconds, but manifested no sign of recognition.

"I guess you don't," Dane continued. "But I know you as one of the men who attacked me last May at Portland Point. I am Dane Norwood, the King's ranger."

"Good Lord!" Botreau gasped. "Do it quick, then, fer God's sake."

"Do what?"

"Finish what them devils nearly did. I deserve it."

"I'm not a brute even if you are," Dane declared. "I want to help you, not kill you."

"But I'm beyond help, an' will soon be like Tom there."

"How did it happen?"

"Too much rum an' a fight. We've not been on good terms with the gang since Seth Lupin's death. They blamed us fer their troubles."

"What! Is Seth dead? Who killed him?" This was important news to Dane.

"Yes, Seth's dead, but who killed him I don't know. It was awful!"

"Where? When?"

"Up stream, just outside the lodge where the Indians had left the Colonel's daughter."

He paused, but Dane laid a heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"Go on," he ordered, in a voice filled with intense excitement. "Where is the girl? Is she safe?"

"Blamed if I know. We got them Injuns to carry her off fer Seth. Then that night jist as he was about to enjoy her company something happened. Me an' my pardners were waitin' fer him to come back, but he never came. At last gittin' anxious, we went to see what was the matter, an' there we found Seth layin' on the ground dead. I tell you it was awful. I ain't been any good since."

"What became of the girl?" Dane questioned.

"I don't know. She was gone when we got to the lodge. It must have been the devil that killed Seth an' carried off the girl."

"Nonsense," Dane impatiently chided. "Don't be such a fool as to believe that."

"But if you'd seen the marks upon Seth's throat, you'd say it was the work of the devil, an' no human bein'. An' there are others who think the same, too."

"What happened after that?"

"The gang came, an' they chased Injun Sam. But they made a mess of that job, an' got scared 'most to death."

"What did they chase Sam for?"

"Oh, some thought that he was the one who killed Seth an' carried off the girl. He had been seen hangin'

around, an' so he was suspected. But it wasn't Sam, I tell ye. It was the devil, an' they found that out to their sorrow."

"In what way?"

"They were campin' one night in the woods when in a twinklin' they were all knocked senseless. When they came to, their guns, grub, an' everything else was gone. Now, if the Injuns had done it, they wouldn't have left one of the gang alive. They were 'most scared to death, so they are certain now that it was the devil."

"So you haven't heard anything more about the Colonel's daughter?" Dane queried.

"Nuthin'."

All this was valuable news to Dane, and it filled him with a great hope. He was not superstitious, so the idea of the devil did not affect him in the least. It was Sam, no doubt, who had rescued Jean, and was taking good care of her. His heart now was lighter than it had been since her capture. But where was Sam? He must find him as soon as possible. He knew where he generally camped, so he determined to go there at once.

In his excitement he had forgotten, however, about the slashers who had recently left the cabin. But his mind reverted to them as he looked at the helpless, suffering creature before him.

"Where are the slashers going?" he asked.

"Against the mast−cutters," was the reply. "They have been plannin' this fer some time, an' are expectin' to meet the men from the north to−morrow. I hope to God they'll git the surprise of their lives. They're devils, that's what they are, an' I hope the mast−cutters'll kill every damn one of them. Look what they've done to me an' Tom."

"When are they planning to attack the mast−cutters?"

"Sometime to−morrow night. They're plannin' to murder every one of them. An' they'll do it fer sure, the devils, unless the mast−cutters are warned."

This Dane realised was only too true, and the blood surged madly through his veins. He must reach the camp first and warn the men of their danger. And he would lead them against the slashers, for nothing would give him greater satisfaction than to surprise and confound those skulking rebels. His heart turned toward Jean, and he longed to go in search of her. But now, as when standing near that line drawn in the sand, duty came first. He felt that Jean was safe, but the lives of the King's men were at stake, so there must be no hesitation on his part. But what was he to do with the injured man? That he was in a critical condition, he was well aware, but how bad he did not know. It was getting dark now, and he could not delay much longer.

"When did the slashers leave here?" he asked.

"When?" Botreau repeated in a dazed manner. "I don't know when. But it seems an age."

"Then, I must get ahead of them, and warn the mast−cutters."

But the stricken man gave a pitiful cry, and reaching out, caught Dane feebly by the hand.

"Don't leave me," he pleaded. "I'm dyin', an' I'm afraid to die alone. Oh, it's terrible here, an' I'm gettin' so weak. I wonder what makes this room so dark. An' it's cold, too. Fix the fire, won't ye, an' lay me near it."

Dane stooped and held the candle close to the man's face. He knew that he was dying, bleeding to death, for the floor was wet with blood. There was nothing that he could do, and of no use would it be to attend to the fire. No earthly heat could now warm the body of the wretched man before him. All he could do was to watch and wait while the life slowly ebbed away.

For a few minutes silence reigned in the room, broken only by the dying man's laboured breathing. At length he slightly lifted his head and looked wildly around.

"Keep back!" he cried. "Don't touch me! I didn't steal the girl! I didn't, I say!"

"Hush, hush," Dane soothed, kneeling by his side and taking his hand in his. "I won't let anything touch you."

But nothing could comfort the unhappy man. He fought his imaginary foe, and pleaded to be saved.

"It's the devil that did it, I tell ye," he wailed. "Look, there's the marks of his fingers upon Seth. Don't let him get me, for God's sake, don't!"

Never before had Dane been in such an awkward predicament. It was hard to listen to the raving man when he could do nothing to help him. And all the time it was getting later, and he should be on his way to warn the King's men. He rose to his feet, stepped to the door, and looked out. It was blowing hard, and he knew that the storm was not far off. He must get away before it burst.

A peculiar sound from the man on the floor caused him to hasten to his side. In an instant he saw that all was over, and that the earthly career of Bill Botreau was ended.

There was little now that Dane could do. He did not fancy the idea of leaving the bodies lying there uncovered, so going outside he cut and carried in a large armful of spruce boughs. These he spread carefully over the bodies.

"It is more than your own gang would do," he mused. "You were contemptible men, I know, but not as bad, perhaps, as those villains who left you here. They must be checked and paid back in double coin for all their devilish work, and I want to be on hand when payment is being made."

CHAPTER XXIX

SHELTERING ARMS

Having closed the cabin door, Dane stepped into his snow−shoes, slung his pack over his shoulders, and started forth after the slashers. He carried his gun in his hand that he might be ready for any emergency. It was not hard to follow the trail, and the travelling much easier than when out upon the river. Although he moved rapidly forward, he was keenly alert to every sight and sound. How far the rebels would go without camping he had no idea. He knew that at times they travelled all night and slept by day. If they intended to do so now it would be necessary for him to exert every effort in order to overtake them. He was well aware that as a rule they did not travel fast, being too indolent and lazy, so in this lay his only hope of outstripping the villains.

His course lay through the heart of a large forest, straight overland, and north of where the Loyalists were encamped on the A−jem−sek. Up hill and down he sped, pausing not for an instant, with powerful swinging strides that would have tested even Pete's great endurance. That he had been travelling since early morning, with the exception of his brief stay at the cabin, seemed to make no difference to him. Davidson had made no mistake in choosing such a man as his chief ranger.

Hour after hour he sped onward through the silent, sombre forest. The wind increased in violence, and the trees swayed and creaked as the tempest tore through their branches. The storm was not far off, and might burst at any minute.

Reaching at length the summit of a hill, he paused to eat some of the cold meat and a piece of the bread Old Mammy had given him that morning. He was about to continue his journey when the report of a gun rang through the forest. The sound issued from valley below, reminding him that the slashers must be quite near. Cautiously now he moved down the hill, peering keenly ahead, not knowing what to expect next. In a few minutes a glimmer of light filtered among the trees, showing that the rebels were camped by a little brook which ran through the valley. As he slowly advanced, the light became brighter, until presently a blazing camp−fire burst upon his eyes. Around this the slashers were ringed, jabbering and quarrelling in an excited manner. What they were saying Dane could not tell, but as he crept nearer, moving from tree to tree, he saw a human body lying in the snow a short distance from the fire. That it was one of the slashers he felt certain, and the explanation of the shot he had heard. He was not surprised at this, for he knew a great deal about the brutal and inhuman nature of these creatures. They disgusted him, and he was more determined than ever to round them up and put an end to their lawless career. There before him was almost the last of the gang which for years had proven such a menace to the country, and interfered with the King's mast−cutters. That this was a final desperate effort on their part he was sure. He was very glad to be on hand to confound them in their undertaking.

Leaving the slashers to their own devices, he doubled back upon the trail for a short distance, plunged off into the deep snow, encircled the camp, and at length came upon the trail farther ahead. He travelled slower now, as there was no special hurry. He believed that the slashers would remain in the valley for some time, and perhaps wait for dawn before continuing their march.

After awhile he came to the valley where stood the cabin from which he had fled several years before. He knew every foot of the place, for here he had often come with his mother. This was her favorite walk, and he recalled how fond she was of watching him as he played among the trees and by the little brook. He understood now something of what it must have meant to such a woman to live for years in the wilderness, cut off from all social life of which she had been so fond, and meeting no one of her own sex except the few Indian women who occasionally visited the house.

A strong feeling of resentment rose up in Dane's heart against his father who had submitted so noble a woman to such a living death. It had not been his intention to go near the house from which he had been driven. But now a great longing came upon him to descend the valley and view the building at close quarters. Was his father sitting alone there? he wondered, and did he ever think with any degree of fondness of his outcast son?

Drawn by an overmastering impulse he moved rapidly down the valley. Before reaching the clearing where the cabin stood, he turned aside, ascended the right bank, and stopped at length beneath a great pine. Here was a wooden cross, and as Dane stood and looked upon it his eyes grew misty with tears. He remembered, as if it were but yesterday, the morning he and his father had borne hither the frail body of the one who had been everything to him. She had requested that this should be her last resting−place where the storms of winter could not reach the spot, and where the wind would make music in the trees overhead. The day was very bright when they laid her there, and the birds were singing and twittering about them. But for him there was no sunshine, for his heart was almost breaking with grief. He knew that his father felt badly, too, for his voice faltered as he began to read the Burial Service. The grave was covered with snow now, and he wondered if his father ever visited the place. But had the ground been bare, he would have known. The well−worn path leading from the house to the grave would have told its own tale. The big pine knew, and if endowed with the power of human speech it would have told how every day during the summer a lonely man came to that spot and covered the grave with fresh wild flowers, sometimes remaining for hours, often with tears coursing down his cheeks. Had the young man known of this he would not have felt so bitter toward the one who had treated him so harshly.

Leaving at length the spot which was so sacred to him, Dane came to the edge of the clearing. Here he stopped and looked intently at the cabin before him. A light shone through the little window, and he heard sounds of voices within. Then he started and hurried swiftly forward, for loud, coarse oaths fell upon his ears. What he had feared was actually happening. The rebels from the north were there awaiting the coming of the others from the Washademoak. His father, then, had not changed. Would he lead the slashers against the mast−cutters? he wondered. The latter must be warned of their danger, but how could he go out with them and fight against his own father? The thought brought the perspiration in beads to his forehead. What would his mother say and think were she alive?

At first he was tempted to go to the house and peer upon the group within. He banished this idea, however, as he did not wish to see his father in the midst of the miserable slashers. He accordingly swung around to the back of the house and entered upon the trail leading to the river beyond. He paused but once to look back and to listen to the sounds issuing from the cabin. Then, with a troubled mind, he continued on his way.

He had not proceeded far when the storm swept upon him. This affected him but little now, for he was thinking of his father and the days when his mother was alive. Old memories came back to him, aroused by the familiar scenes he had just left behind. His was a nature in which sentiment played a large part. This was somewhat due to his early training when his mother had thrilled him with stories of England's greatness, and the glory of the cross−marked flag. She had also taught him to respect womanhood, and she never wearied of talking to him about the beautiful and noble women she had known and loved in her early days. She also sang sweet, homely songs of love and gallant deeds. All these had influenced him, and made an abiding impression upon his life. It was little wonder, then, that his thoughts were sad as he turned his back upon the rebel−infested cabin which for so many years had been his happy home, and around which such fond associations lingered.

Whenever Dane thought of his mother, Jean Sterling always came into his mind. This was but natural, as they were the only two women he had ever loved. One could never come back to him, but the other was somewhere in the country, and he must find her. He longed for Pete that he might send him in search of Sam. He thought much about what the dying slasher had told him, and he was firmly convinced that the girl was with the loyal Indian.

The travelling was becoming heavier now, and the storm increasing in violence. But still he pressed on, up hill and down, over wind−swept lakes, and bleak stretches of wild meadows. But for the importance of his mission he would have sought the shelter of a friendly clump of bushes, and camped for the night. He had often done so in the past, for he could sleep as comfortably curled up in a nest of fir boughs with the snow weaving its mystic web over him as on a soft bed. But not to−night could he afford to tarry. Too much was at stake, so he must hasten on, no matter how fierce the storm or how hard the trail.

His attention was at length arrested by recently−made marks in the snow. He was woodsman enough to understand that some one was travelling that way, evidently under considerable difficulty. Several times he stopped to examine where the wayfarer had floundered about in the snow in desperate efforts to regain the trail. He wondered who it could be, so he hurried forward hoping to overtake the struggling man, for the thought of a woman never once entered his mind.

He had gone but half a mile when he came to a place where the traveller had left the trail and gone off to the right. He stood debating with himself whether to follow or not, when the sound of a human voice mingled with the roaring of the wind. What was said he could not distinguish, although he was certain that it was a call for help. Hesitating no longer, he surged rapidly forward, keeping careful watch upon the crooked tracks. Someone was in need, he was certain, who had become bewildered, lost the trail, and in despair had uttered a wild cry for help. Such cases were not uncommon, especially in winter, where men had perished, and the great forest had never revealed the secrets.

In a few minutes his keen eyes caught sight of something huddled at the foot of a lordly tree. That it was a human form he was sure, and as he stepped forward a great cry of surprise leaped from his lips. Like one almost bereft of his senses he sprang toward the girl, caught her in his arms, and looked into her white face.

"Jean! Jean!" he passionately cried. "Don't you know me, your own Dane? Open your eyes, and speak to me!"

Slowly, as if coming out of a troubled dream, the girl opened her eyes, and stared into her lover's face.

"Don't look at me that way," he pleaded. "Don't you know me? It is Dane."

Then he kissed her again, and again, beseeching her, and calling upon her to speak.

Gradually the light of understanding dawned in Jean's eyes. At first she imagined it was but a happy dream from which she would shortly awaken. But as those strong arms held her firm, and that loved face remained close to hers, she knew that in very truth it was her own Dane. Her lips parted in a glad smile, and reaching out her arms, she impulsively twined them about his neck.

"Dane! Dane!" she murmured. "How did you find me? Thank God, you came in time."

Like a tired child she rested in his sheltering arms, and gave herself up completely to his protecting care. The wind continued to roar, and the great trees rocked and swayed. But the reunited lovers paid no heed to the raging of the elements. They were together again, and nothing else mattered.

CHAPTER XXX

THE ROUND−UP

Owing to the severity of the storm all the mast−cutters of Big Lake camp suspended work, and sought refuge within their log cabins. The latter were poor affairs, inhabited as a rule by two or three men. One, however, contained twelve cutters, and here, while the tempest raged outside, they were cosy and contented. Some sat before the bright open fire, smoking and talking. Others played cards, while a few spent their time in mending their clothes.

They were a sturdy, rollicking band of men, tucked away in the depths of the forest. In the summer they did a little farming along the St. John River and its tributaries. But the inducement of good wages lured them to the camps during the long winter months. They enjoyed the life, too, tinged as it was with the spice of adventure, for they never knew when the slashers would cause trouble. They were well supplied with fire−arms and ammunition, which had been sent up river the previous summer by Major Studholme. A scrap with the rebels would have given them much satisfaction, for they were anxious to wipe out numerous old scores with their base and elusive enemy. The probability of an attack formed the main topic of conversation during the winter evenings, and many were the battles fought and won. They also discussed the mast−business, how many masts, spars, bowsprits and other timber would be taken out during the winter and floated down the river in the spring. They knew how many pieces had been stored in the mast−pond at Portland Point the previous year, and the number of vessels which had arrived to carry the sticks to England. They could also tell the dimensions of the largest masts ever cut, ranging from ninety to one hundred and twenty−five feet in length, and from thirty to forty inches in diameter, and valued at five hundred dollars and upwards apiece. There seemed to be no limit to the knowledge these men possessed of the masting−business, and they vied with one another in telling what they knew.

The arrival of the Loyalists furnished them with a new subject of conversation. But it was the abduction of Colonel Sterling's daughter which stirred them most intensely. Many of them had daughters of their own, and they sympathised with the bereaved colonel. That the slashers were responsible for the cowardly deed, they

had not the slightest doubt, and they often wondered what had become of the girl.

The short afternoon was wearing away, with the storm showing no sign of abatement. The snow piled up around the cabin, and so blocked up the little windows that the men sitting at the table were compelled to light several dip−candles in order to see the cards. Only the two men who attended the oxen in the near−by stable ventured outside, and their report of the storm made their comrades glad that they could remain indoors on such a day.

The fire had just been replenished, and the flames were roaring merrily up the big chimney, when the door was thrown unceremoniously open, and Dane Norwood staggered into the room, bearing in his arms the limp form of Jean Sterling. Amazed beyond words, the men sprang to their feet, and quickly relieved the courier of his burden just as he reeled and sank in a helpless heap upon the rough floor.

"It's Dane Norwood!" one of the men gasped, bending over the prostrate form. "What in the name of heaven has happened?"

Before any one could reply Jean was on her feet, and started to cross the room. But she tottered through weakness, and was forced to place her hands upon the table for support.

"I am Colonel Sterling's daughter," she explained to the staring mast−cutters, "and Dane Norwood saved my life. Help him, quick."

At these words several men hurried forward, lifted Dane from the floor, and laid him gently in one of the bunks arranged along the walls. They then bathed his face with water, and in a short time they had the satisfaction of seeing him open his eyes and look around. In another minute Jean was kneeling by his side, with the men standing silently near. Dane smiled as he saw the girl, and reached out his hand which she at once clasped in hers.

"What a baby I am," he said. "I didn't expect to go under this way. There must be something wrong with me."

"Don't say that," Jean remonstrated. "No other man could have done what you did. It was wonderful."

"I was afraid the slashers might overtake us," Dane replied. "Have you told the men about them?"

"Oh, no, I forgot all about them."

As briefly as possible she explained how the rebels were on their way, and planning to attack the mast−cutters that very night. Dane also related his experience at the little cabin on the shore of the Washademoak, and how he had overtaken and outstripped the slashers. He told, too, how Jean had started in the dead of night to give the warning, but becoming bewildered by the storm had wandered from the trail, and he had by chance found her and brought her into camp.

The mast−cutters were now thoroughly aroused. Word was at once sent to the various cabins, and all were ordered to prepare to march against the enemy. Muskets were brought forth and examined with the greatest care, and swords were unearthed from most unlikely places. Powder−horns were filled, and a supply of bullets doled out to each man. Snow−shoes were attended to, and complete arrangements made for an early departure.

In less than an hour's time fifty men were lined up, the final instructions issued, and the order to march given. They laughed as they breasted the wind which swept across the little clearing, and they looked like a bunch of school boys as they plunged through the snow to the shelter of the trees beyond.

As Jean stood and watched them through a tiny spot in the little window which the banked−up snow had not covered, her heart thrilled with pride. They were but humble men, she knew, yet glad and ready to maintain their Sovereign's cause in the heart of the great northern wilds. She thought of what Norman had said about King George, and a smile flitted across her face. But what did his words amount to before the stern reality of such staunch champions as these obscure mast−cutters? Men might curse and rave, but how futile they were against the spirit of loyalty implanted in the hearts of determined, rugged men.

In the meantime, the cook, the one man of the mast−cutting gang who was left behind because of his age, had prepared food and tea for the new arrivals. Dane and Jean were hungry, and thoroughly enjoyed the rough, though well−cooked meat and bread. "Old Dennis," as he was called, waited upon the visitors with considerable pleasure. His eyes twinkled with merriment as he noted the happiness of the young couple.

"This is the fust time a female woman has ever been in this shanty," he told them. "I never expected to see the day when I'd be feedin' one with me own hands, an' sich a handsome lass, at that. A storm ginrally brings something I've noticed. It was allus raining or snowin', or blowin' when a baby came to our house, an' I had to go to the neighbours fer help."

"How many children have you?" Jean asked with a smile.

"How many, Miss? Why, I 'most fergit. Now, let me see; there's Bennie, an' Susie, an' Tommy, an' the twins, an' Pete, an' Dennis, an' the baby. Oh, I fergot Martha, Sam, an' another pair of twins."

"It is no wonder you find it hard to remember how many you have," Jean replied. "It must take a great deal to feed and clothe such a large family."

"Indeed it does, Miss, an' that's why I'm cookin' here. I'm not as young as I used to be, so can't stand heavy work. But, then, I wouldn't like to lose one of me little ones. It 'ud about break the hearts of me an' me wife. When we heard about you bein' carried off in the dead of night, we cried, that's what we did, an' went an' counted all of our little lambs asleep in their beds."

"So you heard of me, did you?"

"I should say we did, Miss. Everybody knew about it. My, I'm glad to see ye safe an' sound. I do hope them slashers'll git what's comin' to 'em. I'd like to be after 'em this very minute."

"And so would I," Dane agreed. "It doesn't seem right for me to be lying here when I should be out with the mast−cutters."

"Don't ye worry about that, young man. You've done yer share all right in givin' us the warnin'. An', besides, look what ye've done fer this girl. I guess if it hadn't been fer you she'd be layin' out there in the woods now. Don't ye worry. What ye both need is a good sleep, so I'm goin' to ask you, Miss, to take my bunk over yon in the corner. I guess ye'll find everythin' in good shape, fer my wife's a most pertic'ler woman an' has trained me right."

Jean was only too glad to accept the offer. She was weary to the point of exhaustion, and her head ached. As she laid herself down upon the bunk, and Old Dennis tenderly covered her with two grey blankets, the softest bed in which she had ever slept never felt so good. She knew how weary Dane must be, for he had merely pressed her hand as she left his side. She thought of that terrible journey through the forest, and the fight Dane had made to reach the camp. At first he had helped her along the trail, but when she could go no farther he had carried her like a child in his strong arms. She understood something of what that meant, and she had pleaded with him to leave her and save himself. But he had laughed at her, saying that she was not nearly as heavy as his pack and musket which he had thrown aside. But he could not deceive her, for she knew by his hard

breathing, and the way he at times staggered from side to side how great was the strain upon his almost giant strength. She thought of all this as she lay there. But the bed was comfortable, the roar of the wind among the trees most lulling, and ere long she was fast asleep.

And while the two tired ones slept Old Dennis kept faithful watch. He sat before the fire smoking his black stub of a pipe, and listening intently for the return of the mast−cutters. He had no doubt about the defeat of the slashers, and a smile overspread his furrowed face as he thought of the surprise in store for them.

During the night the storm beat itself out, the wind fell, and a great peace rested upon the snow−enshrouded forest. As the dawn of a new day stole gently over the land the mast−cutters returned, bringing with them the rebel prisoners. The noise of their arrival awoke Dane, who sprang from his bunk greatly refreshed after his sound sleep. Then from the leader of the mast−cutters he learned the story of the round−up of the slashers. They were taken in a narrow valley, and after several had fallen, the rest surrendered.

"They were fools to try to shoot." the man said. "But if they had kept it up any longer, we wouldn't have left one alive. It was mighty cold waiting there in that valley hour after hour for the devils to arrive, and my men were in no mood for any nonsense. But I guess this night's work'll settle the rebels, all right."

"What are you going to do with them?" Dane asked.

"Put them to work, of course," the leader replied, as he sat down to the breakfast Old Dennis had prepared, and helped himself to a piece of meat.

"Do they know how to work?"

"If they don't they'll learn before I'm through with them."

"Where are they now?"

"Oh, scattered around among the cabins getting something to eat. They're the most dejected gang I ever saw."

Jean heard all this, for she was wide awake, lying quietly in the bunk. She preferred to remain there for a while, as she felt embarrassed with so many men in the room. But when they had eaten their breakfast and had gone outside, she got up and stood before Dane and Dennis.

"I'm mighty glad to see ye lookin' so well," the latter accosted. "That sleep has brought back the colour into yer purty cheeks. Now, when ye've had something to eat, ye'll be as chipper as a bird."

Breakfast at last over, Jean and Dane sat and talked for a while before the bright fire.

"How soon can we leave this place?" the girl asked.

"When the mast−cutters, who are going with us, are ready," Dane replied. "I have spoken to the leader about those Loyalists on the A−jem−sek, and he is going to send a supply of food to them."

"Oh, I am so glad," and Jean's eyes showed her pleasure. "Those poor people have been so much in my mind. I hope that Sam and Kitty were able to help them. But now that the mast−cutters are to take supplies there is no need to worry any more. I am anxious about your father. We should go to him as soon as possible."

"Do you think that he wants to see me, Jean?"

"I am sure he does. I told you what he said about you, and I really believe he is longing for you."

"He must have changed, then, since the last time I saw him."

"He certainly has. I never saw such a change in any one in such a short time. I was afraid of him when I first met him, but when I got to know him better, and found out about him, he seemed to me almost like a father."

"It was you who worked the miracle, Jean. I owe it all to you. No one could withstand your charms, not even my father."

The girl blushed, and dropped her eyes. She was happy, and the future looked bright. With Dane once again with her, she had no more fear.

For some time they sat there, and were only aroused by a confused noise outside. Rising, and going to the door, they beheld a strange sight. The slashers were all lined up in front of the house, surrounded by armed mast−cutters. Ben Bolster, the boss, was giving orders to the rebels. He was telling them that they must go to work, and make up for some of the trouble they had caused. Those who objected were to step forward. At this the three ringleaders advanced, and flatly refused to lift a hand.

"Very well, then, me hearties," Bolster said, "it's either work or the tree−tops. Which do you choose?"

As no response came from the sullen men, Bolster motioned to several of his men, who at once sprang toward a young birch tree standing nearby. Up this they climbed like cats, and soon their combined weight bent the tree to the ground. A rope was then produced, one end of which was fastened to the top of the tree, and the other about the body of one of the ringleaders, just below the arms. He struggled, fought and cursed, but all in vain. When his hands had been tied behind his back, the tree was released and he was hoisted on high, kicking and yelling in the most violent manner. The same was about to be done to his two sullen companions. But they had witnessed enough, so they begged to be allowed to go to work.

"All right, then," Bolster agreed. "But you know what's in store if you don't behave yourselves. The first time you'll go up like that fool there with ropes around your waists, but the second time it'll be around your necks. See? And let this be a warning to you all," he said, turning to the cowed slashers.

In the meantime the unfortunate man hanging from the tree was becoming tired, and the rope was pressing hard around his body. At length he pleaded to be taken down. Bolster, however, let him remain there a while longer, but when his cries for mercy became heart−rending, word was given, and a man with an axe began to chop down the tree. This increased the cries of the man above.

"Ye'll kill me!" he yelled. "Don't, don't cut the tree! Fer God's sake, stop!"

The mast−cutters merely shouted with delight at his fears, and hurled all manner of jibes.

"Got yer wings all ready to fly?" one asked. "Didn't expect ye'd need them so soon, did ye?"

"Yer havin' great fun with the mast−cutters, ain't ye?" another bantered. "Ye was goin' t' give them the surprise of their lives."

In a few minutes the tree was ready for its fall. It slowly swayed, and then with a rush bore the yelling man downward. He landed, as had been planned, in a great bank of snow, from which he was speedily rescued, spluttering and puffing like a steam engine. But he had been taught a lesson, the effect of which was not lost upon the other rebels.

Jean had watched this with intense excitement. At first she was sure that the man hanging from the tree would be killed. But when she saw him emerge from the snow unharmed, she breathed a sigh of relief, and even

smiled. She knew that in reality he had come off better than he deserved, as did all of his companions.

"How long will the slashers be kept here?" she asked, turning to Dane who was standing by her side.

"Until the rangers come to take them away," was the reply. "But come into the house. You will get cold here."

CHAPTER XXXI

PEACE AT EVENING TIME

In his lonely house in the wilderness Thomas Norman was undergoing great agony of mind and body. The presence of the first band of slashers had been hard for him to endure, and when they were joined later by the rebels from the Washademoak, his distress was intense. But he knew that he had brought this trouble upon himself. He had sown the seeds of dissension which had sprung up into wild and ungovernable thistles. How he despised the slashers as they crowded about him, drinking his rum, eating his food, and polluting the air with their reeking bodies and coarse language. This excitement increased the distress in his side until he felt that he would go crazy with the pain. Of this the rebels thought nothing. They were beyond human sympathy, so the condition of their chief affected them as little as if he had been a dog.

The critical moment arrived when the rebels had broken down the door leading into the adjoining room and the girl they were seeking was not there. For a few minutes Norman's life hung in the balance. The angry men charged him with hiding the girl and keeping her from them. It was only with the greatest difficulty that he was able to subdue their wrath. He told them that he was as much surprised as they were, and he had no idea what had become of the girl. Although the men threatened and cursed, they did not lay hands upon their chief, but contented themselves by informing him that when they came back he must have the girl there.

With a great sigh of relief Norman sank down upon his pillow as the slashers left the house for their march against the mast−cutters. It was storming hard, and this suited their purpose. They believed that the King's men would be all housed and sound asleep, with the idea of an attack on such a stormy night far from their thoughts. They would also be ahead of the rangers, and their deed would be accomplished before Davidson's men could arrive.

When the slashers were gone, Norman's mind returned to the missing girl. He was greatly concerned, feeling certain that she had fled to the forest for protection from the rebels. He expected her to return when the men had left, but as the hours moved slowly by and she did not appear, he feared the worst. He imagined that she had become bewildered by the storm, had lost her way, and perished. He groaned aloud as he thought of this, for he was very fond of the girl. He reproached himself over and over again for his past blindness and mistakes. He knew that he had brought his punishment upon his own head, and that he deserved it.

As he lay there alone, with the storm beating against the cabin, he thought of his patient, noble wife, and innocent outcast son. Them he had lost, and when the gentle and beautiful Jean Sterling had come to brighten his life, she, too, had been taken from him, and he was once more left alone. He had plenty of time now to think of all this, and he wondered if the One he had forsaken for so long was thus hounding him that He might bring him back to His feet. The story of the Prodigal Son came into his mind, and he knew that the Master's parable was being re−enacted in his own life there in the midst of the northern forest.

"I am the prodigal son," he murmured. "I have wandered far from my Father, and have been feeding upon the husks. But I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son.'"

Slowly he repeated these words, but they brought little comfort and hope to his weary, agitated heart and mind. In his distress he sought refuge in prayer, and uttered the simple words he learned as a child. But even

they could not bring the rest he sought, nor the peace of former years. So far had he wandered, and so long had he neglected the golden means of grace, that the sweet communion of his soul with the great soul of the Father could not be restored as if by magic in a few minutes. This he now knew, so with a moan of despair he turned his haggard face to the wall.

The return of Sam and Kitty when the storm had spent itself, brought him no hope. They were alone, and Jean was not with them. The Indians were greatly distressed at the girl's absence, and shook their heads when Norman asked if they could find her.

"Babby lost," Sam replied. "Beeg snow. Injun no find babby."

Kitty was inconsolable, and while Sam rebuilt the fire which had gone out, she sat upon the floor, her head covered with an old shawl, and rocked herself to and fro in an agony of grief. Her sorrow was intense and real, for the girl had become to her like her own child. Sam, too, was deeply affected, and made no attempt to reprove his wife. He wandered from room to room, examining every detail of the havoc wrought by the slashers. He prepared a little food, and took it to the sick man. But Norman would not touch it, pushing it aside with a faint murmur of thanks.

Slowly the weary day wore out, succeeded by a more weary night to the sufferer upon the couch. He was weakening fast, and this the Indians knew. They could do nothing but keep the fires going, place hot cloths from time to time to the sufferer's side, and offer him a little food.

Morning dawned cold and cheerless. Norman had slept but little, and the pain in his side was more severe than ever. Often he turned his eyes toward the door, as if expecting some one.

"Is Dane coming?" he would ask, and when the Indians shook their heads, the light of hope would fade. But ere long he would rouse up again. "Is Dane coming?" he would repeat. "I wonder what's keeping him. He should be here by now."

The Indians sat upon the floor before the fire, awed and attentive. They seldom spoke, and when they did, their voices were low. They knew that the white man was sinking rapidly, and that the end was not far away.

About the middle of the afternoon, while an intense silence reigned in the cabin, a sound of voices was heard outside. Then the door was thrust suddenly open, and Jean entered, her hood covered with snow, and her cheeks aglow with health and animation. Following her was Dane, who hesitated a little as he stepped inside the room. He was uncertain what kind of a reception he would receive.

With a cry of joy Kitty sprang to her feet, rushed forward, and threw her arms around the girl.

"Babby safe! Babby safe!" she murmured.

"Yes, Kitty, I am safe," Jean assured her, looking fondly upon the faithful Indian.

Then before anything more could be said, Norman partly lifted himself from the couch, and stared hard at the visitors.

"Come here, quick," he ordered in a hoarse, eager voice. "Is it true, or am I only dreaming?"

Jean and Dane at once crossed the room, and knelt by the couch. Impulsively the son caught his father's left hand in his and raised it to his lips.

"It is no dream, father," he said. "I have come back, and Jean is with me. Do you forgive me?"

Still somewhat uncertain, Norman lifted his right hand and touched his son's face. Then he turned his eyes wonderingly toward the girl.

"Yes, yes," he said, "it is no dream. You are both here. Thank God, you have come at last!"

"And you forgive me?" Dane again asked.

"Yes, yes. My heart forgave you long ago. Oh, if you had only come sooner! But it's too late now, too late!"

"No, no, it's not too late. Jean and I will look after you."

"Little can you do for me now, my son. But give me your hand, Jean, my dear."

As the girl obeyed, he took her right hand in his and placed it in Dane's. Then his fingers closed firmly upon them as he held them for a few seconds.

"Be good to each other," he said. "Love each other, and may God bless you both."

Tears were streaming down Jean's cheeks now, and Dane's eyes were misty. They wished to speak, but words would not come. Several mast−cutters entered the room who stared in wonder at the scene before them. Sam motioned them to be silent, and pointed to the door leading into the adjoining room. They understood his meaning, and slipped silently away.

In a few minutes Norman again aroused himself, and tried to raise his head from the pillow. He was too weak, however, and sank back with a moan.

"What is it, father?" Dane asked. "Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes, yes, over there in that box in the corner. You will find it at the bottom."

"What is it?"

"The flag. Bring it here, quick."

Dane did as he was bidden, and when he had lifted the cover of the box, and searched to the bottom, he found a small English flag. This he at once carried to his father's side.

"Ah, that's it," Norman exclaimed, reaching out his hand and touching it. "I haven't seen it for years. Yes, it's the same old flag which I so often cursed. May God forgive me."

Eagerly he seized it and pressed it to his lips.

"Good old flag, brave old flag!" he murmured. "It's the greatest flag on earth. Oh, why did I forsake it!"

Then with trembling hands he held it out before him, and gazed upon it for a few minutes in apparent wonder.

"How many crosses are there upon it?" he asked.

"Why, three, of course," Dane replied.

"Yes, I know there used to be three, but I see only one now, and it's very red. What has become of the others?"

Dane glanced at Jean, but her eyes full of interest and sympathy were fixed upon the dying man's face.

"Do you see only one cross?" she asked.

"Yes, only one now, and it's red. Strange, very strange, isn't it?"

Presently his face brightened, and his eyes glowed with a new light.

"It's not the cross on the flag I see," he cried; "it's the cross of Christ, and it's marked with His blood. Look, don't you see it?" he eagerly asked. "There it is; I see it plain. And what are those words? How clear they shine, 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.' Ah, that's it; I understand it all now. The blood of Christ! The blood of Christ!"

He closed his eyes and remained very still. Jean found it hard to control her emotion, so she crossed over to where Sam and Kitty were sitting upon the floor.

"Poor babby, poor babby," the Indian woman said, seizing the girl's hand. "Chief much seek, eh?"

"Yes, very sick," Jean replied, as she, too, seated herself upon the floor. "You were good to him, and I am so glad."

"Kitty no do much. Kitty all sam' babby."

"But you did what you could, Kitty. No one can do anything for him now."

Scarcely had she ceased when the Indian woman lifted her hand, and pointed to the couch. Jean at once arose and went to Dane's side.

"What is it?" she asked.

"He wants you to sing 'Jesus, Lover of my Soul.' I could just catch the words. It used to be a favourite hymn of his."

Jean was in no mood for singing, but she did the best she could. As her sweet voice filled the room, Norman opened his eyes, and a smile overspread his face.

"It's your mother, Dane; don't you hear her singing? And look, can't you see her? She's standing right there, just as she looked on her wedding−day."

He reached out, and his arms closed in a fond embrace, and for him his loved one was really there.

"Priscilla! Priscilla!" he whispered, and with that vision before him, his spirit left the weary body.

The next day the rangers arrived, with William Davidson in charge. Pete was with them, and his delight was unbounded at seeing Jean. That afternoon Thomas Norman's body was laid by the side of his wife at the foot of the big pine. The ranger leader read the beautiful words of the Burial Service, after which his men filled in the grave. A rough wooden cross was erected over the spot, and there Jean and Dane stood after the others had gone back to the house. Their eyes were misty, and for a few minutes neither spoke.

"That is all we can do," Dane at length remarked with a sigh. "Oh, if he had only seen his mistake years ago, what a difference it would have made. It is wonderful how death has wiped out all bitterness toward him from my heart. I only think of him now as the loving father I once knew."

"This will always be a sacred spot to us," Jean replied. "I should like to come here in the summer when the birds are singing, and lay sweet flowers upon these graves."

"We shall indeed come, darling," and Dane's arm stole tenderly about the girl as he spoke. "We shall come next summer to this place which means so much to us."

The sun of the short winter day was dipping below the tops of the great trees, and the distant hills were aglow as Jean and Dane left the grove and walked slowly back to the house. Although sorrowing for the one they had just laid to rest, yet they knew that it was well. This common grief drew them nearer than ever to each other, making their love all the more beautiful and wonderful.

CHAPTER XXXII

AFTER MANY DAYS

Christmas was drawing near and the people of Loyal were looking forward to the season of cheer and goodwill. Their preparations were meagre, and they did not expect to celebrate as in the past. But they had provided what they could for their little ones, and the women had their cooking all done. The *Polly*, on her last trip, had brought extra supplies from Portland Point, so there was sufficient food for all. The various houses were decorated with fragrant evergreens, and before blazing fires during the long evenings parents told their children of the happy Christmas seasons before the war.

In one home only there was no cheer, for Colonel Sterling was in no mood for any gaiety. He paid little heed to the preparations that were being made in the settlement, and listened in an absent−minded manner to Old Mammy's chatter. Even the little Indian baby, of which he was very fond, could not arouse him out of the apathy into which he had sunk. He would sit for hours gazing dreamily into the fire, and would only bestir himself when any of the neighbours called for a friendly chat. But of late such visitors were few, for after the first greeting, the Colonel always lapsed into silence. He would suddenly arouse when the callers were ready to depart, and tell them to come again.

All this was a great worry to Old Mammy. She found the house very lonely, and more often than ever dropped in upon her neighbours during the day.

"I'm sure troubled 'bout de Cun'l," she confided to Mrs. Watson one afternoon. "He jes sets an' sets an' says nuffin'. I know he's t'inkin' 'bout Missie Jean, but he nebber speaks 'bout her now. His po' ol' heart is jes broke, an' no wonder."

The tears flowed down Mammy's cheeks, telling plainly of her own grief. She wiped them away with a corner of her apron, and swayed her stout body to and fro.

"An' dis is Christmas time, too," she continued. "How Missie Jean did lub Christmas. I kin see de dear lamb now, wif her eyes shinin', an' her cheeks jes like two rosy apples. But to hear her happy laff was de bes' of all. An' she was so good to the chilluns. Why, de house was allus full of dem on Christmas day, an' Missie Jean, was jes like a chile herse'f, de dear lamb."

"I know she was," Mrs. Watson replied. "The very night she was stolen away I showed her the presents we made for Danny. She was so much interested in the toy boat, horse and cart John made. She was very bright and happy that night. Poor dear, she little knew what was in store for her."

It was the week after the great storm that the Colonel was sitting as usual one night before the fire. Mammy had put the baby to bed, and was busying herself about the room. The silent man was thinking of his lost daughter. He had given up all hope now of ever seeing her again. The last spark had fled with Dane's arrival.

He had been encouraged by the thought that the courier would bring some word of his loved one. But the first glance at the young man's face had told him the worst. There was no hope. Jean was either dead, or worse than dead. What he had endured since the night she had been stolen away he alone knew. He tried to be brave and to face life with the same courage as in the past. But he found this to be almost impossible. He was getting old, his loved ones had all been taken away, and he had nothing to live for. This feeling of depression increased as Christmas drew near. He ate but little, and he found it difficult to sleep. He would rise long before daylight, and every morning Mammy found him huddled before the fire. He was as kind and gentle as of old, but he was not the Colonel Sterling who had played such an important part in the war.

Old Mammy had just replenished the fire, and the flames were licking merrily around a big hardwood stick, when a noise sounded outside. Then the door was thrust suddenly open, and as the Colonel turned his head, Jean rushed across the room, threw her arms about his neck, and almost smothered him with rapturous kisses. With a great cry of joy and amazement the Colonel clutched the clinging girl, and staggered to his feet. He was trembling violently, and his excitement was intense. He looked into her face, touched her hair, and laid his right hand upon her head, imagining it was all a dream. But when Jean laughed at him, drew off her hood, and stood erect before him, his last doubt was removed. He reached out and passionately drew her to him, and silently held her to his breast. Then he sank down upon his chair, completely overcome by his emotion.

There was great excitement now in the room. Old Mammy had been impatiently waiting to embrace her "li'l lamb," and she would scarcely release her for a minute. She stroked the girl's hair, and held her hands, crying and laughing as if bereft of her senses, and murmuring words of endearment.

The neighbours soon heard the good news, and crowded into the house. Jean laughingly declared that she had never been kissed so much before, and that she was almost bewildered by the attention she received. But when she explained how much Sam and Kitty had done for her, interest was at once directed to the faithful Indians who had been curiously watching all that was taking place. Pete was there, too, and it was a wonderful night for those three dusky wanderers of the trails. They were given plenty to eat and drink, and received the approving smiles of all.

The Colonel kept his eyes fixed upon his returned daughter as she moved about, talking and laughing in the gayest manner. The weary look had gone from his face, and his eyes glowed with a new light. His heart was overflowing with thankfulness, and as the neighbours were about to depart, he rose to his feet, and requested them to remain for a few minutes.

"This has been a wonderful night to me," he said. "The lost one has been restored, and my heart is so filled with gratitude that I am going to ask you all to sing the Doxology. Jean, dear, you know the words, so suppose you start it."

The girl did as she was directed, and at once all lifted up their voices in the old familiar words of "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." It was no mere lip−service offered up there that night, but sincere gratitude from humble thankful hearts.

The Colonel, Jean, and Dane sat late before the fire that night. It was a marvellous story the girl related of her rescue from her captors by Sam and Kitty. But when she spoke of Thomas Norman, her father was deeply moved. He leaned forward so as not to miss a single word.

"Poor Tom! Poor Tom," he said. "What a pity that such a life was wasted. If I could only have seen him before he was taken away. How wonderful, though, that my daughter should have been by his side when he died. That is some comfort, at any rate."

"But you have his son with you now," Jean replied.

"His son! What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. Dane is the only son of your old friend."

Jean never forgot the expression of astonishment upon her father's face at these words. He looked from one to the other to be sure that he was not being deceived.

"It is true, daddy," Jean smilingly told him. "Dane is really Thomas Norman's son, so his name is not 'Norwood' at all. Won't you believe me?"

"Yes, I believe you, dear, but I am greatly confused over what I have just heard. Why didn't you tell me this sooner? Did you know of this before you were stolen away?"

"Why, no. I only learned of it after I met Mr. Norman. But on our way down river Dane and I planned that we would keep this surprise until the last."

"I see, I see," the Colonel mused. "It is good of you. But, dear me, how wonderful everything has happened! Why didn't you tell me about your father?" he asked, turning to the courier. "You remember our conversation out in the hills the day you saved me from the moose. Why didn't you tell me then about your father?"

"For the same reason why I would not tell Major Studholme at Fort Howe when he asked me," Dane replied.

"And what was that?"

"I would not betray my father."

"Even though he was a rebel?"

"He was my father, remember, and I never forgot that, even though he drove me away from home. And more than that, for my mother's sake I could not betray him."

Dane ceased, and gazed thoughtfully into the fire. The Colonel was deeply stirred. Impulsively he reached out and seized Dane by the hand.

"Young man," he began, "I honour you more than words can express. You did what was right, and I should have done the same. I was a fool for doubting you, as I did that day in the hills. As the son of my old friends, Thomas Norman and his noble wife, I now take you to my heart and home, and have no hesitation in giving to you her who is dearer to me than life."

He then took Jean's hand and placed it where his own had been, and clasped them together.

"May God bless you both," he said, "and may you be true to each other."

"We shall," Dane fervently declared, "while the grass grows, the sun shines, and the water flows."

CHAPTER XXXIII

SEEDS OF EMPIRE

Supper was ready and waiting in a cosy room in a well−built house situated in one of the most beautiful spots on the St. John River. The table had been laid with care, and the light from the bright open fire−place cast its soft flickering glow upon the spotless linen and well−arranged dishes. A colored woman, a worthy successor

to Old Mammy, entered and lighted the tapers in the seven−branched candle−stick which had once adorned Thomas Norman's lonely cabin. A smile illumined her face as she looked into an adjoining room where a woman was seated before another fire, surrounded by three children.

If was Christmas Eve, and Jean Norman was resting after the work of the day. In fact, she had been exceptionally busy for several days, so it was pleasant to sit in the big, comfortable chair awaiting Dane's arrival from the city.

Jean had changed but little since that night, seventeen years before, when she had come back to her father, as if from the grave. The years had dealt lightly with her, and except for the passing of her father and Old Mammy, her life had been very happy. Two boys and a girl had come to gladden the home, and as these gathered about her on this Christmas Eve, her eyes shone with pride. James, the eldest, aged twelve, had his father's manly bearing. Ruth, almost nine, resembled herself, while Tommy, just six, was a combination of both. As Jean watched them, she thought of that other Christmas when she had returned to her father. She glanced at his picture over the mantel, and as old memories rushed upon her, tears dimmed her eyes. She hastily wiped them away, but not before Ruth had detected her emotion.

"You mustn't cry on Christmas Eve, Mummy," she said, as she came and put her arms about her mother's neck.

"I wasn't really crying, dear," Jean replied with a smile. "I was just thinking; that was all."

"About grandad, and the time you were stolen away?" James asked. "Won't you tell us about it?"

"But I have told you that so often, you must be tired of hearing it."

"We're never tired of it, Mummy," Ruth said. "Please tell us while we're waiting for daddy."

With Tommy on her lap, James sitting at her feet, and Ruth seated on a small stool by her side, Jean again related the story of the little settlement in the wilderness, the coming of the rangers, how she was carried off at night, and her rescue by Sam and Kitty. She told the story well, and when she had ended there was silence for a few minutes. The three little ones were lost in deep thought, for everything they had heard was very real to them.

"And did you marry daddy?" Tommy unexpectedly asked, at which the others laughed merrily.

"No, dear, not for several years. I guess we were too poor to marry. Anyway, we waited until your daddy and my daddy built this nice house and cleared some of the land."

"Are we rich now, Mummy?" Ruth questioned.

"Not rich, dear, but comfortable. We have a good home, and one of the best farms along the river. We are rich, though, in happiness and in our children. Your grandfather was always so proud of you. Ruth, you were but a baby when he died. He was very fond of you, and named you after my mother. It was a sad day for me when he was taken away."

Again Jean glanced at the picture, and thought of what her father had meant to her.

"When did Old Mammy die?" Ruth asked.

"Not long after your grandfather. She was sick but a short time, and grieved very much over my father's death. She longed to go back to her old home in Connecticut, but that could not be. She died murmuring the words of

her favourite psalm, 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.' She was a good, true woman, and a mother to me. It is very hard to lose our loved ones."

"But we have the Indians, Pete, Sam, and Kitty," James reminded. "They are coming to−morrow, and I am so glad. Sam is going to make me a bow and a whole lot of arrows."

"And Kitty promised me a pair of snow−shoes," Ruth said.

"But Pete's going to bring me the best of all," Tommy chimed.

"What's that, dear?" his mother asked.

"Spruce gum. He said he would, anyway."

James and Ruth laughed so heartily that Tommy became embarrassed, and hid his flushed face against his mother.

"There, there, dear," Jean soothed. "It is all right, James and Ruth will want some gum, too. I am sure they will be very glad to see you, and will have presents for all. We must make this a very pleasant Christmas for them. They are getting old, so we cannot expect to have them with us much longer. Their house is all ready, and Martha is preparing a great dinner for them. We shall all go over to visit them."

"Did daddy build that house for them?" Ruth asked.

"Yes, you know he did. It was his own idea. He was so grateful to Sam and Kitty for what they did for me, that he had the house built just for them and Pete. It is their home, and they can come there at any time, and stay just as long as they please. They shall never want so long as we have anything to share with them. Sam and Kitty saved my life, and I can never forget how good they were to me."

Ruth reached up and reverently touched the little arrow fastened to a chain about her mother's neck.

"And was it really that which told them who you were?" she asked in an awed voice.

"Yes, it was this arrow your father gave me so long ago. I have worn it ever since. We call it 'The King's Arrow,' because of your father's name when he was in the royal service. It has meant a great deal to us both, for it was truly a Love−Charm."

And while they sat there and talked, Dane appeared in the doorway, and stood unnoticed for a few seconds watching the pleasant scene before the fire. His face bore the expression of great happiness. He had made a good trip to the city, and had returned laden with many things for Christmas Day. Some of these he had hidden safely away until the children were all in bed. His eyes shone with joy as they rested upon his loved ones; his wife, fair and comely, and his children full of health and innocent charm. In another minute he was in their midst, and radiant faces and shouts of delight told their own tale of happiness unalloyed.

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