


A Knight of the Wilderness



"And Thou beside me singing in the Wilderness"



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A Knight
of the Wilderness



*As he smiled he raised his eyes and met Sylvia's
glance. (See page 21.)*

A Knight of the Wilderness

By
OLIVER MARBLE GALE
and
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ILLUSTRATED BY IVIN NEY

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THE REILLY & BRITTON CO.
1909

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Published October, 1909

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A Knight of the Wilderness

CHAPTER I

THE MAN IN THE FLATBOAT

ALL New Salem, tingling with excitement, was down by Cameron's dam. It was not often that excitement came to that little cluster of log cabins perched on the banks of the Sangamon River in the year of our Lord 1831. They had their births and their burials, the people of New Salem, and their wooings and their weddings; but a village of a dozen or more log houses cannot well keep itself fully awake with stimulation so meager.

Now and then the outer world permitted them a wanderer with gossip from Vandalia; or from Louisville, if their fortune ran strong. Occasionally an itinerant preacher passed that way and aroused them to a state of pleasurable panic. At intervals the boys from Clary's Grove paid them a rough, rollicking call in facetious mood, making the present exhilarating and leaving the future uncertain; but the agreeable sensations which might have been derived from that form of diversion were marred by danger to life, limb, and law which usually attended these visits.

But all these things, in their uttermost possibilities, were as nothing compared to that which stirred the inhabitants to the highest pitch of agitation and brought them hurrying down to Cameron's dam on this morning in April. They were all there, from the elegant and important James Rutledge, descendant of the Rutledges of South Carolina, founder of the settlement and keeper of the tavern, down to the least toddler of the tow-headed, bare-legged Kelso brood, arrived the preceding autumn from Indiana.

There was old John Cameron, who with Rutledge owned the mill and the milldam. There were the men of New Salem—the merchants, the smith, the carpenter, the cooper—ejaculating and gesticulating on the bank of the stream. There was Dame Rutledge, with uncovered head, hot from her kitchen, her bare arms wrapped in her apron against the coolness of the spring air. There were all the matrons of the settlement gathered about her in voluble concourse.

There was Ann Rutledge—demure, beautiful, tender—standing by the side of her accepted lover, John McNeill, the young and prosperous merchant. There was Rachel Hall, the girl from Indian Creek, black-haired, black-eyed, levying tribute upon her blundering yokels in the midst of the envious daughters of the town. There was her sister, Sylvia, fair-skinned, with hair of twisted gold and eyes gathered from the skies of June; sedate, contained,

smiling indulgently upon the capricious one at her side.

The children of the settlement were there, awed in the presence of the unusual, clinging to the skirts of their mothers, staring dumbly out upon the river. Even Mentor Graham, the schoolmaster, was among them, book under arm, horn-bowed spectacles down his nose, gazing with academic absorption upon the scene that had turned the whole town out of doors.

A flat-boat, floating down the river in charge of two men, had run aground on the middle part of the dam, where the current flowed most swiftly. Her nose hung in midair in front of the dam. Her stern was buried deep beneath a tumbling rush of yellow, muddy water. Every moment the waves piled higher. Every moment they bore her down, clamping her more firmly against the obstruction that held her. She could not move. So much water had already poured into her that she would not have floated if she could have been freed. For all that the people of New Salem could foresee, she was a doomed wreck.

One of the two occupants sat on a barrel, which the curling waters folded and lapped, and gazed with stupid fascination at the slanting lines that the waves were tracing higher and higher along the gun-wales. The other was exhibiting to the spectators at the moment nothing more definite than a pair of amazingly long and angular elbows and a couple of interminable legs. He was stooping over in the

after part of the boat, where the water was deepest, for a purpose not then apparent.

Near the water, at the end of the dam, a small, nervous, excitable man divided his time between pacing the ground with frantic gesticulation and profane admonition, addressed to the one stooping in the after part of the boat—which that one did not heed in the least—and sitting on a stump by the river's edge in a state of the most profound and absorbed melancholy. It was obvious that he was the owner of the boat and the cargo.

The men of New Salem shouted advice. The women clucked sympathy. The young men hooted. The young women tittered. The children continued to stare dumbly, stupefied by the spectacle of shipwreck come to their very door. Mentor Graham, adjusting his horn-bowed spectacles, stepped nearer the scene to illuminate it with the light of science. James Rutledge, being a man of tactful address, endeavored to engage the owner in sympathetic conversation, but to no purpose.

The man stooping in the stern of the boat, oblivious to the confusion of tongues, arose slowly, unfolding himself to a prodigious height. In his hand he held a huge sack. Struggling slightly under the weight of it, he carried it forward, dripping, and placed it in the bow. Having done so, he straightened himself to a still greater height, and looked calmly with quizzical interest at the crowd gathered on the bank. His eyes passed leisurely

from one to another. As his glance turned, a hush followed.

The hush was broken by a titter among the girls. The titter grew into a nervous laugh, which ran among the spectators and died abruptly. There was something about the boatman that stirred them to mirth. There was something about him which made them doubt whether they should laugh. He was ludicrously tall. He was grotesquely thin. He was a succession of inelegant angles. High on his almost interminable legs dangled a pair of frayed and faded jeans. His raw wrists straggled below his sleeves. His head inclined slightly, in a posture half droll, half pathetic.

His face was as gaunt and bony as his frame. High cheek-bones he had, and prominent jaws; between them a great length of sallow cheek. His nose was large, and somewhat awry. His mouth was big and repressed. His features completed the paradox of his figure. Those who looked could not tell whether to laugh at him, or weep for him.

They could not tell until they saw the eyes—and then they could not tell! These were more baffling still. Pale blue they were, with lids that drooped across them; unutterably sad, wistful, and appealing. But in the moment that they were wistful, without so much as the slightest change coming into them, they were commanding, compelling; and while they were compelling, in their depths there twinkled a sly mirth.

It was this spectacle of a man that the people of New Salem gazed upon this April morning.

“Howdy,” said the long boatman, presently, in an even voice. Another titter, beginning with Rachel Hall, grew into a laugh, which died away as the first had done.

“You make me think of a little boy I used to know down in Indiana,” continued the man, solemnly. The mirth in the depths of his eyes flashed and played fitfully as he began to speak. “His father had a cow he called Betsy. Betsy was a great cow to kick, and the little boy used to like to watch his father milk her. One day the cow kicked the old man in the head and killed him. Pretty soon the boy’s mother married again. Somebody asked the boy how he liked his new father. ‘Oh, well, I don’t think much of him,’ said the boy, ‘but I’m glad he’s come, ’cause now there’s somebody I can watch Betsy kick again.’ Maybe you don’t think much of us, but you seem powerful glad to see us this morning, just the same.”

Without further word he turned and strode back where the water piled over the stern of the boat. On shore there was a moment of silence. The people of New Salem were not immediately alive to the significance and application of the story. Presently a soft and silvery laugh tinkled above the sound of the cascade rushing over the mill dam.

The man in the boat, taken by the music of the laugh, cocked his head where he stood stooping in

the water. His eyes searched among the spectators. They fell upon the demure, tender, beautiful young woman standing beside the young man of assertive and prosperous bearing; Ann Rutledge and her accepted lover. As he looked, she laughed again. Her blue eyes, full of merriment, returned his glance. Without the stirring of a muscle, with only a changing light in the depths of his own, the man in the boat answered her laugh and her look with complete understanding. There are meetings that are electrical. There are companionships that begin with ages of comprehension already behind them.

In the moment of their communion the gaze of the boatman fell, and he returned to his labors,whelmed with self-consciousness. In the same moment the story reached home, and a gust of laughter arose from the spectators; even Mentor Graham wisely smiled.

The shouts of advice, the banter of the young men, presuming upon the boatman's facetiousness, redoubled. The long boatman, stooping in the stern of the craft with his wrists buried beneath the swirling water, paid no heed. Neither did the other boatman, still sitting on his barrel island. Neither did the melancholy man against the stump.

Again the tall and angular boatman unfolded. Again he had in his great hands a sack, heavy and cumbrous, which he carried to the bow of the boat. Depositing it there, he grinned amiably at the peo-

ple on shore, setting them off into another gust of laughter, and turned once more toward the stern.

Hope awakened in the breast of the disconsolate man leaning against the stump at sight of the activities aboard. His eyes lighted. His lips moved.

“What — what you tryin’ to do, Abe?” he faltered.

“Trying to get your boat over this dam, Mr. Offutt,” replied the one addressed. “Perhaps you may have noticed that it isn’t moving very fast right now.”

It was clear now that this man was to be laughed at, and the people of New Salem laughed joyously, uproariously, even down to the children, who laughed because the others did, and because they thought the man in the boat was making faces at them. And to please them, he did make faces at them as he continued to move sacks and barrels and sides of pork from the stern of the boat to the bow, overhanging the river below the dam.

Under a constant fire of suggestion, serious and facetious, the tall boatman continued to labor with the cargo, bringing it bit by bit into the projecting bow. In course of time the big, cumbrous craft began to teeter, to seesaw on the dam which held it, as he passed back and forth. Each time the bow dipped beneath his weight, a shout of warning went up from the banks, topped off with a shrill scream from the unhappy Mr. Offutt. Each time that it dipped, the tall boatman watched it, with careful

and calculating observation, and immediately brought forward another piece of cargo.

At last he brought forward no more. Standing in the bow, he surveyed the grinning crowd with sad visage.

“You remind me of a man I used to know in Kentucky,” he said to them, after a pause. “One night he got lost in a storm. It was thundering pretty bad. All of a sudden there was a tremendous crash that lasted for a minute. The man dropped on his knees. ‘Oh, Lord,’ he said, when it was over. ‘Oh, Lord! If it ’s all the same to you, give us a little more light and a little less noise.’ If some one of you people will fetch me an auger I can get along without his conversation while he goes to get it.”

The people of New Salem roared again with delight at the tale. William Munson, chief hand in the mill and chief swain among those who hovered about Rachel Hall, disappeared into the building, followed by the hoots and jeers of the delighted audience. He emerged with an auger in his hand.

“How we goin’ to git it to yer?” queried Munson, standing at the edge of the stream.

“Throw it,” returned the tall boatman, sitting on the suspended bow, his heels dangling nearly to the water beneath.

Old John Cameron came into action. He was canny Scotch, was old John Cameron. If the boat must be lost, that would be unfortunate for the

owner of the boat. There was no need, however, of risking his auger. Whatever was going to happen to the boat, there was no immediate danger that it was going to injure the dam in its wreck, and therefore no ground for sacrifice on his part.

“Na! Na!” he cried, in deep agitation, laying hand on the arm of William Munson. “Dinna heave it! Dinna heave it! Ye might droon it, lad!”

Mr. Offutt, ignorant of any purpose that might be behind the auger, but confident that his boatman and his boat stood in need of it, pressed upon Cameron with fantastic and alluring offers of reward and insurance. Munson, uncertain, stood with arm uplifted, ready to hurl the tool. The spectators were in a flurry of excitement. The tall boatman himself was in the first words of an anecdote suitable to the occasion, when the entire course of events was abruptly arrested by the appearance on the scene of another actor.

He was a young man with a face of clean and manly beauty. Hair, the color of bronze, escaped in waves from beneath his soft hat and fell across his temples. His skin was smooth and fair, with a translucent blending in it of brown and white. His eyes were a warm, rich brown, behind gentle lids. His mouth was full-lipped, tender, sympathetic. It gave a suggestion of softness of character, which was brought into balance by the firmness of his chin and the strength in his jaws.

He was mounted on a roan horse of surpassing

beauty and spirit. He had come among them like an apparition. They had not seen him as he rode toward them, following the road from Springfield, splashing through the mud of the rough way. They had not seen him until this moment, when he drew horse beside William Munson. The stranger leaned over and took the auger from his hand, made limp and unresisting by the suddenness of the other's appearance and the assurance of his action.

"Let me have the auger," he said, quietly, as he took it.

Before those who looked on could bring their thoughts together, before the bewildered John Cameron could interpose objection, the young man on the roan had taken his horse to the head of the dam and driven it out upon it, with soft words and gentle strokes of encouragement.

Snorting nervously, quivering, with crouching knees, the animal bore its rider out along the narrow way. The yellow waters of the Sangamon spurted against hoof and fetlock. They leapt up the slender, trembling limbs. They piled against shoulder and flank. With soft words, with gentle strokes, the rider urged on, calm, cool, deliberate.

They were ten feet, five feet, from the stranded boat. The rushing waves grappled with them, striving to throw horse and rider over the dam into the swirling, sucking backwater at its foot. Against the force of it horse and rider leaned. The man, speaking softly, stroked the neck of the beast coax-

ingly. On shore there was no word. Old John Cameron held his breath. Denton Offutt stood with hands in his hair, his eyes staring. The boatman sitting on the barrel revived his interest in life and took his eyes from the shifting lines which the waves were drawing along the gunwales of the boat. The tall one arose from his seat in the bow and reached out his hand.

“Reckon I can reach it now, stranger. Much obliged,” he said, a ring of admiration in his voice.

The stranger handed on the auger. With quiet touch, he reined his horse’s head up stream and spoke a word of command. The animal brought its feet carefully together on the narrow top of the dam. There was no trembling of the limbs now. There was no snorting. With every muscle steeled, with every nerve tense and drawn, it stood balancing on the brink.

A muffled sound, half gasp, half scream, broke from the midst of a group on shore. Sylvia Hall, her heart pulseless, clenched hands upraised as though they could hold the horse and rider safe where they balanced, stood pale and wavering, not knowing that it was she who made the sound. The tall boatman, auger in hand, gathered himself, ready to do what might be needed in the rapids below. Denton Offutt groaned and sank against his stump. John Cameron shut out the sight with his hands. Dame Rutledge clutched her apron

between her fingers till it tore. Ann Rutledge pressed against her lover's side.

The rider, hearing the sound of alarm, turned his head toward the group whence it had come, to reassure with a look those who feared. His eyes were calm and unperturbed as they fell upon them; but as they fell upon the drawn, tense face of Sylvia they glowed warm, as the eyes of one who sees a vision of beauty for the first time.

The danger of the adventure was largely in the minds of those who saw it. They were accustomed for the most part to such mounts as they could bring from plow or treadmill. The roan was of finer quality and spirit than the horses of which they had had experience. It crept back step by step to the end of the dam with sure and cautious foot. It scrambled upon the shore with a little volley of pent-up snorts. Nickered, it turned its head towards its master, to ask if it had done well. He smiled upon the animal and spoke tenderly to it.

As he smiled he raised his glance toward the group where Sylvia was, and met hers full upon him. Swiftly as she turned aside, she was not so quick that she did not see the warmth which came swiftly into his eyes beneath her look. With the warmth still in them, he drew his horse behind the crowd to avoid the marveling applause bestowed upon him by those who had watched, and modestly retired from their sight.

It was not hard to escape them. Their attention

was not long diverted from the wreck, where the sad-faced boatman was now down on his knees, boring a hole with his auger through the planks in the bow. In a moment it was done. In another moment the other of the crew was swept from his seat on the barrel by the long arm of his fellow, and the barrel itself was rolled far forward. Another barrel, and another, was added to it. The vessel careened beneath their weight. The stern lifted clear of the tumbling current behind it. Splashing and churning, the water in the craft surged forward, and spouted through the hole in the planking. Denton Offutt, comprehending at last, arose from the stump with a mighty shout.

“Hurrah for Abe! Hurrah for Abe Lincoln!” he cried at the top of his shrill voice. “I told you he was smart! I told you he was smart!”

As it was the first time he had opened his mouth in direct address to the crowd during the morning, there were grounds for disputing the statement of the excited boat owner, but no one was in a mood to do so. Instead, they added their voices to his, acclaiming the knowledge and daring of Abe Lincoln, the tall boatman, with a noise that could have been heard in the last log-house in the settlement, if anyone had been left there to hear it.

The boat was drained. The hole was plugged up by the long boatman. A rope was passed. The craft was dragged from her dangerous perch by the men ashore and floated in the stream below.

Denton Offutt, as exuberant as he had been miserable, demanded the instant attendance of all New Salem at the tavern, and forthwith started thither, his arm linked through the angular elbow of his boatman; on the other side of whom with an arm linked through the other angular elbow, marched James Rutledge, descendant of the Rutledges of South Carolina, keeper of the inn of New Salem and part owner in the dam that had brought it all about.

As they went, a young man on a roan horse, climbing the road that led from the river to the village, turned to look back on the shouting crowd he left behind. One there was who took no part in the demonstration. One there was whose blue eyes followed him in his climbing, whose glance fell abashed before his own as he turned. With a warmth in his beautiful brown eyes, he wheeled into the village street at the brow of the hill, and was lost to sight.

That was a big day in the history of New Salem—bigger than they knew, though they held it in vast importance. That night, in the mingling of many potations, Denton Offutt, happy beyond description, made open declaration, among other things, that he was coming to New Salem to open a store, and that he was going to make Abe Lincoln his clerk, soon as ever Abe Lincoln should return from New Orleans, whither he was taking the boat. He furthermore asseverated that Abe Lincoln was

the smartest man in the United States, and could wrestle any man in Illinois; in which statements none felt presently inclined to dispute him.

In the next room was to be heard the even voice of Abraham Lincoln in narrative mood, punctuated at intervals by the hearty, uproarious laughter of the young men of Salem. He was the man of the hour.

CHAPTER II

THE BRAVE WHO SHOULD HAVE DIED

AT the right angle formed where the clear waters of the Black River flow into the tawny floods of the Mississippi, in the years that have been, was the village of Saukenuk, a town of the Sacs and the Foxes, the town of Black Hawk's people. It was a village of some five hundred lodges, large, comfortable, substantial. The houses were placed symmetrically, with equal spaces between them and at an even distance from the open space through the center of the town, which served at once for street and common. At the point of land, the apex of the angle, was the lodge of Black Hawk, more pretentious than the others and somewhat separated from them by a greater space surrounding it. About the whole was a palisade of brush, through which a gateway opened to each cardinal point of the compass.

Not far to the east of the village a hill arose abruptly from the plain to a height of about two hundred feet, overlooking town and rivers and much of the country 'round about. Its steeper sides were covered with woods and thickets. Upon its lesser slopes were patches of the fields of corn and potatoes and beans, which spread over the rich soil

in picturesque variety about its base. At the foot of the hill, along the banks of Rock River, crept a beautiful grove of oaks and elms and maples, fringed with willows that grew at the water's edge. Beneath the trees were the graves of generations of Sacs and Foxes. It was the Silent City, the City of the Dead, sacred and holy to the Indian.

It was mid-June in the year 1831. Black Hawk stood upon the summit of the hill, called by his loving people Black Hawk's Watchtower. Full of years was Black Hawk; but his slight, spare frame was straight and vigorous. His red lips were full and mobile; his nose was sharp and hooked, like the beak of the hawk for which he was named; his eyes flared and gleamed with emotion, or grew dull and heavy with sorrow. This day the shadow of sadness had fallen across them as they gazed upon the panorama of river, field and woodland, his domain for many years, which it had been given him by his people to keep for his people.

He was not alone as he stood there. Beside him, close pressing, her tiny hand clasping his own, her cheek upon his shoulder, stood an Indian maiden, beautiful beyond the wont of her kind. Slender, straight, graceful, rounded into the exquisite contour of perfect maidenhood; dusky cheeks like the autumn skies when the last sunlight flushes across them; lips delicately curved, hinting of song and of love, of scorn and of hate; eyes as dark and as deep as the sea where the depth of water makes it black;

eyes as potent as the sea sleeping beneath summer zephyrs ere the storm awakes; teeth of snow; radiant, tender, loving, reliant, fiery, high-souled, she was one to dream of through the evenings of June—one to cling to through the storms of January. She was Feather Heart, daughter of Black Hawk, beloved of the tribe.

“Nay,” she was saying, in a voice like the night winds through the pine trees, like the shaded waters plashing among the white stones in the brook; “nay, my father should not be downcast. Many years has the Black Hawk led his people to the planting since Quash-Quame, senseless from their fire-water, sold our lands to the whites, and they have not come to take it away from us. Surely they will let us go in peace till you, and even I, my father, have passed on to the happy hunting grounds, where my mother sings for us through the long night.”

“The Hawk knows! The Hawk knows!” responded the chief, with heavy heart. “What should my little Feather Heart know of the whites? Even now they are upon us. Look! See, their lodges are at our gates!”

He pointed across the vista to the eastward, where a little cabin stood in the midst of a cultivated field. About the door played a white child. Within, a white woman busied herself about her household duties, singing as she worked; singing a song of the whites, a hymn of the church militant. Beyond, scattered through the distance, other cab-

ins, of logs roughly thrown together, told of the forefoot of advancing civilization.

“What should Feather Heart know of them?” continued Black Hawk, restraining his glance from roving among the scattered houses. “Why do the whites tear our fences? Why do they plow our fields? Why do they slay our horses when they rove? Why do they take our women, to beat them and send them back, broken, to us? Why do they taunt and revile us? What should Feather Heart know of their ways? It is that they may tempt the Hawk to strike; that they may drive our young men to revenge, so that they may call their warriors from their white lodges in the land of smoke and drive us across the Father of Waters. Many years has Black Hawk led his people forth to the planting, and much wisdom has he got of the ways of the whites!”

The bitterness of his knowledge was in his tones. For a moment there was silence. Feather Heart spoke:

“But is it not that Quash-Quame made it so with the whites that we should live and plant here till they need our fields for their lodges? Surely, there is room here for them, and for us. Surely they will not drive us away!”

“Feather Heart knows nought of the blackness in the heart of the white man,” the chief returned, and was silent.

The slumbering seas within her eyes awoke before the storm that sprang into her soul.

“Then shall the Black Hawk fight!” Her voice was sharp as the wind that whips the wavetops into spindrift; harsh as the spray that dashes against the rocks of islands in the sea. “The Hawk has many young men. The Hawk has braves that are as the trees in the forest. The paleface shall not drive us from our planting. The spirits of our dead cry out to us from the Silent City. Shall the Sauk not hear their cry?”

“The braves of the Great Father are as the leaves on the trees,” returned the chief, sadly. “Feather Heart must speak no more of fighting.”

His voice grew stern. His firm eye met hers. There was command in word and look. She obeyed, though the storm still surged in her eyes. For a space it swept across them, and was gone; the obedience of the Indian daughters was without question.

The storm was gone when she raised her eyes to gaze upon the bluffs lying black against the reclining sun on the distant side of the mighty river that rolled to the west of them. It was gone, and in its place there was a trace of sadness which she would have hidden from her father by turning her head from his shoulder, where it had nestled again with the going down of the storm.

“The party of our young men which went lately among the Ihoways; was it not the party that came

back to our village this morning?" she said, at length.

Black Hawk aroused himself from revery to answer that it was.

There was a pause.

"Did not the White Eagle go forth with them?" continued the girl.

"The White Eagle went with them."

"He came not back!" murmured the maiden.

There was a pause.

"Did our young men say why it was that he came not back?" Her voice was as though she spoke of that which was nothing; for this maiden was an Indian maiden. For a space there was no sound between them; only the call of the thrush, the song of the robin saluting the setting sun, the plaintive cry of the cat-bird from the thicket behind them rose to the top of the hill where they stood.

The voice of Black Hawk floated out upon the dying afternoon, low, intoned, sepulchral. "The White Eagle went forth into the west with his death song in his throat," he said. "The White Eagle will come no more among his people. He has gone to the land of his fathers; he walks to-night in the happy hunting ground. Such is the law of blood between the Ihoways and the Sacs."

Sad as the lonely sea were the eyes of the Indian maiden as the words of her father sank into her heart. Cold as the vacant depths of the sea was her voice when she made response. "It is well," she

said. "If the hand of the White Eagle hath been raised against the friend of the Sacs, the hand of death must be raised against the White Eagle. But I did not know that he had slain among the Ihoways!" she added, with a tone of misery in her voice which she could not restrain, Indian maiden though she was.

"It was not he. It was his brother Half Ear who slew," Black Hawk made answer, after a pause.

A tremor passed across the beautiful shoulders of Feather Heart as she heard. Now of all times she dared not turn her face to look upon the face of her father. If she had turned, she would have seen it all tenderness, all compassion, full of understanding; she would have thrown herself into his firm arms and cried out against life. But Feather Heart did not turn. Feather Heart, daughter of a chief, erect, with head thrown high, looked across the great river into that West whither White Eagle had gone with the song of death in his throat, and spoke again with a voice as gentle in her soft throat as the plashing of the surf upon the margin of southern seas.

"Tell me," she said.

Black Hawk complied. "Half Ear loves the strong waters. He knew not what he did when he struck down one who was as a brother. It was in the hunting across the river, before the snows. The man was of the Ihoways. They cried out for blood,

as the law runs. The time came when our young men were to go to them with the one who had slain. Half Ear, lying sick with a fever in his mother's lodge, could not go. It was needful that some one of the blood give blood back to the Ihoways, lest much blood should run. It was the word of the Sauk that it should be so." The voice of the chief lowered. "The White Eagle went forth into the land beyond the rivers, which is the land of the Ihoways, with the song of death in his throat."

There was no sound from the Indian maiden as she stood with her face fixed upon the west. There was no motion of her body. It was as though she were already one of those who dwelt in the Silent City. The sun, sinking into the sky where she gazed, struck red upon the surface of the Father of Waters. Across the sky spread the color of blood, softened into beauty by the brush of nature. Through the hush that was about them came the laughter of children in the village beneath, the song of the robin, the trilling of the thrush, the plaintive call of the cat-bird.

"It is — it is well," murmured the Indian maiden.

Deep over the face of the Father of Waters flushed the glow of the setting sun. Deep across the fields and forest settled the hush of eventide. Deep into the heart of the Indian maiden, the daughter of the chief, sank the sorrow of the Law of Blood. Motionless, silent, she stood there, her face ruddy

in the glow that came from sky and water. Motionless, silent, the chief, her father, stood behind her, gazing beyond her slight form, gazing beyond the red, flowing river; gazing beyond all that was within the ken of eyes.

As he gazed, a low, sharp cry came from the lips of the girl. He was at her side. He looked swiftly into her face. Her lips were parted. Her cheeks were flushed with a higher flush than that of the dying day. Her eyes were fixed upon the broad bosom of the Mississippi. His own glance followed them; he saw what she saw.

Black against the rushing red of the current, leaving a wake that closed red behind, something came toward the shore with slow and even motion. Beside it, like wings of the eagle, feathering splashes of water came and went rhythmically, falling back into the smooth surface in ruddy drops and films through which shone the glow that was on the water. The plashing sound of them came faintly to those who watched from the Tower.

For an enduring silence they stood there. Nearer and nearer came that which was black against the glow on the water. The red turned to pink, to grey; that which was dark against the waves came closer still. It was the head of one who swam. It came near the shore. It stopped. It arose from the water. A young Indian, magnificent in grace and strength, stood in the shallows. He breathed deeply. He plashed to the shore. He

walked toward the village and into the gate that was by the lodge of Black Hawk.

Black Hawk bent his glance upon the Indian maiden. Her face was set against the West. Her eyes were wide. Her lips moved. She spoke. She spoke to the sun that was gone, to the hush that was about them, to the star that fluttered in the grey sky of twilight.

“The White Eagle should not have come,” she said. Her tone was dead as the sea when the wind has long laid dead. “It was the Law of the Blood. It was the word of the Sauk. My father would not have come back. It were better for him that he had not come.”

“It were better for him that he had not come,” echoed the Black Hawk.

He turned into the trail that led to the village, and left her with her face fixed upon the West, whence the last red of evening had died into ashes.

CHAPTER III

LOVELIGHT

GREAT was the grief that night in the lodge of Light Foot, the mother of Half Ear; the mother of the White Eagle, his brother. The Eagle had gone into the land of the Ihoways for a sacrifice; he had come back living into the land of the Sacs. The eye of the chief had looked aslant upon him. The braves of the Sacs had made a scoff at him. His shame was upon the lodge of his mother!

Bitter were the reproaches heaped upon him by Half Ear, his brother, now well of the fever which had detained him from the sacrifice. Long and elaborate were the repinings of Light Foot. All through the night, while her son, the White Eagle, lay at her feet, Light Foot mumbled her woe, from time to time casting over her locks dust from the floor of her lodge.

“He of the hollow heart has come back,” she moaned. “The White Eagle went that his brother Half Ear might live. The White Eagle has come back; now must we all die, for the law of blood has been broken. Like the eagle went he forth; like the duck he came back, swimming in the water. His mother is the mother of a coward. Old squaws will laugh at her; the children of young squaws will mock

his brother with their fingers; his brother is the brother of a coward. Half Ear is brave; but the White Eagle is a coward; Half Ear is a friend of the whites with much honor; the White Eagle is the enemy of his own people, and will be made to work in the corn with the squaws. He will hoe corn when his brother goes to the hunt!"

Thus through the night she moaned. If the White Eagle heard her, he made no sign or answer, but lay peacefully at her feet, until the day broke, and the Sauk song to the sun reverberated through the village. He made no answer when Half Ear, lowering over the parched corn which Light Foot gave them to eat, upbraided him anew for cowardice and perfidy. With eyes cast down, with even breath, he ate his corn in silence.

Surly and ill-natured, Half Ear left the lodge of his mother as soon as he had eaten his corn. With hanging head and muttering lips he slunk past the corner of the bark house and slipped stealthily behind the rows to the gate in the palisade of brush that ran along the eastern side of the village.

"He goes to his friends, the palefaces," mumbled Light Foot to herself.

Sinister and forbidding was Half Ear. In his youth he was the Blue Wolf; now he was Half Ear, for that one half of his right ear had been lopped off in a drunken fight with his friends, the whites. He had a lean and hungry look, had Half Ear. His nose was thin and twisted. His eyes, close together,

seemed to look at divergent things though their gaze was straight. His mouth was sharp and drawn. His ears, so much as were left him, were small, and stood abruptly from his head. The sun shone yellow and sick through them. Of all the Sacs in Saukenuk, he alone did not stand upright on his heels, as a Sauk should. His voice was thick, and shook when he spoke. About him was the air of the fallen, the degenerate. He was victim to the firewater of the whites. That, in the beginning and the end, was the wickedness of Half Ear.

“See! Half Ear steals away from before the faces of the people,” wailed Light Foot, when that one had left. “Such is the shame that the Eagle brings to the wigwam of his mother!” She fell again to moaning and casting dust upon her head.

White Eagle, looking sorrowfully upon her, passed from the lodge and walked along the village street. As he went, silence fell upon those who were gathered there, like the hush that comes upon singing birds when the shadow of the eagle hovers over the copse. With half glances, they whispered to each other behind their hands. The warriors and the young hunters grunted their contempt for a Sauk who had betrayed the word of a Sauk, given unto the friends of the Sacs.

“Like an eagle he went away; he comes back like a duck, squattering in the water,” mumbled White Cloud, the prophet, taking up the words of another, after the manner of prophets.

“His liver is the liver of a chicken!” replied the Black Hawk, walking by the side of his prophet. His look was more sad than angry when he said it.

The White Eagle, hearing their contumely, seeing their scornful nods and gestures as he passed, walked to the end of the village street with slow step and head held proudly in the air; walked past the lodge of Black Hawk with eye unbending; deigned not a glance toward the door of the lodge where Feather Heart stood watching him; walked to the southern gate, turned, and made his way back among the scoffers to his mother’s lodge. There, with eyes fixed in sadness upon the fire where Light Foot parched corn, setting aside his proud demeanor, he sat grieving through the hours of morning.

The sound of a drum rattled through the village; the drum of the crier. White Eagle, sitting on the ground of his mother’s lodge, raised his head, alert and listening. He questioned Light Foot with a look.

“This is the day of the dance, when the braves of the Sacs tell of the deeds they have done since the last planting,” said the woman, in a doleful voice, making lament. “There is none from the lodge of Light Foot to go among the warriors with a tale of bravery; for the White Eagle has turned into a duck, and Half Ear is brought low by the disgrace of his brother!”

The grief of the woman awakened again. She went on dismally, rocking and groaning on the floor of her lodge.

The drum rolled once more. Cries arose from the warriors, gathering in a square in the center of the village. One leaped into their midst to chant in loud voice of the deeds of valor he had done since the last dance; of his mighty hunting; of slaying braves of the Sioux tribe, their deadly enemies; of stirring ventures and close escapes. He was done. The warriors raised a mighty cry. The drum rattled. Another advanced to the center of the square, and chanted his tale. Another, and another, through hours, they came and told of their deeds.

White Eagle, sitting in the lodge of his mother, listened long to the sounds of the dance. The last brave chanted his story; the drum beat for the last time. The dance was finished. Loud shouts went up from the warriors and hunters; the final ceremony. In a moment they would disperse.

Above the shouting floated the sound of a young, strong voice, raised in lamentations; in the farewell song of the Sacs. White Eagle, stripped of feathers, with his face raised to the sky, chanting the song of farewell, entered the square. He was met by outcries. Some of the young men would have laid hand on him. To the cries and the violence he paid no heed, walking to the center of the square with face raised to the sky and the song on his lips.

“Listen!” he said, from the center, sweeping his eye about him as he turned to face them all in succession. “Hear the White Eagle before he goes. When the night comes the White Eagle will be gone.

He will chant his morning song to the sun in the forests, far from the lodges of his people. His mother's lodge shall know him no more; no more will his voice be heard in the council or the dance; no more will he ride to the hunt with his brothers. He sings the song of farewell. But before he goes, let the brothers of the Eagle listen to what he will tell them.

“The White Eagle has been brave in the hunt and on the war path. The young men of the Sacs have said so; the old braves have looked with kind eyes upon him. His spear is long; his arrows are true; his feet are swift in the war path; many scalps dangle at his belt, though he is small in years. Never has the liver of the Eagle turned soft in danger; never has foe seen his back; the bear and the panther have fled from his knife—this his people knew. But now his people, the people of his father and his father's father, have turned their faces from him. Now, in the setting of a sun, their fingers have been crooked against him. He goes from the land of his people, from before the faces of his brother, to make his bed with the wolves and to lie in the caves of the hills. But before he goes, let his brothers listen to what he tells them.

“For the Law of the Blood went he forth to the land of the Ihoways, singing his death song. His brother had slain; his brother could not go to fulfil the law between our people and the people of the Ihoways that says ‘blood of the blood for blood.’

The White Eagle went that the Law of the Blood should be fulfilled; that the word of the Sauk should not stand as naught in the ears of the Ihoways.

“He came to their village with the young men who went forth with him. Singing his death song he went among the Ihoways. Singing his death song he held out his hands, making the sign of the Law of the Blood. The young men who were with him, singing no song, turned their backs and went again to their people. White Eagle, singing his song, was among the Ihoways.

“They bound him to a stake. They built a fire at his feet. They shouted about him with spears and hatchets when the fire burned. The White Eagle made no cry. On his lips were the words of his death song, raised to the Great Spirit; in his heart was gladness, for he was fulfilling the law. The fire burned his feet;—look, you may see”—the lower part of his limbs were seared and sore. “They struck him with their spears;—look, you may see”—he laid open his shirt of doeskin; there were red wounds upon his breast and shoulders. “They danced the dance of death about him. He made no cry; for was he not a Sauk, fulfilling the word of the Sacs?

“The fire burned. The spears struck him. His strength went away. He hung limp in the cords that bound him. His voice was raised in the song of death. His eyes gazed into their eyes; for the White Eagle is a Sauk, and knows how a Sauk should die. **At the last, when death was upon him, the braves of**

the Ihoways raised a mighty shout. 'He is too brave to die!' they cried. 'It was his brother who slew. The law is fulfilled!'

"They stamped out the fires that burned him. They threw down the spears that made him bleed. They unbound the thongs of deer skin. With much shouting they led him to the wigwam of the chief of the village. For a day they made honor to him, hailing him, dancing and singing before the door of the wigwam; the squaw of the chief healed his wounds. When they were healed, they led him forth and bade him go to the village of his people with honor upon him; a score of their young men went with him even to the Father of Waters.

"He came again among his people with a glad heart, for life is sweet to him. The eyes of the chief fell aslant upon him; the eyes of old warriors shut upon him; the young men made a mock of him; children of squaws howled at his heels; young maidens turned their faces; his brother reviled him; his mother moaned that he had come back. He who had been brave among them was treated as a coward. He who was the son of a chief was made a mock of by children of young squaws. His people turned against him; they believed his liver was soft in the face of death; that he had fled from the Ihoways and the Law of Blood.

"Now the White Eagle goes forth from the home of his fathers; from the village of the Sacs and the Foxes, his brothers. His lodge shall be the oak tree

in the forest; the elm and the maple shall be his wigwam. The squirrel and the thrush will be his companions; with the squirrel shall he eat nuts from the tall trees; his voice shall be raised to the sun with the voice of the thrush. The home of his people shall know him no more; for his people have turned away their eyes in the hour of his honor. They did not know. Now they have heard. The White Eagle will go.”

Passionately he sang his song to them. The warriors stood in silence, listening. The women pressed behind them to hear, hushing their babes. His voice intoning his story was the only sound, save the rustling of the distant waters of the Father of Waters and the call of the cat-bird upon the Tower.

As he proceeded, the eyes of the braves kindled with interest; they lighted with the excitement of listening to a tale of bravery. The women whispered softly and drew closer to one another, dreaming dreams for the babes that were on their arms. Apart from them, in the solitude she had sought, half hidden behind the drooping branches of a maple, a beautiful Indian maiden looked on and listened, with a heart that beat like the wings of a bird flying to its mate. Her eyes were like stars reflected in the bosom of a deep and tranquil sea.

As his voice died into stillness a mighty acclaim went up from the assembled braves. With shouts that shook the Tower they closed about him; for the White Eagle had ever been dear to the hearts of his

people; their joy was great in his tale. Among them pressed the Black Hawk. His eyes snapped with happiness. He laid hand upon the shoulder of the White Eagle, who still chanted his farewell song, returning the acclamations of his brothers with haughty eye.

“The White Eagle will stay with his people,” said Black Hawk. “He will have much honor; he will be made a chief among them; for the bravery of the White Eagle is the bravery of the Sauk; his honor will be high among his people; love will be his in the hearts of the Sacs and their brothers the Foxes.”

A great shout burst forth at the words of the chief. The Eagle looked upon faces that glowed with love for him; into eyes that gleamed their pride in a Sauk brave. He looked upon the countenances of women, turned to him in wide-eyed admiration. He looked upon the face of an Indian maiden of surpassing loveliness, all alight with adoration, in among the leaves of a drooping maple.

“The White Eagle will stay,” he said, his eyes floating as they gazed among the leaves of the drooping maple.

He hastened to the lodge of Light Foot, his mother, to tell her. He found her sitting on the floor of her lodge, casting dust upon her locks. In a corner, glaring spitefully, with eyes that burned with firewater, lay Half Ear in a huddled heap.

“Ah, who hath taught my son, the White Eagle,

to lie!" moaned the woman. "Who hath taught the White Eagle his lies!"

He saluted her. She made no response, save to repeat in louder voice, "Who hath taught the White Eagle his lies!"

The young brave turned a pitying look from her to the one who lay groveling in drink in the corner of the lodge, and left to join the young men in their games. But his heart was not in them; his heart was in among the leaves of the drooping maple, dwelling on the vision of the face he had seen there, aglow with a light which set him afire. Weary were the games; heavy were the hours until the night; eager was his soul for the twilight.

For this was the eve of the Crane Dance; the night of wooing among the Sacs; the night when the young braves sought out their well beloved and made the test of fire. On this night he might enter her lodge without hindrance from her father's spear. He might kneel where she slept and place the light at her side. If the light burned on, she loved him not; if that she breathed upon the light and it fluttered out, it was that she loved him; and on the morrow he might come to the door of her father's lodge with his love song, and she would come forth to him, to be his bride in the Crane Dance. Thenceforth they would be wed. Such was the custom among them from the time when they dwelt by the frozen river of the North, before the Iroquois drove them forth.

It was dusk. Many lights gleamed and flickered through the village. A hush was upon the lodges and in the streets. One could almost hear the faint rush of the flames as they climbed from the tiny torches into the still night air.

A rustling at the door of the lodge of Light Foot! A light breaking into the dusk that was about the lodge! A tall, graceful figure poised for an instant before the door, till the light should burn steadily and surely! It was the White Eagle.

With eager step he pressed along the open way. Other lights he passed, but paid no heed. It was the solemn pretense among them all—lovers, loved ones, and those who dwelt in the lodges with the beloved—to pay no heed.

Swiftly he stole toward the lodge of Black Hawk at the end of the village, toward the lodge of Feather Heart. Soft footsteps were about him; tiny blurs of light melted the dusk. He paid no heed.

His shadow danced off into the darkness, projected by the flickering light he carried. So his heart danced as he hastened toward the lodge of Feather Heart.

He was before the door. He stopped. He hesitated. The courage of the Sauk was within him; but he paused.

His hand was upon the mat of rushes that hung in the doorway. He raised it. He entered. His light glowed within the lodge of the Black Hawk; the lodge of Feather Heart.

He passed among the sleepers. No eyelid was raised. That had been their pretense, from the time their fathers had dwelt by the frozen banks of the Northern river.

Past the sleeping form of the chief he went. Past the members of his household, stopping and stooping to search among them as he went. Past them all to where Feather Heart lay.

Her head was pillowed upon her arm; her soft and slender arm. Her black hair fell across it, and across her throat; her throat like the leaf of a wild rose, new blown. Her long lashes lay along her cheeks; her cheeks with a glow of warmth beneath the dusk. She breathed rapidly for one who slept! Perchance she dreamed!

He reached toward her. He set the light close to her face. Never before had the hand of the Eagle trembled in deed that he did.

“Lovelight hath lighted me to thy side,” he whispered. “I bring you the flame of love on the end of a torch, daughter of a chief. Open thy lips and breath it into thy heart!”

She opened her eyes. The Light of Love was dim beside the light within them. She rested them upon the countenance of the White Eagle. Slowly, with glances clinging to him, she closed her lids. Her lips parted. She breathed upon the light. It flickered for a space, leaped, and went out.

With a heart that bounded within him, the White Eagle made his way from the lodge of Feather Heart.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN WITH HAIR OF BRONZE

THE chant to dawn floated weird and mystic across the flood of the Father of Waters from the village of Saukenuk. It was the morning of the Crane Dance; the morning of the day when the young men and the maidens wed among the Sacs. With the first pink of sunlight the lovers were already astir. They gathered on the green between the lodges, chanting their love songs soft and low to their beloved, still asleep in the lodges of their fathers.

Smoke came from the houses of the village, curling faintly blue against the still fainter blue of the early June sky. The birds awoke in the trees; the thrush made melody upon the hill; the cat-bird, ceasing her mournful plaint, rejoiced in the thicket. The river in its rocky bed made them accompaniment. The sun rose singing over the northern spur of the Watchtower. The day of the Dance of the Crane was at hand.

Swiftly, with flute in hand, the young braves sped whither their hearts leaped before them. Each at the door of his beloved made soft music on his flute; the music of the love song of the Sacs. The

mingled strain from a hundred lodges lifted through the soft morning air into the blue sky.

Pretty was it to see how the father of the beloved, a grizzled warrior, came forth from his lodge with a show of seeing who it was that made music at the door, and why; pretty to see how the mother came behind him, pressing close to learn. Pleasant was it to hear the notes of the love song turn into discord when they came to the door; pleasant to hear the love song spring again from the flute when the mat in the doorway had fallen behind their retreating figures.

Beautiful was it to behold the maiden, coming at last to the door, blushing like the morning, with eyes that dared not meet her lover's; with hand that reached trembling into his to be led forth from her father's lodge. Beautiful to watch them hastening to the green that ran between the houses, hand in hand, close, silent, glowing.

From a hundred lodges they came to join in the dance. In the whole village not a face was to be seen save the faces of the lovers. In the whole village the doors of the lodges were closed. Those neither lovers nor beloved might not fare forth this morn. So had it been since the time when their fathers' fathers had dwelt along the frozen river of the North, before the Iroquois drove them forth.

The White Eagle, in a dress of deerskin, embroidered with quill and bead, the feathers of the eagle in his hair, stood at the door of the lodge of

the chieftain; at the door of the lodge of Feather Heart, daughter of a chief. On his flute he played the love song, or sang with his lips to his beloved.

“Daughter of morning, thy lover awaits thee;
Child of a chieftain, come forth from the lodge!
Cheeks like the wild rose that blows in the summer,
Teeth like the snowflake and throat like the swan,
Eyes like the stars in the stark nights of winter,
Hair like the midnight and smile like the dawn!
Come! For thy beauty shall conquer the morning!
Come! 'Tis the day of the Dance of the Crane!

“Daughter of morning, thy lover awaits thee!
Son of a chieftain, come forth to his lodge!
Mighty in hunting and swift in the war-path,
Keen is his hatchet and stalwart his bow;
Flesh of the deer and the quail will he bring thee,
Skin of the young of the beaver and doe.
Come! For his lodge and his right arm will shelter!
Come! 'Tis the day of the Dance of the Crane!”

A stirring of the mat that hung in the door of her father's lodge, and it was lifted aside! With downcast eyes, all alight with love; with lips that trembled into a smile, like the new leaves of the rose when the breezes of June kiss them, she stood before him. Without a word, they passed hand in hand to the green in the center of the village; to the Dance of the Crane, with no eye upon them; for that was the sacred custom of the Sacs from the first time whence their legends sprung.

One eye there was that saw them; the glinting, blood-hot eye of Half Ear. He was returning to the village from his friends the whites, drunken and shattered. He stood in the eastern gate as they passed through the village. He looked upon them with evil in his face as they went hand in hand. Without entering the gate, he turned and went back the way he had come, as swiftly as he could, for the liquor gripped his legs.

It was night before he returned again to the lodge of his mother, where Light Foot sat alone in the darkness, repining for the honor that had passed over the head of her beloved son to rest upon him of the hollow heart, the teller of lies. The White Eagle had gone to another lodge with his bride, the daughter of a chieftain.

From that day forth Half Ear slunk among his people, more and more like a cur that was whipped. He went no more among the whites, but clung to the door of his mother's lodge, save when he wandered through the village behind the houses to the gate that led to the river, and so out to the last point of land, to sit between the two rivers with gaze fixed upon the sweeping expanse of waters swinging between their banks below.

It was mid-June. The women had gone to the planting, hoeing their corn in the fields about the village. The young men were hunting in the forests; the old men sat about on the grass beneath the trees, smoking their pipes, telling of deeds that had been

done in the days that were past. The Eagle had gone forth with the young men to the hunt. Feather Heart awaited his return on the top of the Watch-tower; for the daughter of the chief went not into the fields to hoe.

Half Ear, sitting on the last point of land with eyes fixed down the river, arose hastily and stole toward the village with averted look, like one who had done murder. At the gate he paused to look behind him. A thin trace of yellow smoke, ascending from beyond the last point of land where it could be seen, arose across the fair blue of the sky. Peering cautiously into the village to make sure he had not been seen, he turned from the gate and crept close behind the palisade of brush to the point nearest the trail to the Tower. From thence he made haste until he vanished within the arch of foliage that marked the foot of the trail.

Scarcely had he disappeared from sight before a sound came over the swinging current of the Father of Waters that was a sound of terror to the ears of those in the village. It was the sound of something coughing and sputtering through the water beyond the bend, like a great monster that swam, choking as it swam. The breath of the monster lay yellow and thick across the sky.

Warriors flocked to the lodge of Black Hawk, their chief. With gun and spear in hand, with hatchet and knife in belt, with horn and pouch slung on their shoulders they came, awaiting his command.

The women, working in the fields, arose and hurried into the village, hearing the sound and seeing the yellow breath across the sky; children in their play hushed and drew near the lodges of their mothers. A call went forth to the young men who had gone to the hunting. Dread was in the heart of all; of all save the Black Hawk.

With his warriors pressing about, he went to the gate that led to the water, with eyes fixed upon the whirling expanse of river below. Something huge and black; something that breathed yellow flames with a horrid hissing noise, something that groaned and moaned, came into view about the bend in the river. A low cry of terror went up from the lodges where the women cowered. The men drew nearer their chief, wide-eyed, waiting.

“ ’Tis the smoke canoe of the whites,” quoth the Hawk. “See! It bears the warriors of the Great Father! The sun flashes from their guns. They go to the White Beaver in his fort above.”

As it drew nearer, slowly urging through the pressing waters, those who watched could see the soldiers crowding about the rail of the steamer. Their eyes were fixed on the shore, where the braves of the Sacs and the Foxes stood grouped. The sun sparkled among their guns.

Slowly the smoke canoe came closer. The braves gathered about their chief looked into his face for sign of command, with their hands stiffening about their guns and their spears. The steamer drew

abreast the point, laying its course in shore. The hissing and the groaning ceased. The vessel stopped. Black Hawk answered the murmurings of his braves with a look of stern command.

A flag of truce fluttered from the gaff of the steamboat. Black Hawk made answer with a sign of peace. The water about the craft swarmed with small boats, hastily put over. They were filled with soldiers. They came to the point of land. The soldiers debarked, and marched toward the gate where the chief stood among his warriors. With firm eye he bade his braves withhold.

At the head marched one splendid in blue coat with yellow buttons, and with crusted yellow upon his shoulders. At the side of him marched Keokuk, a chief of the Sacs, who, for the sake of peace to his people, had led them across the Father of Waters at the word of the Great Father.

“General Gaines, a chief of the Great Father, has come to the Black Hawk, to tell him that the Great Father bids him depart to the land beyond the Father of Waters,” said the Indian, in the Sauk tongue, acting as interpreter; for the Hawk was ignorant of English. “It were wise for the Hawk to obey the wish of the Great Father.”

Black Hawk listened, a look of scorn on his sharp features. When the other was done, he made a sign that they should follow, and entered his lodge. Keokuk, General Gaines, officers who were with him, braves high in the councils of the Sacs, made solemn

and silent procession behind him. Their voices sounded through the length and breadth of the village.

The soldiers, left without the building, loitered about the village whither their curiosity and courage led them, staring at the Indians and poking and prying into the lodges. They were regulars and militia, hastily gathered on a sudden alarm. They were ill-equipped, the militia were undisciplined and inexperienced; but they were in sufficient force to enable their commander to do the will of the Great Father with the Indians.

Among them was a young man of fair skin which the winds and sun could not darken. His eyes were brown, soft and warm; his hair, straying across his pale brow, was the color of bronze; his lips were full, his chin firm, his jaws well set. Silent, watchful, he looked with a pity in his eye upon the women and children huddled in dumb terror; upon the groups of warriors, sullen and stolid.

Near him was a short, round man with a short, round head fitting close to his body; with prominent blue eyes set at a distance apart in a face of fiery red; short, round, red hands on short, round arms. He passed about among the Indians restlessly; his glances searched their faces with impatient eagerness. He peered into the distant parts of the village, cursing with disappointment when he failed to see what he sought.

As he looked, there came a low cry from among

the women crouching close by. One of them, a comely young squaw with a frank face and gentle eye, came to him. In her arms was a babe of less than a year. The skin of the infant was dark, but not so dark as the skin of the woman, its mother. She held it forth to the white man. Her gentle eyes appealed wistfully to him. She spoke to him, softly, in the Sauk tongue. The man, startled to see her, answered her harshly in her own language. It was not she whom he sought!

She spoke again. There was hungry pleading in her tone. The man replied savagely, in a burst of anger. He raised his arm to strike her.

In the instant that he did, with the swift grace of a panther, he of the bronze hair laid hand on the upraised arm.

“Frake, what are you doing?” he said. His voice was calm and contained.

The other turned upon him.

“I don’t know that it is any of your business!” he growled.

“We can discuss that afterward, if you like,” returned the one of the brown eyes and well set jaws. “For the present, I’ll make it my affair. Don’t strike that woman!”

The softness went out of the brown eyes as he said it; his voice, still calm and contained, was raised a shade. The one whom he had called Frake glared at him, his blue eyes standing farther from his head.

“Yes! You’re the feller that’s been preachin’ all the way about givin’ the Indian his rights!” he sneered. “You’re the feller that tried to block the expedition in the first place, ain’t you? You seem to care a pile for these dirty redskins, you do! How long have you been protector of the Indians? Hey?”

A knot of militia had gathered about the center of disturbance; for the querulous voice of Frake sounded through the village.

“Yes; you’re right,” returned the other, answering the asseverations of Frake. “I am sorry for the Indians. I am sorry we came here. But that has nothing to do with her.” He inclined his head to where the squaw stood, shrinking and apprehensive. She seemed to fear lest harm should come to the white man who would have struck her—which is the way of woman the world over. “She was a woman before she was an Indian!”

Frake’s face curled into a low leer. He looked about at the soldiers who had gathered, winking at them.

“Oh, that’s it, is it?” he sneered, with obvious significance, and walked away, leaving the soldiers chuckling and grinning at his repartee.

The other paid no heed to the implied insult, beyond a contemptuous glance at the snickering yokels surrounding him. His attention was fixed on the man who had sought to quarrel with him. He watched him closely, with shrewd eye. Watching him, he saw him stop abruptly in the search he was

surreptitiously making among the Indians, and fasten his gaze upon the eastern gate of the village. Standing in the gate he saw an Indian; a sinister, forbidding Indian, with thin, sharp, crooked face; with eyes close together, which seemed to look at divergent objects; with little ears, of which one was half cut away.

He saw Frake hasten toward this Indian standing in the gate, stealing behind intervening houses to make his progress as inconspicuous as possible. He saw him come to the side of the Indian and speak with him; their heads close together, their eyes avoiding each other's face. Watching still, he saw them pass from the gate across an intervening open space toward a high hill to the eastward. In the foliage at the base of the hill was an archway of limbs and leaves. Beneath it was the trail. The man, watching, saw them disappear in the trail through the archway.

As he was about to withdraw his gaze, wondering whether it might not be best to follow, he saw another figure creep swiftly across the open space toward the hill, and disappear within the archway; the figure of the woman with the babe. Perplexed, he was consulting with himself to determine what he ought to do, when a man at his elbow spoke to him.

“Who's your friend?” asked the man. He turned. It was William Hall, one of the militia men. His face was twisted into a facetious grin.

“That is Isaac Frake, Hall,” returned the one addressed, still revolving in his mind the problem that had presented itself. “I thought you knew him. I have seen you talking with him. He is a settler hereabouts. It was he who brought in the alarm and prevailed upon General Gaines to come here.”

“Oh, I don’t mean him!” chortled the militiaman. “I mean your friend, the squaw!”

The man with the bronze hair ignored him. William Hall, not used to finesse in his communications with his fellows, mistook the dignified rebuke for an indication of embarrassment and a confused conscience.

“You seem to be mighty fond of the Indians!” he ventured, slyly grinning behind his hand.

“I am sorry for them,” returned the other, preoccupied.

“Yes; especially for the women!”

The man of the bronze hair, thinking of what he had seen, made no response. Hall, chuckling complacently over his supposed success, essayed again.

“Seen a good deal of ’em, hain’t yer?” he asked.

“Enough to have charity for them.” He paid little heed to the bumpkin; he was not aware of the point of the other’s badgering.

“ ’Specially for the women?” Hall was making the most of it.

There was no response.

“Been here long?” went on Hall, with an elabo-

rate project of bringing the other to ultimate confusion.

“I have been connected with the Indian agency headquarters at Jefferson Barracks for some months, Hall,” returned his unconscious victim.

What barbed point William Hall sought to impale the man upon, and what his success would have been, can never be determined, for before he could frame the next question in the projected series the object of his pungent designs departed from his side with startling abruptness, and was speeding toward the arched trail, where he presently disappeared.

The man of the bronze hair had made up his mind. Whatever lay behind the journey of Frake to the hill, no harm could come from his following, and he might do much in the way of good. He grew anxious at the thought of what might befall the Indian if she encountered the brute along in the hill; with the army behind him he would hesitate at little. He was convinced that the woman had gone to seek out the man.

Thinking these things, he hurried up the trail. Hastening, he heard someone coming swiftly toward him with soft step. He turned a corner of the hill. In the trail before him was the Indian woman. Her face was eager and apprehensive. At sight of the man, she gave a little cry of relief.

“Raven Hair came to seek you,” she said, in broken English. “The pale face is the friend of Raven Hair. Will he come? There is need for him.

The heart of the woman who loves is wise; she knows where is need for him!"

Impressed by the earnestness of the woman's manner and already wrought upon by his own thoughts, the man bade her proceed. She made no delay. Turning in the trail, she hastened upward. He followed, impatient of its windings, striving to peer through the foliage to penetrate the future.

In their ascent they approached a level place on a shoulder of the hill where the thicket receded from the trail, leaving an opening between the oaks. As they came close to it the woman, making a sign for silence, went forward and peered through the edge of the thicket along the trail. Making another sign, she glided into the open space.

In the center of it, sitting on the ground, leaning against a tree, was an Indian; a pitiful, craven savage. In his lap was a bottle. The Indian was crooning to the bottle drunkenly. Half of his right ear was gone. It was the Indian whom the white man had seen go with Frake. Raven Hair, the squaw with the papoose, came behind him like a shadow and placed a hand upon his drooping shoulder.

"Half Ear will stay with Raven Hair," she said, as he struggled to rise to his feet, surprised and confounded. "The pale face would walk upon the hill."

She directed the white man with a nod to the point where the trail left the opening. Making sure that the woman would be able to detain the wretched

savage by sheer moral strength. he hastened up the trail.

He was not long in coming to where the crest of the hill broke rough against the sky. As he came near the top, he heard voices; a man's voice, harsh and angry, and another, that of a woman, clear as a bugle, defiant, thrilling. The one he recognized as that of Frake. The other he had never heard.

The sound of them sent him running up the trail, which was now more gradual. The thicket opened again, at the very summit. In the center of the space, his back toward him, was Frake. Confronting him, with flashing eye and quivering nostril; slight, beautiful, sinuous, bristling; a panther at bay; an incensed goddess of the woods, was an Indian maiden of a loveliness which he had never before seen in maiden—save only once.

They spoke in the Sauk tongue. He could not understand. From their tone and their manner he knew that the man threatened; that the maiden defied him. He kept closer, looking the while to the knife in his belt. The Indian saw him. She understood, and made no sign. The voice of the man rose louder. The eyes of the maiden were pits of fire.

“Curse your pretty hide, Feather Heart!” cried the man, in English, which she could not understand. “If you won't come one way you will another!”

He had lost all restraint. His voice was a hoarse roar. He grasped the girl by the waist. He placed

one thick hand over her mouth to prevent an outcry. She struggled to no purpose.

The man with hair of bronze leaped upon the broad back of the other. With one motion he tore the hand of Frake from the waist of the maiden; with another he flung him to the ground; with another was upon him, pinioning him, face in the dust.

“Frake,” he said, deliberately, “in Virginia, where I came from, they would hang a man for this. Things seem to be different out this way.”

The man on the ground, wriggling and cursing, tried to release himself.

“Now, don’t squirm, Frake; I don’t want to be severe with you,” counseled the one who held him. At the words he pressed the point of his knife persuasively against the red neck of the man. Cursing still and muttering threats, Frake subsided, and was permitted to arise.

Gaining his feet, he looked toward the Indian girl, abashed and discomfited. Glancing at her, the prominent eyes swelled in his head, his face blanched, his jaw dropped into its creases of fat, his knees shook. He groaned as though he saw a ghost. The other, whose eyes had not left him for fear of treachery, glanced to see what was the cause of his terror.

Standing at the side of the girl, his arm about her, was a young Indian brave, tall, lithe, alert, enraged, physically beautiful. His eyes were

alternately upon one pale face and the other. The Indian girl, clinging to him, whispered in his ear. In an instant the Indian leaped upon Frake with a yell of rage. One hand gripped the great red throat. The other brandished a knife.

Before he could strike, he of the bronze hair was between them. One hand he raised high in the air, fingers extended, palm forward, making a sign of peace. With the other he grasped the brawny wrist of the savage with a grip that partially loosened his hold upon the knife. Fixing the Indian with earnest eyes, he shook his head. Frake, abandoning himself to fate and fear, made no sound or sign.

The Indian, with flashing eye and dilating nostril, gazed savagely at the one who interfered. The brown eyes of the white man, calm, intense, commanding, returned the look. The slight hand of Feather Heart, stealing along the naked arm of the warrior to the hand that held the knife, restrained him. Without relinquishing his hold upon the neck of Frake, he lowered his hand and sheathed his knife.

The white, by signs, led him to the hill overlooking the town of Saukenuk, still holding Frake by the throat, and showed him the soldiers there. Looking at Frake and shaking his head once more with the gesture and expression of one who gives advice, he left the three at the top of the hill. It was no longer his affair. The hand of the Indian was still upon the throat of the pale face.

William Hall, idling among the Indians in the village of Saukenuk while the chiefs of the whites and the Sacs held council, in the course of time saw two figures emerge from the arch of foliage that marked the trail to the high hill on the eastern side of the village. One of them was the Indian woman with the baby whose skin was paler than the skin of its mother. The other was the man from Virginia. Seeing them, and being a man of circumscribed discernment, William Hall turned on his heel with a sagacious chuckle and continued to idle among the Indians while the council went forward.

On the morning of the next day Black Hawk took his people with him and departed in many canoes across the waters of the Father of Waters. On the evening of the next day the sun, sinking red into the west, looked aslant upon red, smouldering heaps of ruins where had stood the city of the Sacs; the grey moon, arising, looked down upon grey ashes over which smoke ghosts flitted mournfully through the deserted night.

The Great Father had had his will with the Indian!

CHAPTER V

THE FRONTIER CLERK

DENTON OFFUTT was as good as his word. He set up a store in New Salem, as he said he would on the morning when his tall and angular boatman worked his flat-boat over Cameron's dam, and placed the same tall and angular boatman in the store as clerk.

It was not long until Abraham Lincoln was one of the community. It was not long until he was much more than the least one of the little settlement whither he had drifted. Genial, mild, even tempered, huge of hand and great of heart, with a brain that had as many droll angles as his frame and features, he grew apace into the affections and esteem of the good people of New Salem.

They were glad when he was with them. They liked to go to Offutt's store to hear him discuss the events of the day with the wiseacres of the town. They enjoyed his pungent comments. They appreciated his hard sense. They delighted in his whimsical humor. They rehearsed and repeated the stories he told from behind the counter or over the supper table at Rutledge's Inn, where he boarded, until his fame had gone abroad through the country.

If Abe Lincoln knew the popularity that was

come upon him, he gave no indication of it. Modest, pleasant to all, he held his head straight and his heart clear through the little attentions frankly and ingenuously thrust upon him by his new friends. All who came shared in his sentiment toward his fellows, which was large and comprehensive. Always was he kind and generous, without favor or prejudice. And always there was about him the intangible, elusive sadness which had baffled them when they had seen him that first morning in the boat on Cameron's dam.

It was a day in July. The little village on the top of the hill by the river lay asleep in the noon sun. Not a stir of life was abroad in the heat. All was hushed, save the plashing of the stream where it trickled over Cameron's dam, having shrunk from the torrent of April. Offutt's store was deserted of all excepting Abe Lincoln, who sat on the counter, legs dangling like strings, reading a book. Presently he closed it with a bang and put it upon the shelf. Exclaiming against the heat and mopping his brow, he went to the door of the tavern in search of a breath of air.

A man on horseback was in front of the store. The horse was drinking at the trough. The long clerk glanced at the man and the horse casually. The animal was a beautiful roan creature, fine of limb, deep of chest, with classic head and neck; such a horse as he had seen but once. He looked at the rider more attentively. The man raised his head

from watching his animal drink, and looked full upon the clerk. It was he who had brought the auger to the stranded boat on Cameron's dam.

"Why, howdy, stranger," said Lincoln, cordially. "Traveling?"

"Hello, mariner," returned the other, recognizing the angular clerk at once. "Ashore at last, are you?"

There was a good-natured raillery in the tone, which Lincoln caught at once.

"Now, see here, stranger," he returned, with mock severity, "I can't allow any allusions to my seamanship. It was n't my fault in the least that we got aground on that dam. The trouble was with the dam. It stuck too far up into the water."

The man on the horse, laughing, inquired if he could bait his animal there; "Powhatan," he called him. He was told that he could. He dismounted, led the horse into the shade of a tree, removed the saddle, rubbed the wet back, felt of its withers to make sure it was not too warm to be fed, gave it grain, and passed into the store. Lincoln, watching his care of the animal with an approving eye, passed in behind him.

"I am going to eat some bread and cheese myself, if you can furnish me with it," said the young man.

The clerk could, and did, and the man sat down to eat by the door, where any breath of air that was stirring might be expected to reach him.

“What news, stranger?” inquired the elongated clerk, at length, contemplating him as he ate the cheese and bread.

“My name is Mortimer Randolph,” suggested the stranger, with unaffected courtesy. Lincoln made himself known, and they nodded on the new basis.

“I suppose you have heard accounts of the expulsion of Black Hawk from his village on the Rock River?” ventured the traveler.

“Some,” assented the clerk, laconically.

“I have recently come from Jefferson Barracks,” continued Randolph. “I was informed there that the squatters, for whose benefit the Indians were expelled, were able to buy only one section of land between them when it was put on sale.”

Lincoln, in sudden agitation, came close to the stranger.

“I don’t know how you feel about it,” he said, with some emotion, “but I think they used the old man badly. The time will come when Illinois will be ashamed of her dealings with Black Hawk!”

“The time cannot come too soon for the fair name of your State,” observed the other, in reply.

Lincoln, still wrought up, paced the puncheon floor of the store, among the barrels and boxes. As he walked his feet struck flat and firm, heel and toe at the same time.

“The oppression of a weak people by a strong is a thing abhorrent to my soul,” he went on, half

forgetting the presence of the stranger in an obsession of feeling. "I was in New Orleans this spring. I saw negroes in chains there, beaten and scourged. I saw a girl sold on the block. The bidders pinched her flesh between their fingers; the auctioneer made her run up and down the room before the men who were buying her! By God!"—he raised his face upward; he lifted his clenched fist above him; it was more a prayer than a curse—"by God! If ever I get a chance to hit that thing, I'll hit it hard!"

The man who was eating looked fixedly upon him. Over Lincoln's homely, grotesque features, into the eyes of sadness had come a radiance that was sublime, that made him beautiful. For a space he continued to pace the floor. Presently he confronted the traveler. He smiled consciously down at him.

"Perhaps you don't agree with me?" he submitted.

The other arose from his seat. He looked fully into the face of the towering pioneer for a moment in silence.

"I am from Virginia," he said at last. "My father owned slaves." He paused. "That is why I came here," he added. With that he passed from the room, to attend to his horse.

As he left, some one stood aside in the doorway to let him by. Absorbed, he only saw that it was a woman. Without heeding who it was, he raised his hat and made way, craving her pardon with a

display of manners rare in those parts. The woman murmured acknowledgment as he was moving away. The sound of the voice—soft, rich, melodious—arrested him. He turned in some surprise to hear such a one there. Turning, his eyes looked into the eyes of blue that he had seen on the morning in April when he had come that way; the eyes that had followed him over the hill as he rode away; the eyes that had looked at him out of his dreams since that morning in spring, that had peeped at him through the clouds in the sky. As he gazed she passed into the store.

A group of young men stood about his horse as he approached it, his mind awl with what he had seen. They were teasing the animal; poking it in the ribs, tweaking its tail, pulling its ears; seeking in a variety of ways to arouse it to a demonstration of temper. As Randolph came among them, Powhatan, whinnying softly, rubbed his nose against his master's sleeve. It brought him to his first realization of the presence of the others.

“Howdy, stranger!”

One of the men, apparently the leader of them, a big, rough, burly man, saluted him. “Fine animal you’ve got there; is his tail on good and tight?” he added, giving the horse’s tail a vigorous pull.

The crowd of young fellows roared at the wit of their leader. The man with hair of bronze made no sign of anger.

"I 'll have to ask you not to abuse the horse," he said to the bully, in even tone.

"You 'll have to do more than ask me, I reckon, stranger," retorted the man, in a tone of rough insult, and an accompanying epithet.

"Very well," rejoined the other, peacefully.

A white fist flashed across the astonished vision of the spectators. A dull sound of flesh on flesh came to their ears. Their leader, with a grunt, sank to the ground. He gained his feet before he was entirely prostrate, with a mighty oath. Another fist whipped through the air. The man fell heavily between the feet of the horse. The animal, nickering nervously, laid its velvet nose on his master's shoulders.

The man, extricating himself, arose once more. His comrades, cursing and shouting, rushed upon the Virginian, where he stood with his back toward his steed. One, two, three, they fell before his fists. But they were too many. By force of numbers, they came inside the range of his blows. They grappled him. Their hands clung to his arms; their fists beat him upon his face and body. Without a sound he fought back as best he could against the hopeless odds.

A low, anxious cry from the door of the store, the cry of a woman, reached his ears. Making shift to look through a shower of blows, where he was the center of a swirling mass of men, Randolph saw her in the doorway; saw the look of distress,

of anxiety, in the eyes, heard the cry again from the parted lips. With a burst of strength and agility he wrenched from their grasps, obstructed as they were in their fighting by the very numbers that gave them advantage. Before they had time to renew the onslaught Abe Lincoln was among them, his sweeping arms flinging them back, his voice raised bidding them hold off.

“Never mind these boys,” he said, between times, to their victim. “They are only the Clary Grove boys. They are not bad fellows, stranger. It’s just their notion of fun. Now, boys,” he continued, addressing the others, “what’s up? What has this stranger done, that you all had to pitch into him like this?”

“He punched me in the face!” bellowed the leader, using the vile epithet again.

“What did he do that for?” asked Lincoln, in the interests of peace.

The other did not offer any explanation.

“Did you call him what you called him just now?” pursued Lincoln.

The member of the gang acknowledged that he had.

“Now, see here, Jack Armstrong,” Lincoln went on, taking him by the lapels of his coat good-naturedly, “if you were a stranger in a place and somebody called you that, what would you do?”

“Lick him, by God!” thundered Jack Armstrong.

“Of course you would,” rejoined Lincoln; “and you ought to. That ’s just what he was going to do when you all pitched onto him. Now let up. You ’ve had your fun, and the stranger has had his. It ’s time to quit!”

Jack Armstrong, crestfallen, muttered something under his breath, but did not see how he could escape from the logic of the tall and angular clerk. The rest of the gang, growling and cursing, exhibited a lively desire to renew the battle.

“If these gentlemen can restrain their impatience and present themselves one at a time, your interposition may not be necessary,” observed Mortimer, seeing the frame of mind in which the rowdies were.

“I am sorry to say, Mr. Randolph, that these boys are not in the habit of fighting that way,” said Lincoln, frankly and without hesitation. “Now, see here, boys,” he went on, turning to them, “you ’ve no call to make any more disturbance with this stranger.”

He proceeded to coax and wheedle them into a disposition toward peace, with many flashes of humor and fragments of quaint logic. He had succeeded in restoring a fair degree of stability to their equilibrium, and the outlook was pacific, when Denton Offutt bustled up busily, with mincing steps.

“What ’s the matter? What ’s the matter? What ’s the matter? What ’s the matter?” he

piped, firing off a question with each step as he came.

It did not take long to make it clear to Denton Offutt what was the matter.

“Abe! Abe! Abe! Abe! Lick ’em. Lick ’em!” cried Offutt, in explosive excitement. “It’s time this tomfoolery was stopped! Boys!” He shook his thin, little fists beneath the nose of the biggest one of them all. “Boys! There is n’t a man of you can wrestle Abe Lincoln, my clerk. He ’s the best wrestler in all Illinois, and he knows more than any man in the United States!”

“I notice nobody never does nothin’ but talk about it,” grunted the one who had started the trouble.

Denton Offutt turned upon him like a hen with a brood.

“You! You! You! You! Jack Armstrong!” he cried, in shrill tremolo. “Why, he could wring your neck for you!”

It had gone past the peacemaker. There was no retreat left to honor. Armstrong was already preparing for the encounter, stripping his coat, rolling his sleeves, drawing in his leather belt, vociferating taunts and threats the while.

“I do n’t like these woolings and pullings,” observed Abe Lincoln, making ready, “but I suppose I must make the most of it.”

The gang from Clary’s Grove withdrew a step, leaving a space for the wrestlers. The man from

Virginia, leading his horse to another tree, joined Offutt at the door of the store. The young woman stood within. Randolph saw her there, pale and intense.

“You will pardon me, madam,” he said. “Shall I ask these men to wait until you can withdraw?”

“No,” replied the girl, with forced composure; “if men must fight, the least women can do is to stand by them.”

Before there was time for other words a roar went up from the circle of Clary’s Grove boys, and the two were at each other. It was soon apparent that Lincoln tried to do no more than prevent the other from throwing him. He broke hold after hold, now eluding Armstrong, now standing stiff and immovable before him, without making any effort to throw him.

For a long space they struggled. The man from Clary’s Grove could do nothing. His comrades, seeing him fail, began to mutter. Armstrong, incensed, lost all restraint, and fell upon his antagonist with blows and kicks, wholly unfair in the sport.

In the instant that he did so, a wild light came into the blue eyes of Lincoln. His huge hands reached forth. They closed about the thick neck of the other. The long arms stiffened. They lifted Armstrong from the ground till his feet swung struggling through the air. They shook him till the breath rattled out of him. They flung him down



Lincoln shook him till the breath rattled out of him.



upon the ground, purple and gasping. In the soul of Lincoln there was no charity for what was unfair.

The boys from Clary's Grove, cursing and threatening, crowded about Lincoln, ready to leap upon him. Randolph hurried to his side. Denton Offutt, sputtering, scurried into his store and laid hold of the arm of Sylvia Hall in impotent alarm. She, with heaving chest and kindled eye, suffered his hands to remain there. Her eyes hung upon the two who confronted the many.

Armstrong, struggling to his feet, elbowed his comrades aside. He made his way until he stood before Lincoln. He held out his hand to him, open, palm upward.

"Shake!" he said. "You're right! And, God, but you 're strong!"

"Are you badly hurt? There is blood upon your face!"

Sylvia Hall, standing in the doorway of the store, found some embarrassment in expressing her solicitude when the handsome young man with hair like bronze entered a moment later.

"I thank you, ma'am," he replied; "it is kind of you. It is nothing that will not wash off."

"It—perhaps a woman should not see these things," she said, in some confusion, impelled to make apology to this man. "I abhor such sights;

they distress me. But it must be glorious to be brave!"

"If it were not for such as you, men would not be brave," made answer Randolph, with a look at her before which her blue eyes fell.

Without further word, she went from the store through the street of the settlement to the house where she was staying. Not once in all the way did she dare look back; for she knew, in the manner in which women know many things, that a pair of warm brown eyes followed her as she went. And she knew that to look into them again, now, was to have a heart utterly and forever lost.

CHAPTER VI

THE MILLHAND

“**W**HY, I tell you, he ’s a wonder! He ’s a wonder! He ’s a big man, Abe Lincoln is! I ’m with him most of the time. I can see it. I know it. You can’t fool me. You can’t fool Denton Offutt when it comes to men! Why, I tell you what I ’ll do! I ’ll give him thirty years—he’s twenty-two now—I ’ll give him thirty years to be President of the United States; that ’s what I ’ll do!”

Denton Offutt, giving his saucer of tea a final cooling puff—it was characteristic of Denton Offutt not to be able to await the psychological moment in anything he did—gulped it down with a strangling noise, and looked about upon his audience to observe the effect of his prophetic assertion. His audience consisted of the boarders gathered about the supper table in Rutledge’s tavern on the evening after the bout between Lincoln and Armstrong.

The effect of his impulsive and unreasoned claims for Lincoln’s future was not all that the vanity of the speaker might have desired. It was not because those who heard were inclined to dispute anything praiseful which might be said of Lincoln. He had been a hero among them from the beginning, and the adventure of that afternoon had

rendered his position in the community unassailable. It was rather because the remarks came from Denton Offutt that they did not receive the expressed endorsement of the other boarders. For Denton Offutt had been discovered to possess the trait of talking too much, and his vociferations were frankly accepted by the people of New Salem on that basis. On this occasion, however, Denton Offutt was convinced that he had not talked enough, and immediately set about making up the deficit.

“Honest? Honest?” he cried, as though some one had disputed the integrity of his clerk! “Why, he ’s the honestest man that ever lived anywhere. Why, I call him Honest Abe! Why, last week, Mrs. Wiley paid sixpence too much for something she bought, and when Abe found it out he shut up shop and walked ’way out to her farm, seven miles in the country, with the balance. And week before that he found a little weight on the wrong side of the scales after he had weighed out some tea for Mrs. Poindexter, and he hunted around town for three hours until he found her and gave her the tea that was coming to her. Don’t you call that honest?”

A mumbled acquiescence went about the supper table, coming to audible articulation when it reached Mortimer Randolph, who had decided to remain in New Salem for the night, after many elaborate arguments with himself on the point, none of which in any way involved a pair of blue eyes of lingering memory. The volcanic Mr. Offutt was exhibiting

alarming symptoms of another eruption, when Lincoln himself appeared, averting the phenomenon.

“Where you been, Abe? You ’re late!” cried Offutt, in the midst of the clamorous welcome which greeted Lincoln.

“Down the road a piece,” replied Lincoln, wiping his forehead on a large red handkerchief, drawn from the front of his shirt. In his free hand he held a small, dingy, dilapidated book, which he carefully deposited on the table at his elbow when he sat down.

“My, but you look blowed!” piped Offutt, with an air of proprietorship. “What you got?” he added, without a pause, catching sight of the book.

“Kirkman’s Grammar,” replied Lincoln. “Just been out to Vaner’s to get it. Mentor Graham told me he had one. It’s the only one in the county. Reckon I ’ll know a heap one of these days, eh, Mr. Randolph?” addressing himself to Mortimer, who sat at the farther end of the table from him.

“Well, you know, you ’re the smartest man in the United States now, Lincoln,” returned that one, winking at Lincoln and glancing slyly at Offutt.

Lincoln laughed, and the tableful laughed, not entirely knowing why. Offutt himself laughed, feebly, as he applied himself to an apple turnover that Ann Rutledge brought him, with a vague suspicion that he was being made a butt. His obliteration for the moment was complete, for Lincoln fell to discussing matters of import with Randolph, and

the others at table followed the conversation with an attention that approached reverent awe. Without knowing why, without consciousness that it was so, these rude, rough men already felt subordinated in the presence of the tall grocer's clerk when he chose to be in earnest.

Mortimer Randolph was glad of the attention paid him by the hero of the settlement for other reasons than the pleasure he got from talking with such a man. He had sufficient discernment to realize that his position in the community was delicate. He knew there was a prejudice among these shaggy people against him in spite of the account he had given of himself that afternoon; that they resented his deportment and manners; that they held his correct speech against him; that the softness of his hands, the smoothness of his skin, the texture of his clothes, affronted them. He fully appreciated what the open friendship of Lincoln would do for him in establishing him in favor with these men of the frontier, and gratefully made the most of it. Not that he particularly cared what they thought of him; but—a vision of the blue eyes of one who dwelt among them floated through his mind bewilderingly.

Denton Offutt was not to be suppressed for long, however, by any discussion, of whatsoever weight and consequence. Having reduced his turnover to a series of shining spirals on his plate; having cooled in his saucer and drunk another cup of tea;

having picked his teeth of the last shred of supper, he seized upon a brief lull in the conversation, and broke forth into piping voice.

“Where’s McNeill? Where’s John McNeill to-night?” he cried. “He has n’t been here to-night. Where is he? Where is he? Does anybody know where he is? Ann, do you know where he is?”

The hand of Ann Rutledge, reaching to give Mortimer Randolph a dish of food, trembled. The voice of Ann Rutledge shook as she made answer. The trembling of the hand, the shaking of the voice, were scarcely perceptible. Probably no one at the table discerned the trembling and the shaking as she made answer, save Mortimer, and one other. Observing them himself, and glancing about the table to see if others did, the eyes of Mortimer rested upon the face of Lincoln. Lincoln was looking at the girl. In his face was a compassion, a protecting tenderness, that made it beautiful, sublime. Other than that one look cast upon Ann Rutledge, there was no sign among them all.

“He is gone East,” said the girl, simply.

“What?” said Denton Offutt, in a voice that was half a scream. “Left his store and gone East?”

Lincoln’s glance went from the face of the girl to the face of Offutt. In his countenance was the look of one who watched, waiting to rescue when the moment of need should come. The mind of Mortimer flew swiftly with events.

“He had word from his family in the East,” went on the girl. There was no shake in the voice now. There was level composure. She was at the back of Offutt’s chair, taking his empty dishes. The entire board was listening closely, the matter being one of common interest. “He had to leave hastily,” she went on, indifferently.

Denton Offutt gazed wide-eyed upon the others, groping for something to which to tie thought. He would have done better had he noted the face of Lincoln, his clerk, or Mortimer; but his eyes were too wide.

“Well — is n’t he coming back? Is n’t he going to marry you?” blurted Denton Offutt.

“Why, what a question, Mr. Offutt,” laughed the girl, passing into the kitchen with a tray of dishes.

Mortimer Randolph, having divined the situation, thought of a score of things to say to Denton Offutt; none which he might give voice to, out of consideration for the young woman. He was forced to content himself for the present with a look of indignant contempt, which lighted his brown eyes with a red, flaring glow. A laugh went around the table; it was intended to be at the expense of Offutt. The sound of it aroused Mortimer again. He was on the point of rebuking them all, when Ann entered the room. Every eye, save his own, was upon her. There was no sign on her face. She smiled briefly,

in apparent amusement at Offutt, and went about her work in her customary circumspect manner.

“That makes me think of a little dog that a friend of mine had down in Kentucky when I was a boy,” drawled Lincoln, as Ann busied herself about the table. “He was a cute little dog; he always had his ears pricked up and his eyes wide open, and gave other indications of a budding intelligence. He never bit anybody; he never killed the chickens or chased the pigs. He was a very good little dog, as dogs go. But he had two faults. He barked a whole lot more than was necessary, and he chewed things up. Anything from a plow handle to a toothpick, from a bed quilt to a handkerchief, that he could get a hold of, he gnawed and trowsled as long as there was anything left of it.

“Now, down at the bottom of the forty acres that my friend’s people had, was an old rail fence. The yellow jackets had made a nest on one of the bottom rails. One day, when my friend and I and his dog were out tramping, we came across the nest. Before we could say anything, the puppy made a leap and grabbed it with his mouth. Now, the yellow jackets didn’t know the dog, and by the time he could let go, his head was twice the size it should have been. He came howling and whining up to us with his eyes shut and his lips puffed out, the worst looking dog I ever saw. My friend looked at him, and looked at me. ‘Abe,’ he said; ‘Abe! That con-

sarned purp never did know just what his mouth was for!' ”

If the application of the anecdote was obscure to the mind of Denton Offutt, he was alone in his failure to appreciate it. The others, listening throughout with their breath held and their faces poised ready for a laugh, burst forth into a bellow when the tale was done that could have been heard as far as Offutt's store. Offutt joined in in a lost manner, half wondering why they all looked at him. Mortimer alone did not laugh. He saw far below the humor of the story. His eyes were fixed upon the narrator in admiration and affection. As for Ann, she cast one grateful glance at Lincoln, which he saw, and went about her work unnoticed.

Considering many things—none of which was a pair of blue eyes—Mortimer Randolph decided on the morning of the next day that it was not entirely necessary for him to continue his journey until the following day. After breakfast he wandered across to Offutt's store to explain why to Abraham Lincoln. He felt a moral responsibility in making his excuses for loitering to certain of the citizens of New Salem. He had already imparted them to Ann when she brought him his breakfast, with a formal smile and a bright countenance, that bore no trace of her emotions of the previous evening.

He found Lincoln stretched at full length on the counter of the store, deep in the pages of the grammar. Lincoln did not observe his approach, for he

was at the moment conjugating a verb of many irregularities, in an annoyed and audible voice. Randolph, undiscovered still, stood beside him for a moment, running his eye from head to foot and back again, marveling at the tremendous stature of the man. He had never before been so impressed with it.

“About how long are you, anyway, Lincoln?” he asked, presently, with a sociable laugh. There was no immediate hurry to tell him why he was n’t going on that day.

Lincoln, finishing his conjugation without so much as a glance at his visitor, placed his long finger between the leaves of the book and swung into a sitting posture, his drooping toes straggling to the floor.

“I ’m six feet four, Randolph,” he replied. “Pretty good for twenty-two years, eh?” There was pride in his look and his tone.

“I should say so,” returned Randolph. “Think you ’ve got your growth?”

“Well, I think so. I think I ’ve got mine, and half of somebody else’s.”

In the course of time Mortimer found it opportune to mention his change of plan. Hearing that he intended staying through another day, Lincoln passed over to where he stood. They were alone in the store. The tall clerk laid his arm across the shoulders of his new friend.

“I ’m glad of it,” he said. There was a sadness

in his eyes as he spoke. "I 'd like to see more of you. Somehow, you seem to bring a touch to life that is missing here. You are different from these people. I like these people. They are good; they are honest; you can count on them. Whether they are friends or enemies, you can tell what they are going to do. I like them all; even Clary's Grove boys, rough as they are. But something seems to be lacking in 'em, and you have got just that something. I do n't know what it is. I do n't know anybody else that 's got it, excepting Sylvia Hall, the girl you saw here yesterday, and—Ann Rutledge." He spoke the name hesitatingly, in lower voice. "But they 're girls," he went on, "and I ain't great shakes with the girls. Besides, the Hall girl will be going back to Indian Creek pretty soon, and Ann Rutledge—" He paused. Sadness and sorrow deepened in his eyes. "Well, Ann is promised to McNeill, you know."

Mortimer forebore to speak of that in any way. He made no reply of any kind, save to thank Lincoln briefly for what he had said. There was a feeling in his thanks beyond the simple words he made use of, there was a feeling in the tone and the look which accompanied them which could not readily have found expression in any words; for the young Virginian was drawn to this great, gaunt man by a quick, living, understanding sympathy. The other sensed the feeling, and returned it through a pressure of the hand that clasped Mortimer's shoulder.

There was silence between them, until a customer entered the store. Mortimer departed without further word.

Leaving the store, he wandered down the road to the river. He loitered along its banks, among the trees of a little grove that grew there, turning away from the direction which the road took toward Springfield. There were matters which he wished to revolve in his mind. He wished to contemplate the new friendship he had found, he told himself, as he loitered, and he wished——

Some one sat at the foot of a tree, in among soft mosses, by the side of the little path he followed; some one in a dress of dainty blue; some one with small, dainty hands that clasped a book in her lap; some one with a figure of exquisite contour and harmonious grace; some one with hair of twisted gold and eyes of blue that he had first seen looking at him from the banks of that river, that he had last seen looking at him on the afternoon before; some one who glanced at him in confusion, half smiling, uncertain whether she would speak to him.

With a naturalness which freed his action of impudence, he sat beside her on the moss. They fell to talking of many things as they sat there looking out upon the river, listening to the river, listening to the birds and the bees and the mill-wheel.

The next day, and the next, and the fourth day, Mortimer Randolph loitered in New Salem. "It

does not matter if I do not reach Vandalia for a week," he told Lincoln, having a guilty conscience.

When on the fifth day he did start, some one walked at his side as he led Powhatan down the road past the mill; soft hands put a sprig of golden rod in his coat lapel before he mounted; white hands stroked the velvet nose of the roan ere he rode away; blue eyes followed him through the dust until he disappeared down the road.

In a week he was back again. He rode up to Offutt's store on that afternoon with a song on his lips and a light in his eye, to tell Lincoln that he meant to remain in New Salem. That his being there might embarrass no one, he sought work to do. He found it in Cameron's mill, now owned by Denton Offutt, frenzied financier. His immediate superior, and the man from whom he took his orders, was Abraham Lincoln, boatman, clerk, and mill superintendent.

What times the eyes of the millhand wandered through the window and down among the trees beside the river, leaving the stones of the mill to grind nothing; what times the millhand himself followed his wandering eyes when they found what they sought among the trees was of no consequence or effect upon his tenure of office. For Lincoln was his immediate superior, and the heart of Lincoln could not suffer the hand of Lincoln to be laid heavily upon a lover.

At last the summer drew to a close. The time of parting came. Their father, passing through the settlement on a journey to Jefferson Barracks, had told Rachel and Sylvia to be ready to return home with him on a certain day. The eve of the day was at hand.

Mortimer Randolph, millhand, walked with Sylvia Hall through the moonlight down by the dam and to the grove where he had first sat by her side on a morning in July. It was late in September. It was cool. They did not sit on the bank of moss which had been their retreat during the hot months of summer, but walked to and fro near the spot in the little path, in among the elms and oaks.

Their talk was of many things, as it had always been. Not once had there been word of love between them. As they strolled this night, he came to tell her of his home in Virginia; of his mother and sisters; of his father and brother; of his nephew and niece, children of his brother. He spoke of his love for them, of his longing at times to go back among them. In the telling, he paused. A silence fell upon his lips. A trembling came over Sylvia as she stood beside him. In all he had said there had been no hint of her, yet she felt that he had paused to speak of love.

“Sylvia”—his voice was low and earnest—
“Sylvia, we have not known each other long. It is scarcely two months. But in that time we have seen

much of each other. And in that time—" He paused once more. She feared that he would hear the beating of her heart in the hush of the evening. He began again.

"My mother taught me that a woman is sacred," he said. "She taught me that no man should consider her lightly; that no man might trifle with even so slight a thing as her time; that he might not seek her companionship above all others unless there were honest love in the seeking." Another pause. "I would not have you think that I have forgotten the teachings of my mother," he resumed; "and yet, to-night, on the eve of your departure, I cannot tell you that I love you!" His words were slow, full of emotion, full of regret. For a moment her heart ceased to beat. In another it sent the pulses surging through her until she would have reeled, if she had not put out a hand against a tree.

"I do not mean that I think you would have me tell you," he went on, in perfect sincerity. "I do not mean that I think you would be glad if I should. I cannot but think it would grieve you, in the kindness of your heart; I cannot doubt that you would tell me in all gentleness that you would rather there were no word of love between us."

If he had looked at her pale face, where the moon shone upon it through the leaves of the trees beneath which they stood; if he had seen her parted, quivering lips, the tears half formed in her eyes,

the frightened, wistful look, he would have known how far from the truth he had gone. But he did not look.

“I have wronged you, Sylvia,” he resumed. “Not because I may have led you to expect that I would tell you of my love before you left; not because I have sought you out diligently above all others in the earth without an honest love in the seeking, but because I have sought you out at all.” He paused; a fervor was creeping into his words which he seemed to struggle against. When he went on it had gone; there was feeling in his tones, but they were calm.

“I am not permitted to make you understand; there is much that I shall have to leave to your inference, and your charity,” he said. “Sylvia, I am a stranger to you. I am a stranger to all who know you and protect you. You do not know what I am. You cannot be sure that I am what I may seem to you to be. I am a millhand only that I may be near you. Cannot you see how it is possible that I may have wronged you?”

Her voice was faint and afar off when she sought to answer, but grew stronger as she proceeded.

“You are not a stranger to me,” she said. “I have learned what you are. There is that in a woman which tells her. I do not need to be told what you are.”

For a space there was silence between them. It was his voice, slow and solemn, which broke it.

“If I should tell you that when I left that home of which I have spoken to-night, I left it under a shadow; that I left it reviled, despised, condemned; that a darkness lingers over my name among my own people even as I speak to you, would you understand how I have wronged you, and how bitterly I accuse myself?”

“If your own lips should tell me evil things about yourself, I should not believe them; but in all else I should believe you utterly,” she made answer. She turned her face toward him, reverently, longingly. He gazed across the flowing river that muttered through the shadows of the trees.

“But it is true, Sylvia,” he said. His voice had sunk almost to a whisper. “It is even as I said. I may tell you more than that. I may not even tell you so much as to say that it should not be as it is. Some day, perhaps, the way may be made clear for me. Some day, perhaps, I may come seeking you in perfect honor. If the day never comes, I should like to feel in my last hours that I had lingered in your memory as the man I may have seemed to be; as the millhand with whom you once walked and talked beside the river and beneath the trees.”

He had finished. She laid her hand upon his arm.

“May I tell you that I should believe in you though the whole world cried evil against you?” she said. “May I tell you that I shall have faith in you to the last day?”

For an instant he pressed her hand, cold and trembling, on his arm.

“You make me brave,” he said. “Come; you are cold. Your hand trembles. We must return.”

CHAPTER VII

SHADOWS

IN the morning they left. All New Salem turned out to see them off, and to banter Rachel and William Munson; for William Munson had progressed so far in the affections of Rachel that it was necessary to banter them. William repaid them for their trouble by kissing Rachel full on the mouth in the presence of all, and having his ears soundly boxed for his pains; all of which, and much else, delighted the people of New Salem beyond measure, so that the cavalcade moved off at last before a gale of laughter.

Between Mortimer and Sylvia there were only the most casual words of parting, to the disappointment and confusion of the people of the settlement, who had not been ignorant of the principal occupation of the millhand through the summer. None ventured upon any witticisms at their expense. There was that about each of them, quite unintentional on his or her part, which debarred the rough settlers from any close approach to such familiarity.

With a last wave of farewell, as the party disappeared down the road, Mortimer returned to his work at the mill, whence his eyes wandered through a grove of trees by the river side, over a scene of

utter and blighting desolation. From that hour he found his only comfort in the company of Abraham Lincoln—in that, and in the hope that he would not relinquish.

The company of Lincoln was not so easily obtained as it had been. From the night when Denton Offutt had blundered in remarking the absence of McNeill, Lincoln was found, or was missed, more and more frequently in the company of Ann Rutledge. In the beginning of her trouble he had been her champion. The story he had told that night had saved her much. As time passed, and evil things came to be whispered about McNeill and his sudden departure, it was Lincoln who laughed them to scorn in her own ears, and silenced them upon the lips of those who spoke them. As time passed, and the faith of her friends in the man who had gone began to wane, it was Lincoln alone who made her brave to believe in him. As time passed, and her own confidence grew faint, it was this gaunt and homely man whose charity brought a shame to her cheeks. And as time passed, she sought his comfort and courage more and more, until there was rarely a day when he did not spend his spare time with her.

Together they read books that he borrowed. He taught her the contents of the grammar he had had of Vaner, going again the six miles to get it for her. They read such volumes as they could find, and discussed them together. He went with her to the little

social gatherings of the community, shielding her from glances and whispers. If need had been, he would have fought with his fists for her. That he did not have to do. His estate had risen among his people. He had arrived, according to the lights of New Salem. He was deferred to.

Winter came. The mill was closed. Mortimer found such other employment as he was able. He had no lack of money, but for the sake of his contentment and his reputation among the neighbors, he kept himself at odd tasks whenever he could. Thus he worked through the cold months, living in the tavern, rejoicing in the moments when he could have his friend alone, delighting in the hours when Lincoln told stories to the men in the tavern's public room, or among the boxes in Offutt's store. The sadness seemed less frequent in the other's eyes as time wore on. Only, when it came, it was more sad than it had been.

One day a letter came to Mortimer from Virginia. The postmaster made a special trip to the farm where Mortimer was employed that day to deliver it. He felt that it must be important, as it came from a law firm in Richmond. He made many overtures of his services when Mortimer was reading it, and lingered long and hopefully about the spot. However, he had nothing to report when he returned to Offutt's store, where a volunteer committee of townspeople awaited him.

That night Mortimer sought out Abraham Lin-

coln, under the human necessity of telling his happiness to some one. He had already confided to him his love for Sylvia. For a long time they conversed in low tones in Mortimer's room. When Lincoln came out, he was full of thought, and glad.

On the next morning, Mortimer, mounting "Powhatan," set out from the village of New Salem, turning his face to the northeast. One hundred and fifty miles ahead of him, by the road he traveled, was the town of Ottawa. Twelve miles north of Ottawa was the little settlement of Indian Creek, the home of Sylvia Hall.

It was a weary way. The roads were little better than trails for the most part; in places they were worse. The mud was interminable and bottomless. During the daytime the rain was almost incessant. In the mornings and the evenings the mud was partly frozen, making travel painful. Yet ever as he rode a song was on his lips; and ever as he rode he took from his pocket, from time to time, the letter he had received the day before he left, and read it with a radiant face.

It was four days before he reached Ottawa. He arrived in a heavy rain, and so late at night that he could go no farther until morning.

On the night he stopped at Ottawa, another traveler, sputtering through the rain and the mud, sought refuge in the cabin of William Hall at Indian Creek. He was a short, round man with a short, round head, fitting close to his body; with a round,

red face in which were set a pair of widely separated blue eyes that stuck out like lobsters' eyes. Their moisture when the door was opened to his knock further increased the similarity.

"Why, Ike Frake! For the land's sake!" cried Rachel Hall. It was she who had opened the door. "Why, you 're wet as sop! Come right in; My, how it blows!"

Isaac Frake, by virtue of having traveled from Ohio in migration with the Hall family, and of having been a frequent visitor at their home in subsequent journeys back and forth, was heartily welcomed by the other members of the family. Young William Hall, slapping him on the back three or four times on the strength of having been a comrade in arms with him, ran to fetch a dry coat. The elder Hall produced a flask of whisky and poured out half a glassful from it, which Frake swallowed with unction. Mother Hall hastened about in search of food for the traveler. Rachel tittered and giggled at him, keeping up a continuous chatter the while. Only Sylvia took no part in the various activities of greeting. It appeared from the sour look of disappointment on his face that her welcome was the one of them all about which he had the greatest concern.

If there were any trace of the fingers of the Indian on the neck or the soul of Isaac Frake, they were not discernible as he presently sat by the fire in a coat belonging to the elder Hall—much too

small for him—with a glass of toddy in his hand; which also seemed somewhat too small as he tossed it into his round face without a flicker of his round eyes. He was abundantly healthful, with a rough vigor of body and a blunt good humor. There was something in his good humor, however, which suggested that it was ephemeral, and sat lightly upon the round surface of the man.

“For the land’s sake, where you been? We ain’t seen you for nigh on two years!” cried Rachel for the twentieth time, pausing for the first time to let him answer.

“Why, I ’ve been staying home tending my own affairs,” returned Frake, with an attempt at levity in his tone and a look at Sylvia meant to be gently satirical, but which passed into an expression of dogged resentment. “I was afraid you would n’t know who I was when you got back. Some of you do n’t seem to.” His look became almost surly, in spite of himself, as he concluded.

Rachel snickered, with immoderate relish. There was a tradition in the Hall family involving the futures of Sylvia and Frake. It had no more substantial foundation than the propitiatory attitude toward the young woman which the man had always displayed, and a matter of fact acceptance of such an eventuality on the part of the family in general as being a satisfactory solution of the vexing and vital problem, always serious to the early settlers, of marrying off their daughter. Sylvia had always

given her parents keen anxiety because of her failure to appreciate the importance of acquiring a husband and of a certain lofty indifference to the swains who had had the temerity to court her. Wherefore the attentions of Frake had been the more welcome; especially as it was generally understood that he was a leading man in the new Rock River country and a patriot who had done much to open the district for settlement.

Sylvia herself was so far out of harmony with the plan that on all occasions she treated the man with an indifference more crushing than scorn. To-night she arose from her seat on the bench opposite to him in the midst of the look which he fastened upon her after his ill-natured remark, and left the room, completely ignoring the very existence of such a man as Isaac Frake as her swishing skirts swept his knees.

“You won’t find it so easy with Sylvia now, Mr. Frake,” simpered Rachel, as the man watched her sister passing into the little room partitioned off from the large apartment for the use of the sisters. “You’ve got a rival, you know!”

“Is that so?” returned Frake, with an appearance of unconcern and amiability which obtained credit with Rachel. There were strains of wisdom in Frake.

“She don’t never say anything to me about it, but the way she went on at New Salem with Morti-

mer Randolph was something to take your breath!" went on the girl.

"With who?" demanded Frake, abruptly.

"With Mortimer Randolph," pursued the girl, oblivious of his emphatic interest in the name. "Oh, he 's an awful dandy! One of them eastern fellers, I reckon. Land sakes, Mr. Frake, afore I 'd take up with one of them eastern dandies!"

"Uhuh!" grunted Mr. Frake, with profound meaning in the sound, and a distortion of his round features that fairly squeezed significance from their creases.

"Why, Mr. Frake, what makes you look so?" queried the girl, perceiving.

"Oh, nothing," returned Frake, with an owlish rolling of his protuberant blue eyes.

"Oh, get along, Mr. Frake!" cried the girl, giggling. "What do you mean?"

Frake turned to young William Hall, who sat by the chimney cleaning his musket, but half heeding their conversation.

"Bill," he said, addressing the young man, "you remember the morning last year when we got to Saukenuk? Remember the man that made the fine speech about the Indian woman with the papoose that came to me begging money for whisky?"

Frake was perfectly aware that young Hall could not know what the woman had begged of him, she having spoken in the Sauk tongue.

"Which one was that?" returned William Hall,

Jr., intent for the moment on his gun, in which his ramrod had become jammed.

“Oh, the one with the red hair that was so damned anxious—excuse me, Miss Hall—so very anxious about what was going to happen to the Indians all the way up the river?” continued Frake.

Rachel, laying down the shirt which she was making for her brother, stared from one to the other.

“Sure, I remember!” ejaculated young Hall, setting his gun down and scratching his head reflectively. “He was a smart aleck! Say, do you know what?” he added, with a flood of recollection, “I saw him go sneaking off into the hill after that woman with the papoose, and after a while I saw them come sneaking back together, mighty friendly-like!”

William Hall, the son, impressed with the startling character of this information, looked at his sister and the guest to observe its effect, with many nods of the head. Rachel’s mouth grew wider and wider as she stared at the two. Frake, not feeling called upon to enter into a detailed account of the sequence of the events of the morning under discussion, half closed his eyes and glanced casually into the fire.

“Of course, you didn’t happen to notice whether the papoose was a full-blooded Indian, or a half-breed, did you?” he observed unconcernedly.

Young Hall, scratching his head again to stir his

memory, allowed that it was powerful pale for a full-blooded Indian. Frake grunted significantly, and said nothing.

“But what’s all that got to do with Mr. Randolph?” cried Rachel, bursting with suspense and curiosity.

“Oh, I don’t like to say,” returned Frake, gazing into the fire still, in evident embarrassment.

“Isaac Frake, tell us! What do you mean?” insisted Rachel.

“Oh, well,” said Frake, reluctantly, “all I know is that the name of this fellow I’ve been telling you about was Randolph.”

“The dirty skunk!” cried William Hall, glowering. “If he comes around my sister, I’ll make a sieve of him.”

“Well, now, of course, maybe his first name was n’t Mortimer,” interceded Frake. “I don’t know what his first name was.”

“Oh, it was, I know it was,” gasped Rachel, recovering her breath. “I knew he was no good when I first set eyes on him. Nobody with such airs ever was any good. And nobody in New Salem never knew anything about him; he jest wandered in there. Oh! Oh! Oh! I knew it! I knew it! I knew it!”

In vain did Frake essay to stem the flood of angry suspicion which he had loosed. To no avail did he endeavor to explain and extenuate on hypotheses that would leave the reputation and character of Mortimer Randolph not utterly black.

His attempted suggestions were futile. All he could say only strengthened suspicion into conviction.

“But for heaven’s sake don’t say a word about it to Sylvia,” he pleaded with Rachel, relinquishing his efforts to save the man. “What’s the good of her knowing?” he argued. “He may never show up again, and she ’ll get over it. If he does show up, there ’ll be time enough to let her know. Now, you won’t tell her, will you, Rachel?”

Rachel, posting off to her room immediately without replying to his anxious petition, Frake sat down to the supper which Mother Hall had meanwhile been preparing for him, sufficiently satisfied in his mind that Sylvia would know everything, and much more, before he should have finished the victuals.

What passed between Sylvia and her sister overnight was in no wise to be inferred from the appearance of the elder when the family gathered at their breakfast of pork and hominy in the morning; but the sullen face of Rachel made it obvious to Frake that she had not carried conviction with her tale.

The remotest reference to Randolph was avoided. Throughout the meal Frake was the embodiment of innocence and frankness. He dilated upon the state of the country. He described the melancholy conditions in Chicago, whence he had come, characterizing the settlement as a hopeless mud hole. He discussed politics and other matters of passing interest for the benefit of the elder Hall. He ingenuously

pointed out from time to time the great promises held in the new Rock River country, where he held some sections, now that Black Hawk had been driven out, and pictured a rosy future for that part of the State. On the whole, he conducted himself like a perfectly guileless man of healthful interests and wholesome enthusiasm, to the eminent satisfaction of father and mother, son and the dark-eyed sister. This, in the circumstances, was wisely diplomatic on the part of Isaac Frake.

They were at the end of the meal. Rachel and Sylvia were clearing away the dishes; the men, pushing back their chairs, were filling their pipes; the talk had guttered down into the dim vapidities of well-fed complacency; when a tremendous commotion among the fowl in the yard, the furious barking of the settlement dogs, and the clatter of hurrying hoofs, arrested all that they did and brought William Hall, the son, to the door of the house in sudden excitement.

Opening the door and glancing out, he turned a black look upon those in the room.

“Here comes the dirty skunk now!” he growled.

If it had been physiologically possible for the face of Isaac Frake to exhibit pallor, he would have been pale when he learned that Mortimer Randolph had come there; for he was as certain that it was he as though his name had been used instead of the epithet. By a struggle he repressed all signs, merely looking from one to another of those present

with an open and questioning countenance, as though inquiring the meaning of the unaccountable behavior of the young man.

In a moment Mortimer Randolph was in the doorway. At sight of him Rachel, with a little scream, grasped Sylvia by the arm. William Hall stared dumbly at him, understanding nothing. His wife wiped her arms nervously on her apron. Young William Hall stood aside, glowering. Frake grinned and nodded with an expression of pleased surprise. As for Sylvia, she looked at him as she had always looked at him when in the presence of others; save that her face was pale.

His clothing was draggled and spattered with mud. Flecks of it were on his face; it plastered his hands; it encased and hid his boots. Clearly he had ridden fast; how fast they might have known if they had seen Powhatan gasping for breath in the yard without.

The expression on Mortimer's face was intense. He was alert, vivid with life and action. His smouldering eyes, his bronze hair straggling across his pale forehead as he stood with hat in hand, his disheveled condition enhanced his handsome and impressive appearance.

His eyes passed swiftly from one to another of those who were in the room. A glance of passing recognition for the younger Hall, slight as the unimportance of that young man merited; a look at Frake in which was a momentary trace of surprise at see-

ing him there, and at seeing him with the breath of life still in his body; a nod at the elder Hall; a bow to his wife; a glimpse at Rachel; a clinging of his eyes for an instant upon Sylvia.

“I have news for you,” he said, full voiced, but calm. “I do not wish to alarm you; I only desire to put you on guard against the possibilities which you may be called upon to confront. There are many rumors flying about the Indians. Shaubena was at Ottawa last night with many tales. Black Hawk has crossed the Mississippi with a thousand braves, he says, and marches inland. Shaubena is our friend. He tells what he believes.”

Rachel, with a shriek of terror, threw herself into her sister's arms. The son forgot his look of dislike. The father came closer, eager to hear more. The mother wound and unwound her apron about her hands. Frake sat dumb and transfixed, his eyes starting from his head. As for Sylvia, she stroked the dark hair of her sister, whispering to her. Her eyes rested upon the face of Mortimer Randolph, as they always rested when others were about.

He told them many of the wild stories that had come to Ottawa, discounting them as he told them. He answered such questions as he could. For a space it was forgotten, in the excitement of the threatened danger, that he was more than any other man. Between them all was the spell of common danger. It was he who broke it by intruding the personal element.

“Frake,” he said, “the men who care to go to protect the frontier are gathering at Nixon’s. Mr. Hall, I should not wish to presume to make suggestions, but I hope you will consider well before either yourself or your son leaves your family here without all the protection that is available. I myself must go immediately to the mouth of the Rock River to see if anything can be done with the Indians. It may be that Black Hawk can be diverted. I came this way to let you know. I must hurry on. Do not alarm yourselves. At the worst, you will only need to exercise precaution. Good day!”

With a swift, wistful look at Sylvia he turned from the door and passed to Powhatan. Sylvia, gently laying aside her sister’s arms, glided after him. Her brother would have detained her. She passed him and went to the side of Mortimer.

“You are going—at once?” she murmured, with downcast eyes.

“Sylvia, I must!” he answered, with emotion. “I have much to tell you. I left New Salem to come to tell you. But this news— I must go at once, Sylvia. I have had dealings with the Indians. For a time I was with the Indian agency headquarters at Jefferson Barracks. Perhaps I have some influence. Perhaps I can avert the danger. Perhaps I can at least reduce it.” He paused. “It was good of you to give me these few words with you.” He took her hand for an instant. “I have much to tell you; I

shall come when I can to tell it to you. Good-bye, Sylvia!"

Their eyes met. She bade him no farewell with her voice. She could not. He rode away, dragging her heart after him over the rough road through the cold grey April morning. Would to Heaven he might have said what he had come to say to her before he had ridden away to the Indians!

"It's him all right," said William Hall the son, exchanging glances with Frake when Sylvia left the room.

"It sure is, I am sorry to say," returned Frake.

"Running right off to the Indians, the first thing!" cried Rachel. "Now I wonder if Miss Obstnacy will believe what I tell her!" There was a ring of malicious exultation in her voice, distinctly feminine.

"The dirty skunk!" growled the junior Hall; "it's goldarned funny how much he seems to think of them Indians. 'Pears like he didn't want some of 'em to git killed!"

"Shame on you, Bill Hall!" expostulated Frake. "Hush," he added with solicitude; "here's your sister. She mustn't know."

Sylvia Hall, her face like the grey morning into which her lover had ridden away, passed across the room to where the dishes stood ready to be cleaned.

CHAPTER VIII

LOVE AND FEAR

THE village of New Salem was all astir again; to the last citizen it had turned out and was down by Cameron's dam once more on another April morning, tingling with excitement. New Salem had had many blessings to be thankful for since it had gathered by the dam on that April morning the year before to watch a long and angular boatman get a flat-boat over the dam; many of which were directly or indirectly traceable to this same long and angular boatman, their present fellow-citizen, Abraham Lincoln.

There had been the vanquishing of Clary's Grove boys and their subsequent allegiance to New Salem; there had been the sojourn of the somewhat inscrutable stranger with bronze hair, an anomalous composite of dandy and millhand; there had been the love affair of the stranger and Sylvia Hall, with its baffling issue. More interesting than these things was the disappearance of John McNeill, lover of Ann Rutledge, affording opportunity for interminable speculations about the cause of his departure—his reasons had long since been rejected—the probabilities of his return and the exact present and prospective status of Abraham Lincoln if he should

or should not return; problems that were peculiarly compensating and satisfying to the soul as being utterly beyond the possibility of conjectural solution.

Within the week the community had been entertained by the vanishing of Denton Offutt, hopelessly bankrupt and a fugitive from his creditors; an exit beautifully in harmony with the career of that versatile and voluble financier. This had led to further excitement. Abraham Lincoln, the clerk, having demonstrated to himself and his employer that his greatest opportunities in life did not lie in merchandising, and being stirred to ambition by the popularity which was forced upon him by the neighborhood, had come out, in a neat circular, for the legislature.

The startling feature of his candidacy was that he stoutly proclaimed himself a Clay man and a Whig, in a district that was violently Jackson and Democratic. His stand for the principles of the "American System" doomed him, declared the wise ones of the settlement. Perhaps he thought so himself, for he wrote in the conclusion of his circular: "If the good people, in their wisdom, shall see fit to keep me in the background, I have been too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined."

One source of strength there was, however, in the "American System." The American System, standing for internal improvements among other things, implied making the Sangamon River naviga-

ble. This principle Lincoln promulgated and emphasized; and in this he was fatefully opportune, for it was this very thing that was the cause of the agitation that brought all New Salem tingling to the banks of the river by Cameron's dam on this morning in April.

For there, chugging and chooting back and forth in the back-water pond above the dam, was a steamboat, constructed of wood and iron, as a steamboat should be, with clanking, clanging, groaning, wheezing inward parts that propelled it through the virgin waters of the Sangamon River in a manner fitting and appropriate to such a craft.

It was the steamer *Talisman*, brought all the way from the Ohio River by a zealous advocate of internal improvements to demonstrate that the river could afford passage to steam vessels as high as Springfield. It had gone up to that place on the flood waters in triumph. Returning, it had been brought low in its pride by the little dam at New Salem, and was scolding and fuming about it as befitted the occasion, having no more honor left than a flat-boat. All the town was down to see it.

There were the merchants and farmers, the smith and the carpenters—New Salem had two joiners now—the tinner and the hatter, other increments to the community; the housewives and the swarms of children, many of them also increments; the young men and the maids, just as there had been the year before; excepting, specifically, that the sisters Hall

were not there; that no stranger with brown eyes came riding on a roan charger to raise their hair with his cool daring, and that the lover who stood by the side of Ann Rutledge was not John McNeill, but an exceedingly tall and angular young man with deep set, sad blue eyes and a face that would have been ugly had it not been for a benign light that shone through it.

But New Salem was disappointed on this morning. The novelty of the sight of the steamer had worn off early in its sojourn in the mill pond. There was nothing picturesque or exhilarating in the peril in which she was placed. There was no tall and angular boatman in her crew to entertain them with stories and repartee. And the manner of her eventual escape did not fire the imagination and stir the soul.

For those who had the *Talisman* in charge resorted to the purely physical and prosaic device of tearing a hole in the dam to permit her passage down stream, first settling roundly with old John Cameron for the prospective damage. A principle was at stake; and a principle must not be deterred or impeded in its progress by facts or the laws of man, nature, or God.

Long before the demolition was completed and the boat safe below the dam, interest in the proceedings began to wane, and the people of New Salem set back toward their village in a slowly drifting current, disappointed and unsatisfied, to gather in

knots in the street, hungry for something with which to appease the appetites whetted by the promise of adventure held out when the *Talisman* was first heard chooting and chugging in the mill pond.

Abraham Lincoln, shambling flat-footed up the hill with Ann Rutledge, left her at the tavern and wandered to the groups standing about the streets. Joining them, he read the signs of the hour. He knew the psychological moment was at hand for a bit of politics. He passed a group of his closest friends. He began to talk. He talked about the navigability of the river; about the American System in general; about Clay, about Jackson; he reverted to local matters and diverged upon State politics; he gathered about him a larger group; he talked in a voice louder and louder as the group grew.

“Speech!” shouted William Munson.

“Speech! Speech!” shouted “Slicky Bill” Green.

“Speech! Speech! Speech!” shouted everybody.

Somebody brought a keg for him to stand upon. Haft a dozen shoved him toward it, and upon it. “Speech! Speech!” they shouted. “Abe Lincoln! Abe Lincoln! Speech! Speech! Speech!”

“Gentlemen and fellow citizens,” he began; “I presume you know who I am. I am humble Abraham Lincoln”—“Humble hell!” shouted a Jackson man. The sad grey eyes wandered toward him. “My politics are short and sweet, like the old woman’s dance,” proceeded the candidate. “I am

in favor of the internal improvement system and a high protective tariff—" "Highway robbery," bel-
lowed the Jackson man. The quiet grey eyes were
fixed for a moment on him. The quiet grey eyes saw
William Munson edging toward the interloper in
belligerent attitude.

"My fellow citizens," he proceeded; "I may not
live to see it, but give us a protective tariff and we
will have the greatest country on the face of the
earth!"

"Give you a rope to hang yourself!" roared the
Jackson man.

There was terrific commotion in the vicinity of
the Democratic partisan. William Munson had ar-
rived at his side, and laid hands upon him at the
latest interruption. The air was filled with swinging
fists, grunts, curses, the sound of blows. Munson
went down. The other, astride of him, pounded his
head with clenched fists.

The grey eyes saw. Lincoln left the keg. He
churned his way through the delighted spectators.
He laid one hand upon the neck of the Jackson man
and the other upon the back of his clothing where he
knelt over his fallen foe. Swinging him like a sack
in his pendulous arms, he flung him spraddling over
the heads of the crowd, a dozen feet away, where he
fell in a heap and was swiftly possessed, still in a
heap, by Munson and Slicky Bill.

"Fellow citizens," said Lincoln, resuming his
keg and his speech, "I have spoken as I thought. I

may be wrong in regard to any or all of the matters I advocate; but I hold it a sound maxim that it is better only sometimes to be right than at all times wrong. My case is thrown exclusively on the independent voters of the country. If elected, I shall be thankful; if not, it will be all the same!"

Mighty cheers arose from the throats of his audience. He was a despised Whig; but first of all he was Abe Lincoln, and they cheered wildly and long.

"Cheer, you condemned Democrat!" shouted Slicky Bill Green to the Jackson man, still in a heap on the edge of the crowd, grinding his face into the soil of New Salem with his elbow. Munson, sitting on the man's legs, jounced up and down vigorously by way of persuading him.

"Hurrah!" growled the man.

"Cheer for Honest Abe Lincoln! And be happy about it!" persisted Slicky Bill.

"Hurrah for Honest Abe Lincoln," repeated the man, with a lack of spontaneity and enthusiasm highly unsatisfactory to Slicky Bill.

To what further devices Green would have resorted for the purpose of restoring the man's spirits and obtaining the proper ring of acclaiming joy in his cheering voice will forever remain unknown, for before he had set about putting them into execution he was diverted by an excited uproar in the skirts of the howling gathering, followed by a tense hush. He

arose to his feet, William Munson with him, and permitted the Democrat to assume a natural position.

A man on a horse that puffed and foamed from hard riding was waving a large sheet of paper in his hand. The man was ferociously accoutred with a sword and a brace of pistols sticking through his belt, and was struggling with an oppressive sense of importance.

“Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye!” he shouted, waving the paper frantically. “Citizens of New Salem, I bring you a message from your Governor, John C. Reynolds; listen to his warning!”

There was not a sound among them. Surely, New Salem had much to be grateful for!

“To the militia of the southwest section of the State,” read the man, rolling his eyes from his document to his audience and back again at every pause. “Fellow citizens: Your country requires your services. The Indians have assumed a hostile attitude and have invaded the state in violation of the treaty of last summer. The British band of Sacs and other hostile Indians, headed by Black Hawk, are in possession of the Rock River country, to the great terror of the frontier inhabitants. I consider the settlers on the frontier to be in imminent danger. In possession of the above facts and information, I have not hesitated as to the course I should pursue. No citizen ought to remain inactive when his country is invaded and the helpless part of the community in danger. I have called out a strong detachment of

militia to rendezvous at Beardstown on the 22d instant. Provisions for the men and food for the horses will be furnished in abundance. I hope my countrymen will realize my expectations and offer their services as heretofore, with promptitude and cheerfulness, in defense of their country. (Signed) John C. Reynolds, Governor of the State of Illinois."

Wheeling his horse, the courier disappeared at dramatic speed before his fellow citizens could collect themselves for one word. The men of New Salem stared at each other blankly, with wide eyes. One by one, with a common instinct, they looked at Abraham Lincoln.

Slicky Bill made his way to Lincoln's side. "What shall we do about it, Abe?" he asked, helplessly.

"Well, I can't answer for the rest of you," returned Lincoln, looking down into the faces turned toward him, "but I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to leave for Beardstown to-morrow morning, if I can get a nag. If I can't, I'll go anyway."

"By cracky, Abe, I'll go with you!" exclaimed Green, suddenly inspired.

So would they all go with him! They proclaimed as much in a babel of voices! The excitement broke forth in a buzzing confusion! They talked, they laughed, they shouted, they swore. Presently they dispersed and ran frantically to their several homes to break the news and prepare for the expedition.

The utmost that New Salem had been through in its short history was as an old woman's tale to the excitement and turmoil that agitated the settlement that night. The wildest rumors of the Indian uprising flew from house to house. The women ran bare-headed to tell that Black Hawk was at the head of a conspiracy belittling Pontiac's; that he came with thousands of Indians from the Western plains; that an English army was marching from Green Bay to cooperate with him, and many other stories of like import. Wives wept on the shoulders of husbands going forth to danger; young men made it the occasion for intimate and personal confessions long contemplated, and the entire community conducted itself as a community should that believes itself to be on the threshold of a long and bloody war.

Abraham Lincoln was not oppressed by a sense of the momentous solemnity of the hour. He looked upon it as serious; he was sober in his discussion of it; but he had heard much of Black Hawk from his friend Randolph, and believed that he was not the bloodthirsty and abandoned savage that rumor made him out to be. He even felt that actual conflict might have been averted, and might still be. Ann Rutledge shared his view of the situation; she shared most of his views now. As they sat together in the deserted dining room of the tavern after the supper had been cleared away, which was the only place where they could be alone, they talked of other things.

They talked of the time when he should return from the war. They planned for the years to come, without one thought that he might not come back. He had his way to make before they could carry out their plans together. Together they planned the making of the way. If he should be elected in the summer, their plans would be hastened. They did not delude themselves with the high hope of that, however. If he should not be elected, he would go to Springfield and study law. In the course of three or four or five years, they could be married—if McNeill should not return meanwhile.

Always there was that between the two. Deserted as she had apparently been by him, and loving her brave and generous sweetheart as she did, she nevertheless could not rid her mind of a sense of obligation toward her former lover. She had given her word to him. If he came to claim the forfeit, she would fulfill it, for the good of her soul. Such was her supersensitive conscientiousness. In her heart she prayed he would not; in her heart she dreaded lest he should.

Understanding this with an insight keener than a woman's; knowing her fear and the torture of it to her; patient, magnanimous, considerate, Abraham Lincoln gave her what courage he could. He did not speak of love as they sat there alone. He did not try to dispel her doubts. It was a struggle within her own soul; her own soul must prosecute it to a

conclusion. Like a tender friend, shielding her from every shock he could forfend, thoughtful only of her peace of mind, utterly devoted to her happiness, sacrificing his own pride, laying bare his own sensitive nature, he was willing to await the time and abide by the outcome. He loved her, and would continue to love her. More than that he could not do for her.

And so that night they talked of their plans, always predicated upon the "if," the dread possibility that gnawed into her soul. When their future was before them and the other was hidden, she was joyous, and the face of Lincoln glowed with a serene happiness that made it a thing of beauty, rough and homely as it was. When her thoughts turned back to the dread present again, as they always did, joy went from her, and a look of ineffable sadness came into the patient blue eyes of her lover.

Thus it was between them when he arose from the table at last to bid her farewell; there could be no farewell between them on the morrow. Thus it was between them when he bent over her and kissed her full on the lips. Thus it was between them when she looked up into his eyes through her tears, and smiled upon him a smile over which was the shadow of dread, the ghost of fear.

On the morrow he road away to the war, with those others who went from New Salem. At the end of the village he turned for the last time to wave

farewell to her, where she stood before her father's door, ere he passed from sight. As he turned his face again to the West the look of sadness was deep within his eyes.

CHAPTER IX

CANT-HOOKS AND CAPTAINS

IN THE beginning, it was a lark for the boys of New Salem to set out on a chase after Black Hawk. There was a vivifying sense of freedom and irresponsibility in getting on a horse and riding across a new country with a company of boon companions. There was novelty. There was adventure. There was a flavor of danger about it. The recruits from New Salem made merry as they rode toward Richland, their first camp, on that morning in April.

As reckless and roistering as any, Abraham Lincoln rode among them, joining in their rough play, bandying jokes with them, telling them stories, tussling with them from the back of his horse and otherwise deporting himself like an exuberant youth with great animal strength in his arms, though with something in his mind which he would forget. With laughter and shouts he rode among them; but through all his laughter and his shouting there was a deep sadness at the bottoms of his grey eyes. The dread of her dread was upon him.

“Abe, how would you like to be captain of this shebang?” cried Slicky Bill, riding alongside of him early in the march.

“Well, Slicky, I should like, of course I should

like it, if the boys want to make me captain," returned Lincoln. "Nobody could be insensible of the honor."

"Good!" cried Slicky. "Old Bill Kirkpatrick wants it. The boys don't like him, but they are afraid of him, 'cause he's so rich. What if he is the richest man in Sangamon county?" went on Green, with fire. "I guess this is a free country, and we don't have to knuckle down to no goldarned rich fellers!"

"Now, see here, Bill," rejoined Lincoln, with sudden animation. "I hadn't cared overmuch about being captain until you told me that old Kirkpatrick wanted it; but now I wish you would elect me, if you could. I'll tell you why. Did I ever tell you about Kirkpatrick and the cant-hook?"

No, he never had.

"Well, when I first came to this country," went on Lincoln, "I got work with Kirkpatrick to roll some logs. He didn't have a cant-hook, so he said he'd get one. Now, a cant-hook costs two dollars, Bill, and I made a proposal to Kirkpatrick. I told him that if he would give me the two dollars, I would move the logs without a hook. He agreed, and I did move them, with a bar and a piece of rope. Bill, when he came to pay me off he did not give me that two dollars, and he never has. If you boys could elect me captain I'd be willing to call it square, and to tell him so."

“By hen, I’ll fix him!” ejaculated Green, highly indignant; and immediately went about doing it.

This is how he did it: The election was on the following morning. The two candidates stood apart. The men were told to fall in line behind their favorite. A howling, tumbling mob broke in Lincoln’s direction. When the ballots had subsided sufficiently for inspection, the line behind Honest Abe was thrice the length of the one behind Kirkpatrick.

“Cant-hook! Cant-hook!” shouted the Lincoln supporters, while the towering militia captain looked blandly upon Kirkpatrick, sputtering in his wrath.

“I swear, Bill,” said Lincoln, confidentially to Slicky, when they were on the march. “It’s a fine thing to be captain, but how under Heaven do you do it?”

Bill didn’t know, but suggested for the comfort of his friend that probably nobody else did, and that therefore he could not make any palpable blunders in the manual. Lincoln took courage therefrom, and marched at the head of his command with a serene confidence in fate.

Fate presently presented itself in the form of a narrow gate in a fence, through which the files of the company could not possibly pass abreast. Lincoln, seeing it at a distance, pulled Slicky Bill by the sleeve and pointed to it.

“What’ll I tell ’em? What’ll I tell ’em, Bill?” he asked, under his breath. “What’s the proper command to get ’em to go endwise?”

“Hanged if I know!” replied Bill, perplexed.

“Men!” shouted Lincoln, for they were at the fence; “this company is dismissed for two minutes, when it will fall in on the other side of the gate!”

Narrow gates in fences were not the only embarrassments of his new office. He found it difficult to obtain from the men the necessary respect for his military authority without forfeiting their personal regard for himself. They were a wild, irreverent lot of fellows at best, on whom all restraint sat lightly. To be under the absolute direction of one of their own number; to receive orders from an old chum and to obey them with a straight face; to look upon his office as anything more than an amusing formality and a joke on Kirkpatrick, was incompatible with their principles of liberty and their sense of the fitness of things.

It became necessary for Lincoln to make them realize that he was commander and to preserve his dignity without arousing their dislike. In this task the strength of his arms, which he was always able to exert with a smile on his face and mildness in his eye, did much. His patience, tact, good humor and presence of mind did more. Only once was he openly defied. Early in his command a private suggested that he go to the devil when he issued a command. It brought up a point of military etiquette and discipline which was settled immediately and permanently.

Another time indirect disobedience brought trou-

ble upon him. Some of his men found where the whisky of the expedition was kept, and stole some of it. In the morning part of his command could not march. He was blamed, and suffered punishment vicariously for his men. All day he was obliged to carry a wooden sword in his hand. The time was to come when he was to carry a much more grievous burden through the faults of his countrymen, and with the same forbearance and good-tempered patience that he exhibited on that day.

He himself was not entirely schooled in the strict requirements of military discipline. He himself transgressed on one occasion, and suffered for it. An order was issued that there should be no firing of arms within a hundred yards of the camp, for obvious reasons involving the public safety. One night he discharged his pistol in camp, that being the only method of unloading it. For this he was rebuked and deprived of his sword for a day. It was his last offense.

The militia marched from the rendezvous at Beardstown toward the Yellow Banks, on the Mississippi, where they were to receive supplies to be forwarded from Jefferson Barracks by water. The holiday spirit of the expedition continued on the march. Even the crossing of the swollen and turbulent Henderson River, effected by means of a raft and an old leaky boat, was a lark, accompanied by much unnecessary splashing and wetting of clothes.

The enthusiasm lasted until they reached Yellow

Banks. It was so high that when the New Salem company and another company both desired the same spot for a camp, a contest was arranged to determine which should have it. The New Salem boys, having Lincoln's prowess in mind, suggested that a champion from each company wrestle for choice. The other company, having in mind a giant among them, by name Dow Thompson, accepted the challenge.

The entire army came to see the fun. All the money and detachable property of the soldiers was wagered on the result. The champions were produced. They grappled. In a moment Lincoln looked over his antagonist's shoulder at his friends.

"This is the most powerful man I ever had hold of," he said. "He will throw me and you will lose your all unless I act on the defensive."

In another moment Lincoln went down, bringing the other with him.

"Dog-fall! Dog-fall!" screamed Slicky Bill Green, jumping into the air and waving his hat. "That don't count. Try it again, Abe! You can throw him!"

"Fair fall! Fair fall!" shouted Thompson's supporters.

Instantly the two factions charged each other.

"Hold on, boys!" cried Lincoln, running between them. "Give up your bets!"—to his friends—"if he has not thrown me fairly, he could!"

Peace was restored. It was the first and the last

time that Lincoln was ever vanquished in wrestling. It was not the first or the last time that he sacrificed his personal pride by surrendering non-essentials for the sake of peace. It was not the first or the last time that his sense of proportion, his gift of perspective, his grasp of the relative importance of things, made compromise with his own interests for the general welfare.

The spirit of the militia underwent rapid transformation at Yellow Banks. The provisions did not arrive from Jefferson Barracks. The men grew hungry. There was nothing for them to do but drill. They became restless, refused to obey their officers, grumbled, fell to talking about going home, and they grew mutinous.

It was Lincoln who saved them. Lincoln, with his droll stories; Lincoln, with his farcical pranks; Lincoln, with his sympathetic good nature, his humorous point of view, his optimism. He submerged the officer in the man. He relinquished the man for the buffoon. He turned clown. He made them laugh. Those who laugh cannot mutiny. They forgot their grievances. They plucked up their spirits. The provisions arrived, and they set off for Fort Armstrong at the mouth of the Rock River in picnic mood again.

There they joined the forces under General Atkinson, the "White Beaver." With General Atkinson was a colonel of the regular army, commanding four hundred men from Forts Leavenworth and Crawford; a bluff, rugged colonel. His

name was Zachary Taylor. Under Colonel Taylor was a certain second lieutenant. He was not then present. He had been away on furlough; he was hastening to rejoin his command, voluntarily. His name was Jefferson Davis.

The army set out on Black Hawk's trail, which led up the right bank of the Rock River. The mounted volunteers, under General Whiteside and Governor Reynolds, marched along the banks of the river, through the mud, over prairies, among dark, damp woods. General Atkinson was with them. Colonel Taylor with his regulars and three hundred unmounted militia followed in boats.

They came to Prophetstown. The Indians had burned it, and gone on. They reached Dixon's ferry, kept by John Dixon, an old resident, who had always maintained friendly relations with the Indians. Isaiah Stillman and David Bailey were there with militia from the northern part of the State, impatient to strike the Hawk.

Lincoln, sauntering to Dixon's tavern, where his company was mustering, encountered a handsome young man with hair of bronze and brown eyes.

"Well, howdy, Randolph!" he said. "You here?"

"Hello, Abraham! I'm glad to see you!" returned Randolph.

"How about this, Randolph?" Lincoln asked, when they had exchanged further words of greeting. "Is there going to be a fight? Where is Black Hawk?"

“There need not have been a fight,” returned Randolph. “The Hawk did not come to make trouble. I have talked with him. He only wants to make corn among the Winnebagos. He came to plant on his old territory. He brought all the women and children with him. The poor old fellow believes that he is right. He thinks he has been badly treated. He does not want war.”

“You say you have seen him?”

“Yes; I went to Prophetstown. He received me well. He was friendly. He may have erred; he is stubborn; but he is honest, and does not want to fight. He has passed on into Wisconsin, I expect, to join the Winnebagos.”

“Will they help him if it comes to war?”

“I presume they do not know that themselves,” Randolph made answer.

Lincoln was silent. The sadness came into his eyes.

“Randolph,” he said at length, “we may be technically right in this matter, but we are morally wrong. Our government has the treaty duly signed, but Black Hawk knows that it has not been fulfilled by the whites. Furthermore, the old chief cannot forget the indignities heaped upon his band by the lawless squatters, who were thieves, cut-throats, outlaws from the civilized communities of our land. They fringed their cabins around the Indian’s reservation and appropriated the Indian’s gardens. They

burned their lodges. They beat their women and children.”

“They did worse than that,” remarked Randolph.

“A ducky may stand such treatment without turning tail,” Lincoln went on, “but an Indian, never! He’ll fight until he dies when his blood is up. The Hawk has a right to insist on the fulfillment by the government of the treaty. He cannot forget the violations of his sacred dead, the destruction of his ancient home, and the cruelty to his women and children. The fact is, the whites are so bitter that they cannot regard an Indian as human—as possessing any more rights than so many stones. I see a bloody fight ahead of us, and we shall have enough to answer for if we survive this war.”

“I am as unwilling to pursue the war to its obvious conclusion as anyone,” said Randolph, “but it would seem that there is no alternative now. The Black Hawk is stubborn; the white are fanatic!”

“Affairs need never have reached this point,” responded Lincoln. “I think this is a case where discretion would have been the better part of valor. Better to have let the old chief die in his ancestral home. The case reminds me of one of our pioneer farmers who had a big log lying in the middle of his field. It was too big to haul away; too knotty to split; too wet and soggy to burn. One Sunday he told his neighbors that he had got rid of the log. ‘How did you do it?’ they asked. ‘Well, now, boys,

if you won't tell the secret, I'll tell you,' answered the farmer. 'I just plowed around it!'

Another silence was between them. Presently Lincoln turned toward his friend. The shadow of sadness had gone from his eyes. They were filled with gentle sympathy. He laid his hand on Randolph's arm.

'And Sylvia? How about Sylvia?' he said with a smile.

Randolph told him briefly of his hasty visit at Indian Creek. 'I had barely a word with her,' he concluded.

'You did not show her the letter?' pursued Lincoln.

Randolph shook his head.

'My haste was too great,' he said. 'I felt called upon to reach Rock River without delay. I felt the time was not fitting. Perhaps it would have been better if I had; I accomplished nothing by coming here. And Ann Rutledge?' he went on, finding Lincoln made no response. 'Is she well, and happy?'

A shadow came over the face of the other, a heavy shadow of grief and sadness.

'Mortimer, Mortimer, she is not happy!' cried Lincoln. In his emotion his voice was almost a moan. 'I love her; I love her with a love that consumes! I think she loves me. She thinks she does. She is certain she does. But there is a horrible ghost in her soul; the ghost of her promise to that other man. In the honesty and sincerity of her

nature, she cannot think that she is absolved from that by his leaving. It is as though she were married to him. She fears he will return. It haunts her love for me. It haunts the happiness which that love would bring her. It lies cold and contaminating within her heart.

“I do not know! I do not know!” Tears were in his eyes as he went on. His voice was low and mournful. “I think she is wrong. The man deceived her. His name is not McNeill. It is McNamar. He told her he had to hide from his people while he made his beginning, lest they follow him and drag him from the ladder he sought to climb before his feet were firm upon it. Perhaps he did. He told her he would come back. Perhaps he will. I do not know! He writes to her, but his letters are formal and distant. I believe she would be justified in forsaking him, but the ghost is in her soul, and she cannot cast it out!”

There was silence for a moment. The unhappy man raised his two huge clenched fists high above his head. His eyes closed. His great gaunt frame quivered with emotion.

“My God! My God!” he moaned. “It is killing her! It is killing her! And it is I who have done it! She could bear it if I had not brought my love to her.”

His upstretched hands unclasped. He lowered them, burying his face in them. “I would far rather he returned; I would far rather see them wedded,

than that this ghost should so devour her soul," he said.

A silence fell upon them. The hand of Randolph crept to the shoulder of his friend and rested there. For a moment they stood so. With a shudder through his whole body, Lincoln struggled into self-control.

"I must muster in," he said, and the two walked silently toward the tavern, where Major Robert Anderson was swearing in the militia for service in the United States Army.

CHAPTER X

THE FLAG OF TRUCE

ISAAC FRAKE, having by virtue of swaggering self-assurance become captain of soldiery in Major Isaiah Stillman's command, rode in the midst of his men with many brave oaths, vociferously expounding the purpose and art of warfare as it was at that time conducted by himself and Stillman. Isaac Frake, captain of militia, was in high spirits. His counsel had prevailed. Major Stillman, with his own and Major Bailey's militia, was on the way from Dixon's up the Rock River to chastise Black Hawk and disperse his band.

It mattered little to Captain Isaac Frake that his counsel had prevailed, because the soldiers, on the point of open mutiny, had demanded to set out on a punitive expedition without more delay after the arrival of Whiteside at Dixon's. It mattered still less that the mutiny was fostered and fomented by himself for the specific purpose which it had attained. If it mattered at all to him, it was a matter of pride.

Isaac Frake, discussing the objects of war as he rode, had nothing to say about personal revenge as a worthy motive, or hatred for those whom one has injured and fears, or the expediency in removing

from the scene of one's future home Indians to whom one has been a neighbor, and who might remember incidents and circumstances of his neighborliness that would be embarrassing in a new order of things. Neither did he have anything to say concerning the use of whiskey in strategy and tactics, and the opportunities it offered for subverting the natural instincts of the red men. Nor had he anything to say concerning treachery and guile in any form.

“We'll show the old fraud what it is to defy the United States Government!” quoth Frake, vehemently, speaking for the Government, as an officer in the army. “We'll show him that when an Indian makes a treaty, an Indian has got to keep the treaty!” Speaking for the Government, Frake was silent about the keeping of treaties with the Indians by the United States. “I know the old cuss,” Frake went on. “I didn't live next him for two years for nothing. Coming to make corn, is he? Why don't he make corn in Iowa, where he belongs? What does he come over here for? Isn't the soil good enough for him there? If he wants to plant, why does he make tracks for the Winnebago country with a band of warriors? Oh, I know him!”

Thus said Frake, captain of militia, as he rode forth to slay. This, and much more of like purport, he reiterated, bouncing along with his men. They echoed him approvingly. As an officer and a man of sense, they believed him. Also, they were in

complacent temper. They were gay. They were out upon a picnic. They laughed and joked roughly such times as they were not called upon to listen to the dissertations of their captain.

One among them was silent, one who was not made jubilant at the prospect of killing the redskins. Concerning him Frake whispered to his men as they rode: "You fellows watch that man Randolph! He 's a friend of the Indians. He 'll play us into their hands if he gets a chance, or I miss my guess! I happen to know something about him. And I happen to know of a squaw of the Sacs who has got a papoose with a skin altogether too white to look good on an Indian!"

Mortimer Randolph, riding apart, saw the angry looks his comrades cast upon him. Riding alone, he gave them no heed.

All day they went on through the unbroken woods, three hundred and fifty white men, laughing, singing, joking, cursing, awakening the silence of the waste places to a myriad startled echoes, sealing the throats of birds with terror, making the squirrels cling quivering and afraid to the limbs of the high oaks, peeping wide-eyed upon a sight they had never seen—all day, until the rays of the afternoon sun slanted among the boles of the trees that clustered along the fringe of Old Man's Creek.

There they stopped in jubilant mood; built their camp fires, laughing and frolicking with one another; fried their bacon and boiled their coffee

with many rude jests; they smoked their pipes, lying on the ground beneath the trees in the first twilight of the May evening; and there, insolently defying such of their officers as tried to restrain them, they drank deeply out of many black bottles, roistering and carousing.

Mortimer Randolph sat apart from the men of Frake's company, of which chance had made him one. He was disturbed and anxious concerning the spirit of the troops. He was made fearful by the black bottles. He knew they would soon be in a temper beyond restraining, and that Indians were close at hand. He was certain in his own mind that Black Hawk would not fight unless forced to defend himself. There was nothing reassuring in the attitude of the militia, as they sang and cursed and joked, reviling the Indians and filling the end of the day with threats. Deep in a mood of abstraction, he arose from the log on which he sat and wandered through the little grove, casting over in his mind what might be done to avert the clash between the militia and the Sacs.

Frake, whose eyes had not been long absent from Randolph at any time of the carousal, in which he indulged with his men, saw him go.

"D'you see that?" he muttered to his companions. "See him sneaking off like that? Somethin's up! He'll bear watching, that man Randolph!"

Half a dozen of his followers staggered to their feet.

“By God! we ’ll watch him,” they growled, taking their guns in hand and stumbling over the uneven ground with uncertain steps.

Frake arose among them, expostulating. He pleaded with them to do nothing rash in much the same manner that he had lately pleaded with Rachel Hall to spare the man’s reputation whose life he had now brought in jeopardy.

“Don’t be in a hurry, men!” he cried, clinging to a pair of them with his fat hands. “I am not sure about him; I only say to watch him. If he tries anything, there will be time enough!”

The men were not in a temper to weigh evidence. They pushed Frake aside, protesting loudly that they would have no traitors in camp. Their indignation grew to anger, their anger swelled into rage. A score of others leaped to their feet. The excitement of the chase and the liquor was working on the hatred of the redmen that was in each. They became frenzied. Frake no longer held control.

Major Stillman, hastening thither at the sound of the turmoil, was helpless. Major Bailey pleaded with them in vain. They were a mob. They cried out for the blood of this man Randolph, traitor and spy. With a hoarse roar they turned whither he had disappeared—fivescore men, maddened by liquor and brute passion. Frake, appalled by the violence of the storm he had brewed, stood speech-

less, watching them with staring eyes, his jaws hanging in the folds of fat beneath his chin. His device had worked too well. The explosion was taking place too soon for the one who had lighted the fuse.

Those who followed Randolph, seeking his blood as that of a traitor, had gone scarcely a rod, when the one who led them gave a mighty yell, and stood in his tracks. Twenty feet ahead of them, approaching through the grove, were three Indians. One of them carried a flag of truce. With them was the man Randolph, whom they sought.

“Indians!” shouted the leader.

“Shoot ’em! Hang ’em. Kill the dirty redskins!”

Some one in the mob shouted it. Some one fired a shot. The bullet struck the stick to which the flag of truce was fastened. It was shattered in the hand of the one who held it. The flag fell into the dirt. The Indians, astonished at their reception, stared blankly at the soldiers, appreciating their danger, but undaunted. A hoarse roar arose from many throats.

“What is this for?” cried Mortimer, leaping before the Indians and confronting the men, his eyes flaring, his nostrils dilated with wrath. “Why do you fire on a flag of truce?”

Drunken and raging though they were, there was something about the appearance and behavior of the man that withheld the hands of the soldiers

from their guns. They could not shoot him down in cold blood without a word. His single soul was stronger than their many.

“Where ’d you find them Indians?” demanded one of the men, less drunk than his fellows. “Who are they? What do they want?”

“I met them coming through the woods with a flag of truce,” Mortimer replied, “and conducted them into camp. “They have come from the Hawk to parley. They are asking for peace, I infer.”

“What were you doing in the woods?” asked the one who had spoken first, the suspicions which Frake had aroused strong within him.

“I was endeavoring to get away from the drunken and shameless behavior of the men who should be soldiers!” Mortimer answered back.

Frake, impelled by a curiosity that overcame the fear endangered by his responsibility for the outburst, came to the front of the mob. At sight of the Indian in whose hand was the broken stick that had carried the flag, he swelled with rage; the rage of a bully who sees his enemy; when he feels himself at an advantage in the presence of his enemy. The Indian was White Eagle!

“I know this Indian and I know this white man,” he bellowed, starting forward with a courage inspired by the temper of the men behind him. “Come on!” He grasped a gun from the hand of a soldier. He could not shoot, for men from other parts of the camp, drawn by the noise, had sur-

rounded the group of Indians and were in the line of fire.

The half-crazed men, who had hesitated for lack of a leader, pressed forward with a roar of anger. They were a mob once more. The Indians could not understand what was said. They only knew their danger was great. They stood behind the one who championed them, erect and defiant.

The mob surged forward, paying no heed to the frantic shouts of Stillman and Bailey, who would have held them back. With a rush, they closed about the Indians, who stood motionless and unresisting, true to the flag of truce, which lay in the dirt at their feet.

As they came, Mortimer Randolph fought them back. Without a weapon of any kind, he struggled against the mass with body and limb. His white fist, flashing through the air, fell upon the soft flesh of Frake's face, bowling him over heavily. Twice, twenty times, he struck about him. One of the Indians was felled with the butt of a gun, and lay motionless on the ground. Bailey, tears in his eyes, tore at the fringe of the mob in vain efforts to stop the work that went on. Stillman, struggling where the turmoil was highest, gave what protection he could to the savages, who were now beginning to fight back, seeing no hope of help left in the whites.

Frake, clambering to his feet, his face suffused with blood from Randolph's blow, fought his way toward the Southerner, his knife in hand and a

horrid snarl upon his lips. Great was the bravery of Frake, one of an hundred against one who resisted alone! He came to the side of Mortimer, whose face was turned away in the exigencies of the struggle. Frake's knife was raised. His wrist stiffened for the blow. He set his teeth. In the instant, while the impulse was traveling from his brain to the nerves of his arm, Mortimer turned. And in the instant his hand grasped the wrist of Frake, twisted it, and sent the man to the ground, crumpled with pain.

“Indians! Indians!”

Someone came crying the alarm through the woods. At the cry, the fury subsided from the tempestuous mob as boiling ceases when a kettle is removed from the stove. There were no gradations in the going down of the ebullition. It stopped at once. Those who had been frantic with rage paused to listen to the one who came through the woods, crying as he ran.

“Indians! Indians!” he said, coming up to the panting group. “A swarm of them, over there!”

He pointed across the prairie. There, in the gathering dusk, they saw five savages, mounted on horses, riding slowly across the skyline beyond the camp. At the sight their cries arose again, and fury broke upon them once more, directed this time against the five men they saw. With one accord, oblivious of the authority of their officers, each for himself, they rushed to their horses, saddled them

as swiftly as they could, and started in complete disorder for the five whom they had seen. In the diversion, the two of the peace party who had survived the fanaticism of these American militiamen vanished into the grove.

Major Bailey, seeing the stampede of his soldiers, mounted and followed. Major Stillman endeavored to form such men as had not already taken the field on their own initiative. Frake, purple with wrath, dashed after a knot of his own command. Randolph, leisurely saddling, kept wary eye on all that went forward. His heart was heavy within him, for he knew that now the struggle had been precipitated. One comfort he found. The one of the three truce bearers who now lay dead in the camp was not the tall young brave whom he had seen on the hill at Saukenuk the year before, and whom he had recognized in the one who carried the flag of truce.

The five Indians, seeing the rush of men toward them, put spurs to their horses, and were soon out of sight. Shouting and cursing, the militiamen dashed across the prairie on their trail. In vain did Stillman, riding hard behind them, shout his commands in an effort to bring them in hand. They laughed at him.

A cry went up from those who led the van of the straggling pursuers. Ahead of them, riding forth from a fringe of thicket, was a small band of Indi-

ans. At their front, vengeful and magnificent, rode the one who had borne the flag of truce.

The Americans pressed on, exultant, to brush away this handful. The Indians, pretending fright, withdrew to the thicket. Their pursuers, believing themselves already victors, spurred their horses more keenly, that not one of the savages might escape. A long, ragged line of horsemen drew near the thicket where the Indians had vanished. Like conquerors they rode, shouting ribaldry to each other through the pale shadows of the evening.

A shot from the thicket! Another; and another! A dozen! A score! A cry that was half a scream tore along the thin, ragged line. One man, shrieking, tottered and fell from his saddle to the ground. His horse, in panic, wheeled and stampeded back across the prairie. Reins were drawn. Steeds plowed through the soft ground on their haunches, suddenly held up by their riders.

A wild yell arose from the thicket; a cluster of mounted Indians broke cover, and ran fiercely toward the line of whites, brandishing spears and hatchets, guns and knives.

“Run, men. Run for your lives!”

It was Major Bailey gave the order; the only order which his command had ever obeyed with the alacrity which marks good soldiery. As fast as they could bring their horses to a stop and turn them, the men wheeled and fled back toward their camp. Major Stillman, arriving with the handful

that he had gathered into formation, faced them about and bade them fly for their lives, as his junior had done, giving them at the same time an eloquent object lesson in retreating.

Of the whole force of three hundred and fifty men, but one rode toward the enemy. That one, mounted on a beautiful roan that quivered with the excitement of the firing, went steadily forward to a clump of woods where his quick eye told him a stand could best be made. Fugitives, crazed with fear, passed him, shouting that Black Hawk with his thousands was after them.

The Indians, breaking into four squads of ten or a dozen each, struck off in different directions of pursuit. One squad, larger than the other, made for the clump of trees in the prairie toward which Mortimer rode. It was led by the brave who had carried the flag of truce. As he came on, Mortimer marveled at the speed which had enabled him to get back from the American camp to his friends in time to join in the fight.

Entering the clump of trees at one side before the Indians had reached the other, Mortimer glanced hastily about to see if there were any nucleus of a force to which he might attach himself. Of all the three hundred and fifty he alone deplored the struggle with Black Hawk, and desired that there might have been no quarrel. Of all the three hundred and fifty, he was the only one who seemed ready to fight, now that the unhappy time had come

—the only one save a small knot of men whom he saw at last standing in the woods on the edge of a little stream, prepared to meet the oncoming savages—Major Perkins, Captain Adams, men whom he had known in the march, with a handful of men about them. Putting spurs to his horse, he leaped the creek and galloped toward them.

As he rode, the Indian yell was heard in the fringe of the clump of trees. Some of the men with the two officers, firing once, broke and fled on their horses. Some of them stayed. Among those who fled was Frake—his fury made impotent by his terror. He came in his flight toward Mortimer. His face was distorted by passion and fear. His eyes protruded from his head.

Close behind him pursued the Indian who had borne the flag of truce; whose strong fingers had once been about the neck of the man he pursued. Now they would not give over their hold, if once they made it fast, until the carcass of the man went limp in their grasp. Frake, turning, saw the Indian and groaned. Mortimer felt the whiff of his flight as he sped past. He saw the Indian raise himself from his horse's back, poisoning his spear. He saw the dun arm whip through the air. He saw the streak of the spear against a bit of sky that peeped among the trees, as it flew toward the retreating man.

As it flew, he struck through the air with his gun, as quick as a cat might have done with its paw, and

struck the javelin from its course. The Indian, in mad career, was abreast of him. Until then, the savage had not seen him, so intent was he upon the other. Gripping his horse mightily with his knees, Randolph flung his arm about the waist of the brave, swept him from his seat and threw him to the ground, where he lay for the moment gasping and breathless. Spurring his own horse, Randolph rode toward the few who stood now the center of a whirling group of screaming savages.

Not for long did the struggle last. Charging through the Indians from the outside with yells and blows of his clubbed gun, he scattered them for a breath, and in another breath they were gone, in search of a prey that did not fight. Bodies lay upon the ground, writhing in the dark shadows of the trees. Randolph dismounted, hoping there might be some whom he could succor. As he passed among them, leaning over to feel for their pulse, to listen to their breathing, the last of them gasped and lay still.

With a heavy heart he remounted "Powhatan," and made his way to camp, cautious and watchful.

CHAPTER XI

MASSACRE

MORTIMER RANDOLPH rode through the woods lying between Dixon's Ferry and Ottawa in the heart of a May morning. The sun shone softly upon him through the tender leaves of the new fledged trees. The flowers smiled up at him from the mold. Birds twittered among the branches overhead, busy with their nests. The heart of Mortimer was light within him; he rode whistling a tune; for on his return his way would lie through Indian Creek.

He was bearing expresses from Governor Reynolds to Ottawa, to be forwarded thence to Vandalia, the capital. The militia, alarmed by the reports brought in by Stillman's stampeded men, cowered in their camp at Dixon's, refusing in their present numbers to go forth and fight. They were growing mutinous, and threatened to return to their homes. Governor Reynolds, in despair, was sending to his capital for more help. It was these messages which Mortimer carried on their first relay.

Forgetting the sorrow and bitterness of the war as he rode, thinking only of Sylvia, and what it was he had to say to her, he passed beneath the trees,

flecked with the sunlight that fluttered through the leaves, eager and joyous. At intervals as he rode he took from the breast of his coat a large envelope, looked into it with an expression of the highest satisfaction, and replaced it tenderly. It was the letter he had received at New Salem the day before he had first set out for Indian Creek.

He was in the midst of one of these inspections, after he had been riding upward of an hour, when he heard a horse coming along the trail ahead of him. Powhatan first called his attention to the sound of the animal's steps by a series of soft snorts. The times being uncertain, Mortimer reined his horse to the side of the path, behind a bush which concealed them both, drew his pistol, cocked it, and waited.

The one who approached was in no haste. He came at a pace distractingly slow. Powhatan, losing patience, pawed the turf—entirely without noise, however—and looked petulantly at his master. Presently Mortimer saw the man coming toward him. He was white. He rode with head down, deep in meditation. His horse, taking advantage of his preoccupation, walked.

There was something familiar to Mortimer about the appearance of the man. He eyed him more attentively. It was Frake. He recalled then something that had passed out of his mind—that Frake had left Dixon's without announcing his errand early on that morning, when he himself was waiting

for the despatches to be prepared. Without any assigned reason, he conceived a suspicion from the circumstance of his having come this way.

Frake's horse, getting a sniff of Powhatan, brought up short with a snort of surprise. Frake snorted, too, at sight of a man drawn up beside the trail behind a bush with a cocked pistol in his hand. Observing on a second glance who it was that way-laid him, his first fright gave way to heavier fear and keen distress. His face indicated confusion and embarrassment, as well. He stammered, without forming any articulated syllables. Mortimer smiled grimly at him.

"Well, Frake, it 's you, is it? Pleasant morning for a ride, is n't it?" he said. "You see," he went on, his brown eyes closing to slits and the smile vanishing from his face, "I am here a little sooner than one might have expected. Now, I do n't want to be rude, Frake, but I 'll have to ask you to ride on down the trail for a piece; and you need not trouble yourself to look back."

"What if I won't do it?" growled Frake, perceiving that the other exhibited no signs of immediate hostility.

"Well, I had n't thought what I might do under those circumstances, because I think that you will," returned Mortimer, calmly, fingering his pistol in a persuasive manner.

"What business you got ordering me?" snarled

the other, his eyes gleaming with hatred. "You bullying coward!"

"We shan't stop to discuss it, Frake—at the present time." Mortimer added the qualifying clause with distinct significance. "I am willing to take my chances with the Indians, Frake, but I don't want to be traveling with you too close behind. Come, now! I am somewhat in haste."

"What you going to do? Shoot me in the back?" Frake intended insulting irony in his tone, and in the leer which accompanied it.

"If I should, I apprehend that I should only be saving someone else the trouble," returned Mortimer, serenely. He swung his pistol impressively in the direction of the trail toward Dixon's, without further word. Frake, cursing beneath his breath, started his horse and passed by him.

"You 've got the drop on me this time, you blackguard," he muttered, "but I 'll get you yet! I 'll get you yet!"

Mortimer watched until he disappeared. Dismounting, he stole softly after him for a distance, to make sure that he continued on his course. Mounting again, he took up his way toward Ottawa.

"Frake is a bad customer, I am afraid, Powhatan," he said, as he rode. "We are likely to have trouble with him before we are through; though I can't entirely understand why we should have aroused his enmity."

Powhatan seemed to share in the premoni-

tion and the perplexity of his master, for he flicked his ears a number of times, and whinnied softly as he fell into his lope.

They had traveled for an hour or two from the time of the meeting with Frake. Mortimer, thinking of many things, had forgotten it. His wary eyes no longer studied the thickets and covers as he rode. Suddenly Powhatan, snorting, stood still in the trail, his ears erect, his limbs trembling with excitement. Mortimer, recalled to the present, followed the stare of the animal, fixed upon a clump of bushes at a short distance to the left of the trail.

“Well, boy, what it is? Indians?” he said, addressing the horse, as he was accustomed to do when they traveled alone.

The horse nickered. Penetrating the bush with his gaze, Mortimer saw a pair of eyes and an Indian’s face, nearly hidden by the leaves—a sinister, hangdog face. Half of one of the Indian’s ears—the right one—was lopped off. As he looked, with a faint remembrance of the face and the half ear in his mind, there was a flash from the bush, a puff of smoke, the crack of a musket. A bullet whistled past his head. The face vanished.

Driving his spurs into the quivering withers of Powhatan, he rushed toward the bushes. The horse could not penetrate. He threw himself from its back and struggled through the tangled boughs, his pistol cocked, his eyes peering among the leaves. He found no trace of the ambushade, and returned

to Powhatan. Mounting, he rode cautiously forward, looking on all sides as he went.

“By George, Powhatan!” he exclaimed, when he had ridden a few paces. “That is the Indian Frake met at Saukenuk! I recall him now. He is the one whom the Indian woman called Half Ear, when we found him on the hill that day. Powhatan, my boy, there’s something behind this! If we only knew what it was, old fellow, we should probably know what Frake was doing out this way so early this morning. Well, Half Ear,” he added, apostrophizing the Indian, “by your looks I should judge you were in fit company!”

The mystery was not enough to hold his mind from what it had been dwelling upon as he rode, and by the time he had reached Ottawa the incident of the ambush was submerged beneath the flood of fancies that buoyed up his heart. He did not tarry long there. He waited only to bait his horse after he had delivered his messages. As for himself, it did not occur to him to eat, though he had ridden nearly fifty miles since the morning.

It was late in the afternoon before he was on his way to Indian Creek. It was so late that in ordinary circumstances he would not have started again that day. But there was that in his heart which would not wait.

Powhatan felt it, too. He swung off down the road that led along the edge of the prairie to the little settlement, a dozen miles away, as though he

had that moment come fresh from his stall. His ears played as his master talked to him; with every bound he gave a little confidential snort in response. His master laid no hand on him, letting him take his own pace. The miles reeled away behind his heels. An hour passed at the same swinging lope. Scarcely two miles of the way was left.

“Good fellow, Powhatan!” exclaimed Mortimer Randolph, in great spirits, looking over his shoulder at the sun, which hung low in the west. “We ’ll make it before sundown.”

The horse tossed his head, as though he had intended to do so from the first, and stuck to his gait with even breath. Overhead the blue sky was paling into grey. Larks, springing from the ground as he passed, fluttered away with song in their throats. A soft wind made sheen over the lush grass. The odor of spring was in the air. The feel of it was abroad. The lips of Mortimer sang a song as he went, with eyes searching the landscape for the first view of the settlement in among the trees near the creek.

“There is the place, Powhatan!” he cried, fixing his eyes on the woods. “Right behind that thick point in the grove.”

Powhatan, making answer with a series of low snorts, quickened his pace. The sun, red in the western sky, cast a crimson glow over the prairie. Shadows thickened in the woods. Behind the woods as they approached lifted a thick head of smoke.

“Strange how these people out here go to the labor of clearing the forests for a place for their fields, when they have all these wide and fertile prairies to hand,” he remarked, habituated to express his thoughts aloud when he was alone with his horse. He had observed the smoke and supposed the settlers were burning brush.

Half a mile! The smoke rose higher.

“That ’s a pretty big bonfire they ’re burning, old fellow,” said Mortimer, looking at it earnestly, some wonder in his gaze.

A quarter of a mile! The black billows swelled above the trees.

“Powhatan! Did you hear that?”

Mortimer, leaning forward in his saddle, listened intently, his hand behind his ear. He had heard a cry. Powhatan pricked his ears and snorted once, softly. He had heard it, too. His feet fell more lightly on the ground. He slackened his pace for an instant.

Across the glow of sunset that was upon the prairie, from the direction of the headland of woods, it came again—a sound that checked the currents of Mortimer’s blood—the cry of a man in the last extremity! Powhatan, hearing it, snorted loudly and broke into a gallop. Mortimer, pale, distraught with dread and suspense, compressed his lips, and said no word.

Another sound reached his ear; sharp, weird, frightful.

“Great God, Powhatan! Indians!” cried the rider.

Powhatan, snorting loudly, laid back his ears and quickened into a run. The face of Mortimer, paler still, grew intense. His eyes stared before. His breath came quickly.

“Powhatan! Powhatan!” he whispered hoarsely, encouraging him to greater exertion. “Powhatan! Powhatan!” as the horse flew across the even prairie road.

Gaining speed with every bound, lengthening his stride, his body close and closer to the ground as he leaped, the horse ran such a race as he had never run. The grass streaked past, green and red beneath the glow of the sunset heavens.

The eager eyes of Mortimer, fixed on the spot where the settlement was, saw the smoke arising higher above the trees; the column filling swiftly into a dark, whirling volume, tumbling upward. The lower surfaces of it glowed ruddy as it rolled and bellied. The top of it glinted with the setting sun. The glare of flames shone between the trunks of the trees. With it all was a horrible stillness.

“Now, Powhatan, let your breeding tell! Let the pride of your long line reach greater renown! There is none to watch you save only one; but never was race run for greater stakes!”

Three hundred yards lay between them and the point of trees, behind which was the place where

the houses were, or had been. Two hundred! A hundred yards! Faster, faster, he sped!

His master no longer whispered his name into the leveled ears. Another name was upon the man's lips, spoken fervently, in the voice of one who prays.

“Sylvia! Sylvia!”

Now he could catch glimpses between the boles of the trees that formed the point; glimpses of seething masses of fire, from which dense columns of smoke rushed into the air. The sound of flames came to his ears; a muttering, growling, heavy roar, sprinkled with faint, crackling noises. There was no other sound, save that of Powhatan's hoofs echoed from the wall of trees.

The point was gained. Powhatan, trembling from the strain of his exertions and excitement, wheeled close about the last tree. He sped toward that which had been the settlement of Indian Creek. As he turned, a groan came from the lips of his master.

The few houses that had comprised the settlement were now pyramids of leaping fire. Flames struck through the windows of the cabin where Sylvia had lived. They licked hungrily about the red lips of the logs. They lapped at the outer surfaces. Tiny blazes sprang up behind them as they swung.

In the whole view there was no man or woman, unless a hideous heap that lay some paces from the houses near the creek might still be called a man—

or a woman. Over all was the silence of mystery; nothing but the flames to tell him what had become of his beloved.

“Sylvia! Sylvia!” he cried, throwing himself from his horse, which stood gasping so close to the burning houses that the heat was pungent upon the man’s face and hands.

“Sylvia!”

He ran toward the house. Only the tongues of flame made answer to his cry of agony.

“Sylvia!”

His hurrying feet struck against something soft and heavy. It was the body of William Hall, her father. The lips were mute. The eyes gave back no look.

He rushed to the house. The flames beat him back. He ran to the edge of the little ridge overlooking the creek bottom to stare across the ground with a dread upon him that dulled his soul. He was calling her name, now softly, now with a shriek of despair. Only the flames, roaring and chuckling, made mocking answer. A sense of utter, desolate solitude possessed him.

He ran whither Powhatan gasped for breath and threw his arms around the animal’s neck, to rid himself of the feeling of loneliness that drove him mad. His eyes were as the red windows of the burning houses.

He hurried back to the cabin where she had lived. He would enter there, through all the fires

of hell! The flames seared his face. He threw his arms before it, to protect his eyes until they should see—that which he sought. The fire singed his hair. The heat of it in his nostrils stifled him. He gasped. He threw back his head. He gathered strength to rush though the flames. There would be but a moment, and then——

Out of the desolate solitude there came the voice of some one calling him; calling him by name. “Randolph! Randolph! For the love of God, do n’t go in there!” cried the voice.

He turned and staggered from the fire, beating out the flames that had caught in his clothing. The smoke pursued him. A huge, blazing arm, leaping from the house, darted after him, enveloping him for an instant. So vigorously it leaped that it tore itself loose, and went hurling upward, a detached sheet of flame, to flutter and disperse the heated air. Blinded, gagging, he dragged himself free.

“Sylvia!” he called again.

“Sylvia is n’t in there,” answered the voice. “She is all right. She is n’t killed. The Indians have got her.”

The voice was close in front of him. Sight, returning to his eyes, revealed to him William Hall, the brother, white with terror, but unharmed. Mortimer groped about for speech.

“I do n’t think they ’ll hurt the girls,” repeated Hall, dazed. “It was Pottowatomies that got them. They won’t hurt them.”

“Which way did they go?” cried the other, finding his voice.

“North,” made answer William Hall, blankly.

“Have you a horse?”

“They took all the horses.”

“Have you a gun?”

“The guns were in the house. Say, you can’t chase them!” burst forth the young man, realizing what the other had in mind, and forgetting his antipathy in the face of the calamity. “You’d never catch them. If you did, you could n’t do anything. There are a hundred of them. Anyway, if you tried it they would kill the girls, sure! They would never let them get away like that!”

Mortimer made no answer. He strode toward his horse. Hall followed him as he went.

“See here!” he pleaded. “Do n’t try that! The best thing you can do for the girls is to get to Dixon’s as soon as you can and give the alarm.”

Mortimer paid no heed to the man. He reached Powhatan’s side. He placed his foot in the stirrup. Hall laid hold of his arm.

“Do n’t go, I tell you! Do n’t be a fool!” he cried. In crises enemies forget.

Mortimer threw off his hand, and swung himself from the ground. As he did so Powhatan, groaning, staggered and fell, overborne in his exhaustion by the weight of his master. Mortimer was scarcely able to leap out from under.

“What do you think you could do with that horse!” ejaculated Hall, looking at the animal, which made no effort to rise.

The accident brought reason back to the mind of Mortimer. Gazing ruefully at Powhatan, he knelt beside him and rubbed his nose.

“Are you ready to set out for Dixon’s?” he asked, presently. His voice was calm and contained.

Hall made answer that he was. The other urged Powhatan to his feet, loosened the cinch, threw off the bridle, and slung it over his arm.

“Come!” he said. “Let us be off.”

They started through the gathering dusk, Powhatan after them.

With much unction, as one to whom fame is assured, William Hall told of the attack made that afternoon upon the settlers; how the band of Pottowatomies, led by Mike Girty, whom he knew, had descended upon them; how his father and mother and the Davises, and all the settlers, save his sisters and himself, had been killed and scalped, together with minute details of the preceding and attendant circumstances.

Mortimer, trudging by his side through the darkness of night, heard little of the story. His thoughts could not fasten on more than one fascinating fact. But this he heard, as they walked through the night:

“Three of them were Sacs. One of the Sacs was the worst looking Indian I ever saw; a little,

weazened fellow with a crooked face. One half of his right ear had been cut off sometime!"

Whereat the thoughts of the listener passed swiftly away from what he was thought to be hearing.

CHAPTER XII

A MESSAGE FOR THE HAWK

“GENERAL WHITESIDE, sir, General Atkinson is right. His only mistake is that he is not emphatic enough. The militia, as it is, is worthless—it is worse than worthless. It would be much better if we could send them all home to their women and let the regulars catch the old fox; but the orders we have from Washington make it necessary for us to send the militia into the field. Therefore we must make them effective by drill and discipline before they make any advance. Your men, sir, look upon this campaign as a pleasure excursion contrived for their benefit and enjoyment. They must be taught that it is war, sir; war!”

Colonel Zachary Taylor, seated at the right hand of General Atkinson at the dining table in John Dixon's tavern, delivered himself in this fashion to General Whiteside and the members of a council of officers, punctuating his speech with many jerkings of his round, hard head and thumpings upon the table. Opposite to him, in some concern over the nature of the colonel's remarks, sat Major Robert Anderson, U. S. A. At his right was Second Lieutenant Jefferson Davis, his aide, a young man of elegant and handsome features and an air of high

breeding; courageous, chivalrous, haughty. Disposed about the board were General Whiteside, Governor Reynolds, Major Henry, Major Stillman, Major Bailey, Captain Fry and a number of the officers of the militia.

Among them, at the bottom of the table, inconspicuous, retiring, modestly listening to the discussion that went forward, was one who, in the fullness of time, was to sit at other war councils in the land with the weight of his country upon his shoulders. If Abraham Lincoln had been told that day that the brilliant young lieutenant sitting at the right hand of the rugged colonel, whose handsome face, distinguished bearing, high culture, and easy manner he admired and half envied as he watched him, should some day be opposed to him at the head of the bitterest and most tragic struggle in history, he would probably have expressed his opinion of the prophecy in an appropriate anecdote.

Major Bailey exhibiting symptoms of resentment at the colonel's condemnation of the militia, Taylor turned to him.

"Major Bailey will be able to substantiate what I have said," he remarked. "He has seen the militia in action under excellent opportunities for observation. He knows how well they fight!"

Governor Reynolds, under the obligation imposed by his office, found it necessary to undertake a mild defence of the people of his State, to which Colonel Taylor was about to reply with some

heat when General Atkinson diplomatically interposed for the sake of peace.

“My contention is not that the militia is totally unfit for service, gentlemen,” he said, “though we are all agreed, I think, that they could be made more effective by stricter discipline and drill. There are other elements to the problem, however. The temper of the men must be considered.”

“They must be taught temper!” interrupted Colonel Taylor.

“The process would require time, colonel,” returned his superior. “It is necessary to bear in mind that the men are so unused to restraint that it is a question whether strict military rigor might not impair their value at first, rather than increase it, by destroying their present enthusiasm, which has revived, and arousing their resentment. They would not readily relinquish their civil rights. General Whiteside reports that they are now chafing to take up the pursuit of Black Hawk, and that their morale is rapidly disintegrating under the enervating effects of their enforced inactivity, which is a circumstance to be considered in dealing with civilian soldiers.

“For we are forced to deal with them in the dual capacity, colonel,” he added to Taylor, who gave symptoms of an eruption; “added to which is the fact that the situation demands that a blow be struck at the Indians without further delay. If Black Hawk intends to join the Winnebagos, as is

reported, any time that may be afforded him is to our marked disadvantage—to say nothing of the alarm in which the country has been thrown by his continuing at large. Therefore I must beg of you, gentlemen, to come to a consideration of the problem which the council was called to solve; namely, where and how to strike the blow!”

For an hour the discussion ran high. Plans of campaign by the score were proposed and disposed of. The debate drifted 'round and 'round, always striking at last upon the snag of unwillingness, or unfitness, to do the tasks involved in the several schemes. The men would not consent, many of them, their officers said, to go out of the State in pursuit of the Hawk; they were not equipped for a long campaign; as a force they were cumbrous and unmanageable. The council grew acrimonious. General Atkinson, continually rapping on the table for order, found it difficult to preserve the decorum of the meeting. Nothing was coming of it but jealousy and friction.

A lull came. They were back where they began. There was a reluctance on the part of all to precipitate the discussion again. In the lull, Abraham Lincoln arose from his chair, unfolding his gaunt height and looking down at the assembled men with a half whimsical, half serious expression on his face.

“Gentlemen,” he drawled, “I am no soldier. I have no advice. I should hardly presume to offer it, if I thought I was in possession of any. I have

listened to all that has been said, and it reminds me of two men down in Kentucky who caught a 'possum in a box trap. One of them wanted to cut it up and fry it, and the other thought it would be better stewed. They got into a pretty warm discussion over it. Finally they decided that they would cut the animal in halves, and each do what he wanted with his part. They shook hands on that, and went to get the 'possum. When they opened the trap, it was gone. They had left the box a-tilt when they talked, and Mister 'Possum had squirmed out. Now, not being a soldier, there are things about the situation that I cannot hope to understand, but to the mind of a civilian it would seem advisable to find Black Hawk before we chastise him!"

Even Zachary Taylor laughed when Lincoln finished and sat down, the whimsically serious expression still on his face. The mirth subsiding, Lieutenant Davis arose to his feet. He bestowed a smile of patronizing indulgence upon the one who had just spoken.

"Gentlemen," he said, "the point taken by Captain—Captain——"

"Lincoln!" prompted the owner of the name.

"By Captain Lincoln is well taken. We have only the most meager information concerning Black Hawk's whereabouts and intentions. Some report him to be in the immediate vicinity; others say he is at Koshkonong, and others that he is on the Dalles of the Ouisconsin. If General Atkinson will

permit me, I will go with a dozen picked men and determine where he is.”

He resumed his seat. There was a moment of silence. In the midst of it the door of the room was opened. John Dixon, visibly excited, appeared, bringing with him Mortimer Randolph, haggard and disheveled. He had come from Indian Creek, alternately riding his tired horse and hurrying on foot with Powhatan stumbling behind him. Now, late in the morning, he had reached Dixon's with the news, leaving Hall behind him to come as he could.

At sight of him, Jefferson Davis started from his chair in astonishment, with an exclamation. With the look of surprise in his face was mixed pleasure and gladness. In a moment the gladness vanished, and he sank back in his seat with a stare of doubt and distrust. Mortimer, scarcely glancing at him, gave his presence no acknowledgment. Pale and trembling from fatigue and emotion, he drew himself up into formal military position and saluted General Atkinson.

“I have the honor to report, sir, that Indians last evening attacked and massacred the settlers at Indian Creek,” he said, in the dead level of the military voice. “I have the honor to report that fifteen men, women, and children were killed, and that the two daughters of William Hall, who was killed, were taken away alive by the Indians.”

As he said this he turned toward Lincoln, with a look of horror and anguish on his face. It passed



“It reminds me of two men down in Kentucky who caught a ’possum in a box trap.”

in a moment. Lincoln, oblivious of formality, arose and went to his side, putting an arm about his shoulders. Jefferson Davis continued to stare, puzzled and uncertain, with doubt still in his mind. A clamor went up about the table; the militia officers arose from their chairs and crowded around the bearer of the news in high excitement. General Atkinson, tapping loudly upon the table, with the hilt of his sword, called them to order and sent them to their seats, reminding them that they were at a council. Motioning Randolph to a chair, and waiting until he drank the glass of whiskey John Dixon brought to him, he formally and in prescribed manner bade him make his report more fully, permitting him to remain in his chair the while, out of consideration for his exhausted condition.

Before Mortimer finished a commotion was heard in the camp of the militia. There was much angry shouting, and cries for vengeance upon the savages. William Hall, who had found a fresh horse at a settlement and had followed Mortimer closely, had arrived and told his story to the men. Shouting, they came toward headquarters, demanding to be despatched at once in pursuit.

Doubt no longer remained in the council of officers. They must be sent to the fight when the mood was on them. Governor Reynolds, springing to his feet, spoke fervently for a moment, pleading for immediate action. General Atkinson issued a few hasty orders. The officers of militia left to prepare

their troops to march at once. Lincoln, whose look of tender commiseration had never left the face of Mortimer, passed behind his friend on the way out and pressed a hand upon his shoulder. The touch was more eloquent than many words.

Mortimer remained at the table with General Atkinson, Colonel Taylor, Major Robert Anderson and Lieutenant Davis. The last named was still looking at him with a mixture of eagerness and reluctance, as though high regard for the man contended with suspicion of him. There was a period of bustle; orderlies running in and out, orders given, reports made, and questions asked and answered. In the first lull, Mortimer, in whose face there was no trace of knowledge that Jefferson Davis was present, turned toward General Atkinson with another salute and addressed him.

“May I be permitted to speak, sir?” he asked, in a formal and perfunctory manner.

General Atkinson gave consent with a nod befitting his office.

“There is no need to say that the young women who were abducted by the Indians are in precarious circumstances,” he said, in perfect calm. His strength was reviving fast. “It is not necessary to point out that, should they escape immediate harm, their danger would be increased if our soldiers should press Black Hawk too closely.

“Their value as hostages cannot be lost upon the chief. May I be permitted to carry to the Hawk

official assurance from General Atkinson, representing the United States Government, that in the event of the safe return of the young women he will be permitted to withdraw his band of Sacs to the western side of the Mississippi, without molestation? That, as I understand it, is the purpose of this campaign?"

General Atkinson drummed meditatively on the table for a little, pursing his lips and cocking his head. He was in two minds about submitting to the effrontery of this civilian, who had the audacity to interfere in military affairs. Impressed by a certain unconscious air of assurance and importance in the young man, he was finally led to do so.

"I think you are under some misapprehension concerning the full purpose of this campaign, sir," he returned at length, heavily. "I do not conceive it to be within the intention of the Government to permit the Hawk to escape just punishment so easily. He has defied the Government by his return, and he must be made to suffer for it."

"Even at the expense of innocent and helpless women?" suggested Mortimer, quietly.

"War, sir, war, as you should know, is a deadly enterprise," rejoined General Atkinson. "It entails manifold sufferings, which often fall upon the innocent. While I should personally deplore any misfortunes that might be visited upon these young women, I nevertheless should not deem it consistent with my duty as an officer of the United

States army to permit such considerations to divert me from the purpose of the campaign, which is being prosecuted under direct orders from the war office at Washington.”

“Which leave you no discretion?” hinted Mortimer.

“None that I should care to exercise in the present instance,” made answer General Atkinson, in his mighty manner. The civilian was going too far in his presumption. “I cannot feel otherwise than that Black Hawk should be chastised as a beneficial example for all Indians, without regard to cost. It is establishing a dangerous precedent to permit him to defy openly the authority of the United States, and with impunity.”

Mortimer arose with dignity.

“It is unfortunate that the chastisement is being prosecuted in such a spirit on the part of the Government,” he said, with complete equanimity and respect. “In view of the fact that Black Hawk had no intention of stirring up strife when he came across the river this spring, it is deplorable. In view of the fact that he would be glad to lead his tribe in peace to the other side of the river if permitted to do so, it is pitiful. It was these considerations, as well as regard for the safety of the young women, which induced me to make the suggestion to which you have so kindly listened. Shall I be permitted to inquire if any other method of assisting the young ladies will be considered? I am going personally in

search of them, whether with or without a commission from the authorities; can I be of service in furthering any plans you may make?"

His calm determination, his quiet, unassuming dignity, his pale, handsome face awoke the admiration of those who saw him standing before General Atkinson, waiting for his reply. The look of distrust and suspicion went quite out of the face of Jefferson Davis for a moment. Colonel Zachary Taylor, looking at him searchingly, broke the silence which had followed Mortimer's conclusion.

"The young man's idea is a good one!" he exclaimed, vehemently, "if you will let me say so. Let the young man go to Black Hawk. How do you propose getting to Black Hawk?"

The colonel fired the question at him like a field piece.

"I undertake to find him, sir," returned Mortimer, quietly.

"Good!" ejaculated the other, snapping his jaws and jerking his head, his approving eye the while resting on Mortimer. "I have no doubt you will do it—if you will take the trouble to eat something before you start."

The young man's haggard appearance had caught his eye at the same time with the square jaw and the look of resolve in the brown eyes.

"Now, let the young man go to Black Hawk," continued Colonel Taylor, "with the assurance from General Atkinson that if he will deliver the young

women to us and surrender himself into the custody of the United States authority, his people will be permitted to cross west of the Mississippi without being molested. If we get the old fox into custody and get his followers across the river we shall have done all we were sent to do; if we do it without bloodshed, so much the better. If this young man is going to Black Hawk, and I believe he is"—looking keenly at him again—"he might as well bear such a message. No harm can come of it."

"On what do you base a supposition that he would consider such a proposal?" inquired General Atkinson, with a trace of irony.

"On evidences which ought to be more or less convincing to a military man," rejoined Colonel Taylor, with some heat. "He doesn't want to fight; he has all his women and children with him; he is trying to get them out of trouble, while his young men are covering his retreat with these raids which are doing all the mischief that is being done. If we can straighten this matter out in this way, we are fortunate, and should do it."

"You make no account of those he has killed already?" suggested General Atkinson.

"You make no account of those he has not killed, but might," ventured Major Anderson, entering the discussion. "And is warfare a piece of vengeance? Shall we count on our fingers the number killed by the enemy and keep on fighting until we have killed as many, regardless of the purposes of the war?"

Premonitory mutterings of a lively discussion appearing about the council board, Mortimer interposed before the storm broke.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I have no place at your councils. I shall await your decision without. I shall delay my departure for an hour. Within that time you may find me at your pleasure. I have only to ask that you will give me your personal assurances that the Government will abide by whatever decision you may reach. I should not want, inadvertently, to be the instrument of more misunderstandings between Black Hawk and the United States.”

He withdrew from the room, not once glancing in the direction of Jefferson Davis.

As he was seated beside a table in John Dixon’s kitchen half an hour later, finishing the last of the dinner which the ferryman had brought him, Lieutenant Davis came to him.

“Sir, I have to report that you are requested to deliver the enclosed message to the chief Black Hawk, at your pleasure and discretion,” he said to Mortimer, standing stiffly by his side.

“Convey my thanks to your commanding officer,” returned Mortimer, looking over the contents of the order that the lieutenant had brought. Davis, ill at ease, watched him as he read. Mortimer nodded his head approvingly as he finished. Raising his face, he turned it toward Lieutenant Davis.

“Was there anything further?” he asked, look-

ing him fully in the eye, without the least trace of recognition.

“I thought perhaps you would have something to say to me,” faltered the other, growing confused under the steady gaze.

Mortimer was silent.

“How did you come here, Mortimer?” burst forth the lieutenant, with a frank, friendly appeal in his voice.

“I should infer from your bearing that you had heard why I left West Point and Virginia,” said Mortimer, by way of answer. “I had to go somewhere,” he added.

“I can’t believe it!” returned Lieutenant Davis, fervently. “I heard, but can’t believe it. In Heaven’s name, Mortimer, tell me that it is a mistake!”

He spoke with an eager affection, holding his right hand toward the other. Mortimer ignored the gesture.

“If it is necessary to tell you, it is not worth while,” he made answer, coolly. “Kindly commend me to your commander, and tell him that I have read his orders and shall endeavor to execute them.”

Without another word, he turned and walked to his horse, still wearied from hard traveling. Without casting a look to the right or the left he mounted and rode to the north, leaving Lieutenant Davis to stare after him in doubt and disappointment.

CHAPTER XIII

SANCTUARY

MORTIMER RANDOLPH rode through the night in the direction the militia had taken, up the east bank of the Rock River. He did not talk to Powhatan, as his custom was, but rode silently, revolving many things in his mind. Powhatan, flicking his ears for a space in dutiful attention, and finding him taciturn, gave it up, rather glad upon the whole that his master was not in conversational mood; for he himself was sufficiently tired to do without discourse.

Riding through the night, he came presently to a low ridge whence he could see the glow of campfires among the trees. Approaching close enough to determine that it was Whiteside's men, Mortimer sounded the army cry and went toward them. Beyond giving back his cry they paid little attention to him, supposing him to be some straggler who had just come up from the march. As he came closer he saw the long limbs of Abraham Lincoln traced black across the firelight and his shadow dancing mournfully in the tree tops as he stalked back and forth at a distance from the blaze. He looked like a grim ghost of melancholy.

Lincoln, absorbed in his own reflections, took no

more than passing notice of the new arrival. Indeed, he was not aware of his identity until Mortimer, dismounting close beside him, placed a hand on his arm and spoke to him.

“You frightened me,” said Lincoln, quickly, with a startled look. “I was thinking so much of you that when I saw you at my side I believed you to be a ghost. Why did you come? You should not have come! You are worn out.”

He said nothing of what was at the top of the mind of each; yet there was more in the touch of his hand on the hand of the other and in the tone of his voice than he could have spoken.

Mortimer made no reply until he had unsaddled and unbridled Powhatan and smoothed his back. The animal sighed deeply, rubbed his head against his master, whinnied affectionately, and stretched himself upon the ground, wholly exhausted. Mortimer, seeing him comfortable, turned again to Lincoln.

“You know why I came,” he said, replying to Lincoln’s question. “I am going to find them. I am going to try to save them.”

He threw himself wearily upon the grass.

“How do you mean? What are you going to do?” asked Lincoln, sitting on the ground beside him.

“I am going to hunt out Black Hawk,” Mortimer replied. “I am authorized to negotiate peace with him on the terms that he gives up the young women

and surrenders himself to the United States authority. I have written orders to that effect from General Atkinson."

"Man, man!" cried Lincoln, "you will destroy yourself. Do you expect that you will be able to reach Black Hawk alive?"

"I must."

"But it is foolish! It is a wild chance you take! Look at it soberly! We shall soon overtake him with our troops, and deliver the young women from him."

Mortimer paused before replying. "Do not argue," he said, in a low voice. "I am not disposed to argue. If I were, I could show you that it is the only way; that their lives would be of slight value if we gave the Hawk battle when they were in his hands; that it is peculiarly my duty and my privilege to go to their succor, and many other things. Please do not compel me to the exertion; I am weary of body and soul, and need rest."

"You would do your duty better if you did not throw your life away on a foolish errand," retorted Lincoln, not disposed to honor his request against argument.

Mortimer made no immediate reply. He lay still on the ground for a space. Raising himself upon his elbow at last, so that the light of the distant fire played in his brown eyes, he laid a hand on Lincoln's knee and looked long into his face.

"If Ann Rutledge were in the hands of the

Indians, what would you do?" he said, in a low and solemn voice.

"My God!" groaned Lincoln, and fell silent.

"Have you eaten?" asked Lincoln, presently.

"I have eaten," replied the other. "To-night I shall rest, and to-morrow we shall be ready, Powhatan and I."

"Will you come closer to the fire? It is damp here."

"I—I will stay here," replied Mortimer.

Lincoln understood his desire to be alone.

"I will find you a blanket," he said, and turned to go to the camp.

As he approached the fire, a group of men were gathering about it, in the highest excitement. One of them, a short, round man with a short, round head, bent over the blaze. In his hands he held a paper which he was reading by the light of the flames. Standing in the midst of the group was an Indian, bent and withered with years. He watched with an anxious face the man who read the paper.

"Where'd you get this passport?" asked the man, looking up from the paper. It was Isaac Frake.

"General Cass, he give it to me," replied the Indian in broken English. "He friend of red man. Me friend of American. Misser Frake, you know me. Me good Indian!"

"You bet I know you!" growled Frake. "This is a damned forgery! This is not his writing!"

He shook the paper at the Indian. The red man, filled with apprehension, held out his hand, pointing at the passport.

“Paper good! Paper good!” he said. “Paper no lie!”

“Damn your hide!” bellowed Frake. “You’re a spy!”

He took a step toward the savage, who raised his hands helplessly.

“Kill him! Kill him!”

A dozen soldiers, raising the cry, snatched up their muskets. Frake grasped the Indian by the throat.

“We’ll show you what we do with spies!” he roared, cursing horribly.

“Shoot him! Kill him! Stand aside, Frake!”

A dozen muskets were leveled. Frake let go his hold.

“Give me a musket!” he stouted, stepping back to the others. “I’ll fix him!”

A soldier handed him a gun. He raised it. The Indian, in despair, held out his hands imploringly. “Me good Indian! Me good Indian!” he pleaded. “Me friend of the white man.”

A tall, angular figure emerged from the shadows about the fire. In a bound, it stood before the Indian. Abraham Lincoln, his face wrought into fury, his pupils distended and glittering, faced the dozen muskets.

“Men, this must not be done! He must not be

shot and killed by us!" His voice rang above the hoarse shouting of the soldiers, the curses of Frake.

For a moment the men stood defiant, their muskets leveled at the two. They muttered. They cursed. They threatened. Lincoln's eyes, black with wrath, fixed theirs.

A fateful silence brooded over the scene. The eyes of the soldiers fell beneath the steady gaze of Lincoln. Angry and sullen, they lowered their muskets.

"This is cowardly on your part, Lincoln!" cried Frake.

"If any man thinks I am a coward, let him test it!" Lincoln's face was frightful to look upon.

"You are larger and heavier than we!" retorted the other.

"This you can guard against. Choose your weapons!"

His huge hands clenched and unclenched. His face worked with passion.

Mortimer Randolph, aroused by the disturbance, came and stood beside him. Frake, with vile oaths, glared at him hatefully for a moment, and turned away muttering. The soldiers, morose and grumbling, scattered about the fire, glancing balefully from the corners of their eyes at the group. Lincoln stood where he was for a space.

"Come," he said, presently, addressing the Indian. "I will look out for you."

They went away, Mortimer following at a dis-

tance, watching the sulking men about the fire. As they went, the Indian, pointing to Frake and gesticulating, spoke excitedly to his rescuer, who looked at Frake several times as he walked away, listening, and nodded his head. Randolph joined them. They lay upon the ground where Mortimer had lain, Lincoln remaining awake to watch.

Frake, grumbling and boasting, drank deeply from the black bottle he took from his shirt, and lay down by the fire among the soldiers.

“Our friend Randolph seems to love the Indians as much as ever,” he said to William Hall, who lay next to him, rolled up in a blanket.

Isaac Frake, standing erect with the morning sun red on his face, gazed at the form of William Hall, still sleeping at his feet. Thrice he nudged him in the ribs with his toe. Hall, not yet entirely recovered from the fatigue of his trip from Indian Creek, rolled over sleepily, with a grunt and a curse.

“Hall! Hall!” called Frake, when he stirred. “The dirty cur has gone!”

Hall, sitting up by degrees, rubbed his eyes and yawned. “Who’s gone?” he asked, blinking.

“Both of ’em.”

“Both o’ who?”

“The Indian and that man Randolph.”

“Where’d they go?” asked Hall, with kindling interest.

Frake answered the question with silent con-

tempt. "Do you know who that Indian was?" he asked, in return, preparing the way for a startling revelation.

"Of course I don't," rejoined William Hall. "He seemed to know you, all right."

"I know him. He's from Saukenuk, and one of the worst of the breed. I'll tell you who he is. He's the father of that squaw with the half breed papoose that Randolph was so sweet on. And they've gone together."

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE THICKET

A BRAHAM LINCOLN, in company with half a dozen horsemen, rode across the flat prairies lying between Dixon's ferry and Galena. It was a day in June. The sun hung high in a brassy sky. The tall grass of the prairie swooned in the quivering heat. There was no breath in the air. It clung to the ground, close and stifling. Here and there in the distance little clumps of trees, dark blue islands in the sea of green, floated in the shimmer of the plain. The horses, drooping their heads, plodded listlessly. The riders stared silently at the ground before them, exchanging gruff monosyllables now and again.

Abraham Lincoln was no longer captain of militia. He was a private in the Rangers, under Captain Elisha Fry. The militia had disbanded in disgrace. They had refused to go further in pursuit of Black Hawk than the Wisconsin borders, clamoring to be returned home. Marching back to Ottawa, they were dismissed. New companies were formed out of such as wished to continue in the service, Lincoln among them. Another was William Munson, frantic over the predicament of his sweetheart, Rachel Hall. A third was William Hall, who joined

in the hope of being of service to his sisters. A fourth was Isaac Frake, for reasons of his own.

They were riding on scout for troops bound to Galena in answer to urgent calls for help, following a report of a savage attack by Black Hawk's warriors on the fort at Apple River. The country was in a ferment of fear. Small raiding parties of Sacs were abroad, descending on isolated settlers at night, killing and devastating. The army gathered under General Atkinson at Ottawa, now the army headquarters, was helpless, not knowing where to strike—like the horses the rangers were riding across the shimmering prairies; it switched its military tail when it felt the sting of the Hawk, but never got him.

Lincoln and Isaac Frake rode side by side, the latter's face purple from the heat of the day, his mouth open from sheer exhaustion. From time to time as he rode he stole a wary glance at Lincoln, who was lost in reverie. Presently Frake pulled a black bottle from his shirt.

“Have a drink, Captain?” he said, riding closer and proffering the bottle. He still used the title as a form of flattery.

“No, thank you, Frake; I never touch it,” Lincoln replied.

“I don't often,” observed Frake, applying the bottle to his lips. “I am so plumb worn down by this heat that I need a little stimulant.”

“I didn’t suppose it was very good in hot weather,” suggested Lincoln.

“It’s the best time to take it; it drives the heat out,” Frake explained.

“Oh!” commented the other.

“I didn’t know but that you were mad about that Indian incident, and that that was why you wouldn’t take a drink with me,” ventured Frake, eyeing Lincoln shrewdly.

“No,” Lincoln returned; “it would be the same if President Jackson should ask me to take a drink. I promised my precious mother only a few days before she died that I would never use anything intoxicating as a beverage, and I consider that promise as binding on me to-day as it was the day I made it.”

He was aware of the other’s sly look. He surmised the man had some purpose in reverting to the affair, and sought to prevent it. Frake persisted.

“I hope you don’t bear any ill will on that account, Captain Lincoln,” he said. “I hope there won’t be anything personal resulting from it between us.”

“That is hardly likely,” Lincoln replied. “Of course, we form our opinions of men more from what they do than from what they say; but I am not one who bears malice.”

He said it in a tone so even and dispassionate that Frake studied his face for a moment out of the edges of his eyes before venturing further. “You

see," he said, shortly, "I naturally hate the Indians, having been near them a good deal, and this particular Indian I happen to know altogether too well."

"So I am informed," observed Lincoln, dryly.

"He's one of the worst in the whole tribe," resumed Frake, eyeing Lincoln narrowly after his latest remark. "I have had dealings with him, and he has a grudge against me."

"Naturally," commented Lincoln, so innocently that Frake, peeking at him, was satisfied that his interjection was entirely perfunctory and unintentional, without the significance which it seemed to bear.

"He'd cut your throat in a holy minute," Frake went on, "and he's the most notorious liar in the whole Sac tribe. He's a spiteful old villain."

"I'm rather glad to hear that, Frake," observed Lincoln.

"Why? How so?"

"Oh, because he told me some things I would not like to believe about any man," Lincoln returned evenly, looking far across the prairie.

"The cuss!" growled Frake.

"I see you surmise that he was talking about you," Lincoln remarked.

"Of course, I knew he would," returned Frake, a little disconcerted for the moment, but nevertheless pleased to have wormed this much out of the

man at his side. "What did he tell you, now, just for curiosity?"

"Oh, well, Frake," returned Lincoln, laughing; "I guess I won't tell you. I don't want to see you get mad on a hot day like this, and now that you have told me that he is an enemy of yours and that he is an awful liar, I will know how to take his tales."

There was a possibility of a double meaning in the reply which did not rest easily on Frake's mind, but there was something final about the other's laughing manner of putting him off that he was shrewd enough to profit by. He pursued the subject no further, contenting himself with a shrewd inspection of his companion's face, from the ingenuous expression of which he was unable to infer whether he had in any measure accomplished his purpose of counteracting whatever of evil report the other might have heard of him. In fact, he was considerably disturbed, and drew forth the black bottle again.

"I don't feel well to-day, Captain Lincoln," he said, fulsomely clinging to the title. "If you don't mind I think I'll take another little pull."

Lincoln did not mind, and intimated as much by a slight nod of the head. They rode in silence for a space, Frake conning the other's face quizzically from time to time.

"Funny where Randolph has gone to, isn't it?" he submitted presently.

“Why?” Lincoln’s face was imperturbable, impenetrable.

“Nobody seems to have heard from him since that morning when he disappeared with the Indian,” observed Frake, a sly suggestion in his tone.

“Nobody but you seems to have expected to hear from him,” rejoined Lincoln, indifferently. Another silence.

“Don’t it seem strange to you for him to go off with an Indian like that?” asked Frake, presently, with crafty insinuation.

“If I considered it my affair sufficiently to ask him about it, he no doubt could give me a reason that would not make it seem strange, if it should happen to appear so in the first place,” returned Lincoln. “Perhaps he was influenced by a desire to protect the man’s life against some of his old neighbors.”

“I happen to know that that old Indian was a pretty good friend of his,” retorted Frake, nettled by the last fling.

“Was he?” asked Lincoln, lackadaisically. “I should imagine they would be good friends before they parted, at least,” he added.

“Do you know this man Randolph pretty well?” Frake went on, still maintaining his tone of innuendo.

“Better than I know any man,” Lincoln replied, speaking half to himself.

“Is that so,” returned Frake, with a tinge of

sarcasm in his tone. "Why, I didn't know he had been in Illinois long enough for that."

He intended to convey weighty meaning in his tone. He intended to impute a dark and mysterious past to Randolph. Lincoln heeded only the meaning of his words.

"It don't always take a long time to know a man, Frake," he replied. "I haven't seen you more than once or twice, and still I think I know you pretty well. Don't you?"

He looked frankly at Frake in saying it.

"I hope you do! I hope you do!" Frake made answer, looking straight ahead. The quickness of his reply was not immodesty. It was lack of finesse. He perceived the innuendo in Lincoln's question, and sought to nullify it by his reply. He overdid it, and knew that he had overdone it when he saw the quiet mirth in the depths of the other's eyes. It was necessary, however, to proceed to the end of what he had so obviously set afoot. He went on, concealing his discomfiture.

"Do you know what I think?" he said, looking Lincoln freely in the eye for the first time, with the steady gaze of one who hopes to deceive.

"Well, Frake, perhaps I do, in a general way," drawled Lincoln.

"What do I think?" demanded the other, pouncing upon Lincoln with the question.

"You must be a little more precise, Frake," Lincoln replied.

Frake laughed heartily, making out that he had achieved an advantage in repartee. He laughed a little too heartily to produce any effect of mirthfulness.

“What do you think?” Lincoln interrupted him in the midst of his laughter.

“Oh, you don’t know, then? Well, I’ll tell you, seeing that you don’t know”—he was making the most he could of it—“I think that we are apt to run across this friend of yours when we get up amongst the Indians!” He said it with an air that should have been overwhelming in implications.

Lincoln, looking afar off across the prairies, made answer slowly. “I am rather inclined to think so myself,” he said.

Again there was warning conveyed to the man that an end had been reached of safe discussion. Again Frake, with discernment enough to perceive it, fell into silence. When he broke it again it was to say casually, with an air of easy familiarity:

“Do you think the reward will do any good?”

Lincoln, in a fit of abstraction, absently inquired what reward he meant. He meant the reward of a thousand dollars offered by Governor Reynolds for the safe return of the Hall girls, of course. He did not omit to dissert upon the part he had played in inducing Reynolds to offer it. Lincoln ventured no opinion. Whereupon Frake fell into an analysis of the question, pointing out that if they were in the hands of Mike Girty and the Pottowatomies the

chances were pretty good, but that if Black Hawk had them he would keep them as hostages, and might even kill them in case the whites pressed him too close. To all of which Lincoln paid no heed whatever, so that Frake presently passed again into silence and fell to reviewing the late conversation, with many doubts and misgivings concerning it.

Crossing, late in the afternoon, through a strip of timber that fringed a creek, they emerged upon a beautiful rolling prairie a few miles in breadth, beyond which lay Kellogg's Grove, a large clump of woods that was the site of a settlement. The sun was low in the west as they approached it. The woods were close and dense. The shadows of the afternoon thickened in their depths. It was gloomy and forbidding to those who knew that there were Indians about, and that they drew closer to a lurking foe with every step they took northward. One by one those who were with Lincoln lagged behind. He rode ahead, accompanied only by Frake. They came within a hundred yards; fifty yards. Frake was clearly nervous.

"Captain!" he said, "I've got to stop a minute. My girth is loose. Don't wait for me; you go right on. I'll catch up."

"Why don't you wait until you get into the shade, where it is cooler," Lincoln suggested, with a grim smile. Frake made no answer. Lincoln entered the edge of the grove alone. His own heart beat faster as, with keen eyes and listening ears, he

passed among the trees into the shadows. It is the greatest courage that takes men where they fear to go.

More slowly now, with cautious glances that searched every tree-trunk, every thicket, he rode into the midst of the forest. His companions straggled behind him, pale, with lips set. Last and palest of them was Isaac Frake. Lincoln brought his horse to a walk. With gun ready, he rode on. Each waving branch, stirred by the afternoon breeze, caught his eye and sent the blood coursing swiftly.

There was no sound save the soft fall of the horses' feet upon the mold; the evening song of the robin, the call of the cat-bird in the bushes. The red sun streaked among the stems of the trees; the leaves rustled aloft in the dying breeze. The peace of nature was upon the world.

A path led through a little swale. The bushes came close to it, creeping down from the rising ground on either side. Midway through the swale, Lincoln glanced at those behind, to make sure that they were coming before he proceeded farther. His eyes fell upon the face of Frake, some rods behind. He was looking fixedly to the right of the path. With his hand he was making signs, evidently in reply or command. Lincoln, following his gaze, saw a movement in the brush; he saw the form of a small, slouching Indian for an instant; caught sight of a weazened face in which the eyes were set too close together and the thin nose was awry.

Almost in the instant of his seeing the form it was gone.

Shouting to his companions, he turned his horse and dashed through the brush upon the rise of ground which bordered the swale. The sight that met his eyes there turned him sick. Five bodies lay upon the ground, motionless, about the remains of a camp fire. On all hands were signs of a struggle; trampled ground, broken guns, torn pieces of clothing, scattered camp equipment.

Lincoln, forgetting the Indian he had seen in the sudden dread possessing him at sight of the slain men, leaped from his horse and ran to the body that was closest. The red sun shone red upon a raw and bloody spot on the top of the head, where the victim had been scalped. The man lay upon his face. Shuddering, Lincoln turned him until he could look upon the features. It was not he whom he dreaded it was. From one to the other he went, hope and apprehension contending in his heart. There was not one whom he knew.

He finished his ghastly inspection, and looked up. The van of the force bustled about him, in a fever of excitement and alarm. Frake, loudly exclaiming, made much ado. In his face there was no sign of what had taken place, observed by Lincoln. Lincoln, on the point of denouncing and exposing him, reconsidered, and held his peace. His suspicions of the man were keen. What he planned and plotted he could hardly surmise, but he should

have a better chance of discovery if the other were unaware of his suspicion. Arguing thus with himself, Lincoln held his tongue, even apparently permitting the soldiers to convince him that his alarm had been false, and that he had seen no Indian. This the men were sufficiently desirous of believing, for their own peace of mind.

Anxious for the safety of the settlers, the expedition hastened to the cabins in the center of the grove, stopping later to give the dead rough burial. The buildings were deserted. There was no sign that they had been attacked or molested by the savages. The commander, conferring with his lieutenants, decided to remain there for the night, for darkness was coming on, and travel at night was hazardous.

Their supper was finished. The full moon, rising in the sky, mellowed the dark shadows of the woods. The men, lying on the ground in the pleasant evening, revived in spirits. One of them called for Lincoln.

“What’s the matter with Abe to-night? Why don’t he tell us a story?”

Lincoln, standing concealed in the shadow of a house, made no response. His eyes were fixed on a point in the woods, in the direction whence they had come. Passing there among the trees, leaving the camp, was a shadow; the shadow of a man. Watching him for a space, Lincoln stole from the obscurity

where he stood through other shadows, and so to the place where the retreating figure had disappeared.

He traced his way among the trees, slipping from one to another, always in the shadow, avoiding the branches that lay upon the ground, silent and stealthy. From time to time he paused to listen. Ahead of him, through the woods, he heard the low, sharp crackling of twigs, the crushing of mold beneath the foot of some one who passed. He followed the noise. At times he could see the figure of the man he followed, stealing through the patches of moonlight, from tree to tree. At times the sound of the other's steps ceased, and he stopped, that his approach might not be heard.

The man worked toward the edge of the grove, toward a point to the right of the trail by which they had come; toward a point in the direction of which the Indian had vanished. The glow of the moonlight on the prairie beyond began to show between the trunks of the trees. The smell of the grass reached Lincoln's nostrils. The rasping of the insects in the field was loud in his ears. He saw the shadow of the man against the moon-glow. He heard him pushing gently through some brush. The noise of the footsteps ceased.

Now he who follows must travel without noise on such an adventure. Lincoln's progress was slow. Through such places as were not illuminated by the moon, he felt his way, lest he tread on a branch and be heard. Tediously he approached the place where

the man had disappeared. He was close to the edge of the grove. He paused once more to listen. The rasping of the insects on the prairie was louder. A night-hawk cried at intervals overhead, leaving the silence the more intense for his cries. Hushful noises filled the night.

As he listened, out of the murmuring stillness came a voice; a sharp, snarling, cracked voice; it came from a clump of bushes close at his right hand. In an instant it was smothered. Pausing a moment longer to compose himself, Lincoln, with bated breath, crept silently in the direction whence he had heard it.

He crept along the edge of a clump of bushes. He found himself on a slight bank bordering the bed of a rivulet, now dry. Thickets enclosed it on both sides, save for the space through which he had approached. The bushes did not reach a sufficient height to shut out the moonlight, which filled the tiny hollow. He could see distinctly.

Sitting beneath the bank, with their backs toward him, so close that he might have reached them with his long arm, were Frake and an Indian. Lincoln knew him by his stature, his slinking posture, his dried-up face, as the native he had seen in the bushes. The savage, whose face he could not see, clutched in his hand a bottle, with which he made feeble, drunken menace at his companion.

Frake paid no heed to the empty threat. One hand grasped the Indian by the nape of the neck and

shook his head from side to side persuasively. The other was shut tight over the Indian's mouth.

"Shut up, you fool!" growled Frake, under his breath. "You want to get us both in trouble? They're apt to be looking for me any minute."

The Indian, brandishing the bottle more, mumbled something between Frake's fingers that Lincoln could not hear.

"I tell you I have not got any more whiskey!" Frake replied, still whispering. "I've given you all I had now. I'll have to go without myself, curse your skin! You get those girls for me and I'll give you a barrel of whiskey and half the money for their return. That'll be enough to keep you in firewater till it rots a hole through your pesky hide. If you hadn't been fool enough to let Black Hawk get hold of them, you 'd have had it by this time."

Frake removed his hand from the Indian's mouth.

"What could Half Ear do?" whined the red-skin. "Mike Girty was chief; Mike Girty afraid of Black Hawk; Mike Girty give white squaws to him. Half Ear could not help it."

"You're no good, Half Ear!" returned the other, contemptuously. "You always go back on me. You let that red-headed paleface get away from you the morning before you went to get the girls, and then you let the girls get away from you! See to it that you do better this time, or, by the Lord, I'll turn you over to White Beaver and have you strung

up. And, say, Half Ear!" added the white man, in an afterthought; "look out for the red-head. He has left the army and is prowling around somewhere looking for the girls, I reckon. He wants one of them; the yellow-haired one. If you see him, you know what to do. There's a half barrel in that for you, too." ?

"Half Ear had no firewater that day," returned the Indian, looking wistfully at the white. "Half Ear cannot shoot straight when he no has whiskey!"

"I tell you, I have n't any more whiskey," Frake snarled, interpreting the other's look.

Half Ear put the empty bottle unsteadily to his lips and held it inverted for a long time, sucking the tainted air into his mouth. Frake leered at him while he did it.

"Now, then, Half Ear, I got to dig out of this," he said, when the Indian finally put the bottle down; he knew how little chance there was of getting his attention before he put it down, empty though it was. "You've got it all straight, have you? You're to get the girls from Black Hawk any way you can. You're to bring them down here without saying a word to anyone about it. Right here!" he emphasized. "Not to Dixon's, or Ottawa, or Galena, or Fort Armstrong, or anywhere else, but right here! When you are here, you are to cut down that little beech sapling out there on the edge, at the mouth of this dry creek"—he indicated the place with his hand as Half Ear listlessly turned his head to look—

“and I ’ll happen along. I ’ll be around here until you show up—and then you ’ll turn ’em over to me. And there ’s a barrel of whiskey in it for you. You ’ve got it all clear, have you? A barrel of whiskey; and if you bring me a certain red-haired scalp, there ’s a barrel and a half! But you need n’t bring me any but the right one, ’cause I can tell; you can’t fool me on that hair! And if you say a word to them about Raven Hair, I ’ll kill you! Hear?”

The Indian nodded and rolled his head drunkenly, assuring the other that he knew what was expected of him.

“Half Ear will do it,” he mumbled.

“Come, now, you’d better make yourself scarce,” the white added. “It’d be a pretty mess if you got caught here now!”

The Indian staggered to his feet. The two made their way slowly down the bed of the creek to the edge of the grove. Lincoln could see them outlined at last against the glow of the moon on the prairie. Once at the edge, they separated and went in opposite directions, keeping at the edge of the grove.

Lincoln waited until the sound of their soft steps had died into stillness. Pondering many things, he arose and returned to the camp.

CHAPTER XV

THE CAPTURE

JUNE! A blue sky, bending over a solitude, unmarked of man; a glowing sun looking down upon inviolate nature; the warmth of brimming summer in the soft air; lush grass ripening sweet on the unbroken prairies; shooting stars a-twinkling in the breezes; violets, coquetting with the sky, blue as themselves, from the depths of the cool grass. Wild strawberries reddening beside them. Larks fluttering to their nests with songs tinkling in their throats; bobolinks whistling on the waving sun-flowers. It was surely June.

In the midst of it, a strip of woods fringing the banks of a river; fresh, soft verdure of new leaves, awakened from dreams of life by the caresses of the winds; the song of the robin and the thrush, the scolding of the squirrel in the branches above; the call of the cat-bird from the thicket, the twittering of small warblers in the bushes; through the heart of it the river, flowing softly between its wooded banks; teeming life in utter solitude.

Alone in the solitude a man was seated on a fallen tree by the bank of the river. Behind him stood a horse, his nose resting on his master's shoulder. The face of the man was haggard, drawn,

pinched by hunger, pale and anxious. His eyes—deep brown eyes—were fixed abstractedly upon the softly flowing water. Such was the setting and such the scene on the banks of a river in Northern Illinois on a day in June; a day shortly after that when Abraham Lincoln rode by day and prowled by night.

Mortimer Randolph, half arousing himself from his abstraction, raised his hand and stroked the nose of the horse.

“Powhatan,” he said, deliberating as he spoke, “we’re on the wrong track. We don’t seem to be very good at this trick of trailing. I don’t think we have been following Black Hawk’s party at all. I think we have been chasing roving bands of raiders all this time. We don’t want to see any raiders, Powhatan. We want to see Black Hawk first of all; so I think we’ll cut right across for Ouisconsin and hunt him out.”

The horse nuzzled closer into the hand that stroked it, drooping and dozing listlessly. The man fell into thoughtful mood again. For a long time they remained silent and motionless, lending themselves to the solitude. Presently the horse, with a low whinny, raised his head quickly and looked through the trees and across the prairie over which they had just come from the south. His ears were pricked and flicking nervously; he sniffed the air eagerly, whinnying again. The man arose from the

fallen tree where he sat and followed the gaze of the horse.

Debouching upon the prairie from a patch of timber two miles away and coming toward them was a band of horsemen. They were at such a distance that Mortimer could not make out whether they were whites or Indians. He studied them closely for a space. They rode swiftly, apparently following and observing the trail over which he and Powhatan had just come. Glancing quickly about in reconnaissance of the topography, Mortimer drew Powhatan beside him and mounted.

Turning the horse into the river, he directed him down the current, making what haste he could through the water, keeping close watch meanwhile upon those who were riding up. A few rods below where he entered the water, on the side of the stream from which the strange body of men were approaching, lay a long, low hill, extending about two hundred yards along the bank. For part of that distance it came quite close to the river, itself forming the bank. In some places there were tables or shelves between the river and the hill.

Reaching the hill before he was able to determine the identity of the horsemen, he decided to ride through the water to the other end of it and observe them thence. By the time he reached the point they would be sufficiently close. If they proved to be Indians on his trail, he could swing around the further end of the hill when they passed the end he

had quitted, and leave in the direction whence they came, keeping the hill between himself and them. By the time they should find his tracks leaving the water, he would have acquired a long start. For the rest, Powhatan was sufficient.

With this plan in mind, he passed behind the ridge, which shut out from his view those who came across the prairie. The stream narrowed abreast of the hill. The water grew deeper, retarding their progress. Mortimer could hear the rumble of the horses' feet afar off on the sod of the prairie. Powhatan picked his way between the deeper pools, silent and alert. They gained the end of the hill. The sound of hoofbeats ceased. Mortimer dismounted. Leaving Powhatan close under the corner of the hill, where he could not be seen either from the strip of woods or the crossing at its upper end, he crept through the brush to the top, and looked out.

The band had stopped. They were clustered together at the edge of the woods, consulting among themselves. Because of the intervening brush, he could not yet determine whether they were Indians or whites. He waited. The horsemen scattered, forming a long line at the fringe of the timber, extending far enough to envelop the hill. As they came to their positions opposite him, he saw that they were redskins. They had suspected his strategy.

One of their number, a tall young brave directly

in front of him, raised his hand for a signal. The line advanced slowly through the trees, with guns and bows ready, their glances piercing the woods. In the moment of their starting Mortimer recognized in the one who gave the signal and who came most directly toward him, the young brave whom he had seen on the top of Black Hawk's Watchtower at Saukenuk the year before, whose fingers had then been about Frake's throat, who had come with the flag of truce, and whom he had thrown from his horse at Old Man's Creek to save the life of Frake. They were to meet now for the fourth time.

For a moment he hesitated, considering whether to throw himself upon the generosity of the brave whom he had served at Saukenuk, and relying upon his gratitude. In the next moment the incident in the fight at Old Man's Creek came before his mind, and he decided against the risk. He must see Black Hawk before he was seen by any Sacs. He would trust all to Powhatan. He crept down the hill to where he had left the horse.

Powhatan was not there.

"Powhatan! Powhatan!" he called, softly.

From behind an elbow of the hill to his left came an answering whinny, quickly smothered as though a hand were placed over the animal's nostrils. With silent step he hastened to the elbow and peered around it through the bushes. On a little shelf between the high ground and the water were a half dozen Sacs, hideous in war paint. Two of them held

Powhatan, who was struggling to throw them off. One of the two had his hands on the horse's nose. It was Half Ear.

Mortimer had no sooner seen the Indians than their quick eyes detected him in the brush. They had heard his call, and were alert. Before they made a motion to fire upon him or take him, he passed around the bushes and approached them, making the sign of peace, extending the musket before him on open, upturned palms. For the slight chance of his own life he would have fought them all; but more than his own life depended upon his living.

"I come in peace," he said. "Is there one of you who speaks English?"

Half Ear, letting go his hold on Powhatan for an instant, leveled his musket and fired at Mortimer. That was the English he had learned of late. At the instant he pulled the trigger, Powhatan, rearing, struck the musket out of aim. The ball knocked Mortimer's hat from his head, doing him no hurt.

Powhatan, pawing and biting, broke fully away from the one Indian who held him when Half Ear let go to fire, and came to the side of his master. The Indians, screaming their war cry, pressed toward him. He was so close among them that they could not fire without danger of hitting their friends. They came with clubbed guns and hatchets and knives, bristling about him. His offer of peace had

been received as their own truce had been on a time which he too well remembered.

The one slim chance must be taken. All about him was raging fury. The line of approaching savages was already breaking out along the crest of the hill. With one leap he was astride Powhatan's back. Half Ear, green eyed with wrath and hatred, was at the horse's head again, clutching at the bit with a tenacity and courage new to him. Powhatan pawed and reared; Half Ear clung. His name might then have justly been Blue Wolf, as it was in the beginning, before he knew the whites.

Mortimer, striking about him with his knife to keep off his assailants, reserving his fire for the last extremity, saw Half Ear clinging to Powhatan. He pointed his gun at the Indian and pulled the trigger. A sluggish puff of smoke rose from the firing pan; the powder sputtered and sizzled; there was a low, muffled report in the chamber; but there was no detonation. The powder was wet from the splashing of the horse through the river, and would not explode.

Grasping the barrel of the rifle and swinging it about his head, he aimed a blow at Half Ear, who dodged it, letting go his grip on the horse. As he let go, two Indians from the other side of the animal grasped the bridle, and one who was behind the rider, raising his musket, brought it down upon Mortimer's head before he could recover his bal-

ance from his own blow and defend himself in the rear.

He felt something crash against his skull with a blunt heaviness; flashes leaped before his eyes; a deep, hot pain shot along his spine; his legs turned numb and could no longer grasp his horse; the trees reeled against the sky, and he fell senseless to the ground.

Gradually consciousness crept back into his brain, bringing with it exquisite suffering. He felt a knot about his wrists; the pain from it was soaked up by his arms. Cords were about his body; his whole weight was suspended in them. They cut his flesh. He knew that he was bound to a tree.

He raised his aching head at heavy cost. By degrees he discerned the crowd of savages about him. They gesticulated and talked excitedly, frequently pointing at him. As he tried to fix them in his gaze, the trees of the woods set up a dance and the sound of the stream close by, which was only a gentle murmur of water, roared through his ears.

Little by little his strength came back and accumulated. He was able to stand again, relieving the cutting of the cords that bound him to the tree. As he gained control of himself, he forced his face into composure, banishing all trace of suffering from its lines, and looked boldly at his captors. They seemed to be quarreling violently among themselves. As they quarreled, they shot hasty glances of hate in his direction, growing more excited every moment.

The focus of the quarrel was between Half Ear and the tall young brave. The young man seemed fiercely to demand his immediate death. The other, leering at him viciously from time to time, appeared to be arguing against such a course. Mortimer found no comfort in that circumstance. He believed that at best it was only a question of the time and circumstance of his destruction. He would have preferred an instant fate to any that might be in the devising of this distorted and degenerate savage.

He continued to stare boldly among them, meeting the gaze of such as glanced at him without flinching, without sign of fear or supplication in his face. Half Ear's eyes filled with hatred and fell before his own when he turned them toward him. Into the eyes of the others, through their animosity, came a look of approbation for the cool manner in which he faced them. He saw it, but built no hope upon it, seeing how much stronger was the look of vengeance.

For a long time they wrangled. In the end the tall young warrior, with a grunt, threw his open hands downward as a sign of acquiescence. Grumbling, they unbound him from the tree, leaving the thongs still upon his wrists. Driving him among them with blows, they took up their way northward, out of the woods and across the prairies. Half Ear, leering at him viciously, mounted and rode Powhatan.

CHAPTER XVI

THE WHITE MAN'S CHILD

RAVEN HAIR, haggard, with sunken cheek, sat on the ground by the bank of a river swinging Fire Fly on her knees, seeking to soothe him to sleep with a song. The child looked up at her with a pitiful, wistful appeal, seeming to wonder why this warm, soft, tender thing that had always been with him, that had fed him and sheltered him from his helplessness, that was all he knew of life and living, did not now stop the dull, dragging anguish which reached its cruel fingers within his tiny body and gripped without mercy.

It was the pain of hunger that clutched him. He was starving. His emaciated frame was like a skeleton in papyrus; his eyes had an unnatural luster; the hollows beneath them were leaden; the skin of his face was drawn and colorless; his thin neck could no longer support his head; his hands were tiny, shriveled claws, blue, with purple veins upon them. In one of them he held to his mouth a root which he had sucked until it was nothing but white shreds. He still sucked ravenously, staring at his mother with yearning eyes.

Signs of distress were all about. Old men and squaws lay beneath the trees, weak and fainting

from hunger. Gaunt children staggered among them, hollow-eyed. Papooses, their skin like taut parchment over their bones, which threatened to break through the envelope, lay silent in their baskets. A horrid stillness brooded over all. No voice was heard, save the low song of Raven Hair crooning to her child. The silence was eloquent of their stoic bravery to endure. Even Fire Fly, greedily sucking the innutritious root, made no complaint, looking up at his mother with an expression of patient faith that said if she let these pangs tear at his bowels, they were a just part of life, and as they should be.

Apart from them Black Hawk paced by the side of the river. Sorrow bent his head. His eyes, full of woe, were on the ground. Great grief was upon him. He had led his people from the other side of the Father of Waters that they might make corn in their own land; now they were famishing. They had been driven from place to place by the implacable whites and had had no chance to plant, so that there would be no crop for them; they had brought but little food with them, and it was long since gone; it was not the season of much game, and their hunters were away in war parties raiding the white settlements; the Winnebagos, fearing the wrath of the whites, had refused to help them; day by day, without hope, they were slowly, patiently, stoically starving, with relentless certainty.

Now they were camped on the banks of the Ouis-

consin, whither they had come from Lake Koshkonnong. Their case was not so desperate when they could make camp and stay in one place and glean from the surrounding country. The women, going into the forest and upon the prairies, found berries and edible roots; the boys shot squirrels and snared fish in the river. But soon they would be relentlessly driven forth again, and so, again; until the time came when their trembling limbs were unable to bear them farther; when the bullets of the pale-faces would finish the work of hunger, and the people of the Hawk would be no more. This was the past, the present, and the future, as the mind of their chief contemplated them, walking the banks of the Ouisconsin. This was what he had brought on his people.

He had wished to return beyond the river when the whites showed hostility, but his young men, incensed by the attack made on their flag of truce at Old Man's Creek, urged him to retaliation. Chief among the young men who asked for vengeance was the White Eagle, fiercest in war. Feather Heart, his squaw and the daughter of the chief, lent bitter voice to the plea. The Hawk, weak against their insistence because of his own anger, had acquiesced. The young men had fought back in their own way, descending in small bands upon the unprotected settlers and slaying them. They had aroused the whites by their depredations and had brought the arm of the nation more heavily upon his people.

Now his people were being hunted to their death by the palefaces.

Feather Heart, at his side, sought to comfort him. "Let the Sacs die, if they must," she said, "but let them fight their oppressors. It is better that they should be destroyed utterly, than that any should live to tell the children of the Sacs that the Sacs fled from the palefaces. The Hawk has done well; his people are glad to die; the spirits of the departed will praise him in their happy hunting grounds."

The Hawk, laden with sorrow, made no answer as he walked by the side of the stream.

Raven Hair, sitting on the ground, crooned in a low voice to Fire Fly, her first born, as she swung him on her knees.

"The son of the white man must die by the white man's hand," she said, in the English tongue, which she used when she spoke to her babe. "He who would have been chief of the Sacs will never lift the hunting spear; he will never dance the war dance with the young men of his people; the maidens of the Sacs and the Foxes will not tremble with love for him when the time of the Dance of the Crane draws near. For the land of the Sacs is no more the land of the Sacs; the paleface has driven the Sauk from his hunting grounds and from the Silent City. So let the child of the paleface die by the white man's hand."

She half chanted what she said to the child.

There was no sorrow in her voice, and no anger; there was resignation, fatalism, patience, but no grief.

“You must not say that Fire Fly will die; Fire Fly will not die. He will be a great chief and a mighty hunter among his people.”

A soft and sympathetic voice fell upon her ears as she finished; a gentle hand rested on her shoulder. Sylvia Hall stood behind her, gazing over her shoulder at the child with pity in her deep blue eyes. Her face was careworn and thin from her lack of wonted food, her figure had lost the delicate fullness of its contour; but the look of courage upon her countenance, of strength to bear her trials and her sorrows, and the brave self-reliance of her carriage made her beauty and her grace more glorious than they had ever been, even on the night when she bade farewell to Mortimer Randolph by the side of the Sangamon River.

Rachel stood at her side. She was pitiful to look upon. She had a hunted, haunted look. Her glance was restless and eager; she was pursued by the phantom of hope. There was fright, terror, despair in her face. She clung bitterly to a love of life, but she had not the spiritual courage to have faith in the future. She left hope and courage and faith to her sister, depending upon her for their sustaining virtues. In depending, she seemed to demand the other's moral support, pettishly, querulously, like a spoiled child, and as though all the tribulations

that had come upon her had come through Sylvia, with malice prepense. This was suggested both in her appearance and in her bearing toward her sister.

Raven Hair neither raised her head nor turned her face as she made answer. She had often heard the soft voice and felt the gentle hand of the pale-face woman since the two prisoners had been turned over to Black Hawk by Mike Girty and the Pottowatomies. She knew who it was that spoke to her.

“His people are thy people, and thy people come to slay him,” she said, still half chanting. “Once he could walk; now his head hangs on a thong and his legs are as water. Once he laughed and called to his mother; now his voice is a moan in the night. Blue death creeps to his heart by many trails. The squaw of the whites is good. The squaw of the whites is kind. Raven Hair is grateful to the pale-face squaw. But Fire Fly must wither and fade in the days of a summer; for the white man is cruel, and the son of a white man cannot live on the roots that the white man leaves for him to eat.”

For the first time there was a trace of anguish in her voice as she finished, and a shadow of sorrow passed through her eyes. Rachel, forgetting her own tribulations, listened keenly, almost with excitement, to the mother, casting many glances at Sylvia. She had held herself apart from the Indians and had not learned of Raven Hair and the white man’s child before.



“Fire Fly will not die. He will be a great chief and a mighty hunter.”

"Why don't you take the child back to the white man?" she asked, half sneering. "His father would not let him starve, would he?"

Raven Hair arose and confronted her, clutching her child close to her. Her stoic composure was upon her again.

"The white man has gone his way and I have gone mine," she made answer, proudly, though not without a regret, which she could not exclude from her tone.

Rachel was on the point of speaking further, when Sylvia put her aside with a gesture of reproof, and laid her hand tenderly on the frail shoulders of the baby.

"I have corn that the Hawk has given me," she said, shuddering as she felt the tiny skeleton, almost without flesh to cover it. "I will make a gruel for Fire Fly. I will feed him. He must not starve."

"We have no corn to spare," expostulated Rachel, snatching indignantly at her sister's sleeve.

"Let the black-eyed one have no fear," said Raven Hair, turning a scornful glance upon Rachel. "I shall not take her corn; for the Hawk has said that the white squaws must not be hungry, though we all starve, and that they must come to no harm, so that the palefaces may see that the Hawk has a full heart. I will not take your corn."

"The Hawk shall not know," said Sylvia, more and more distressed at sight of the starving child sucking the unwholesome and worthless root. "I

have plenty of corn. We will touch none of hers," indicating Rachel with a gesture of her brows.

"Whether the Hawk knows or knows not is all one," answered the Indian woman. "His word has gone forth, and his word is the truth."

"Come! We will ask the chief," urged Sylvia. "He will let you have some of my corn if I ask him."

Raven Hair pointed a thin hand toward Black Hawk, pacing by the side of the stream. He was alone now. Feather Heart had left him to his sorrow.

"Shall I go to him with a cry because one of his children is dying, when they are all dying at his feet?" she said, with passion. "What is the child of Raven Hair, and who is Raven Hair, that she should go to the chief with her anguish when the anguish of his whole people tears his soul? I will go with Fire Fly to the woods and find roots for him. When the time comes for him to die he shall die like a Sauk, and not like a paleface."

She walked away from the two sisters as she finished, disdainful of fate. Sylvia, knowing the soul of the woman, made no further attempt to persuade her, but watched her go with a heart full of pity. Rachel, observing the sadness in her face, flew into a passion.

"Have you no shame, sister?" she cried, stamping her foot petulantly. "Are n't you ashamed to carry on so about that child? Did n't you hear her

say time and again that it was a white man's child?"

"We are not to judge of that by our own laws, Rachel," answered Sylvia, softly. "It is flesh and blood, and we must not see it die of hunger."

"Yes, and whose flesh and blood? Whose flesh and blood?" cried Rachel, bursting into tears in her anger and vexation. "I hope you are satisfied now, you stubborn fool! I hope you will believe what he is now! I suppose he is to be judged by our laws, is n't he?"

The girl was beside herself with vexation. A look of pain came into Sylvia's face. She turned her head away to conceal it. Rachel, perceiving the hurt she had given, in spite of her sister's attempts to hide it, burst forth again more violently than before.

"Did n't Mr. Frake give you warning what sort of a man Randolph was?" she exclaimed; "didn't your own brother see him with a squaw at Saukenuk; did not he start for the Indians as soon as they were in danger; can't you see that this is the squaw with the half-breed papoose they told about; can't you see why he came, and what he is? It serves you right! It serves you right!"

She stamped her foot and bit her lip. The white face of Sylvia was more pallid, and more beautiful, as she made answer.

"Rachel," she said, "I have listened in silence to many things that you have said about Mr. Ran-

dolph. I have been patient with you and have tried to overlook your wicked abuse of him. Now I will hear no more of it. I forbid your mentioning his name to me again. I charge you never to speak of him, for good or evil. You have forfeited the right. Until I see evil in him with my own eyes, I shall believe in him, though the whole world cries evil about him. Unless he destroys it in me, I shall have faith in him until the last day.”

There was rebuke in her tone, but no anger. There was dignity and firmness in her countenance; but there was patient and pitying affection in the look with which she regarded the passionate face of the other. When she had finished she left Rachel pouting, and passed among the miserable savages to the little bark shelter that Black Hawk had caused to be built for them apart from the Indians, for their greater comfort and privacy. There they lived with Light Foot, their custodian, chosen because she was old and knew some words of English, learned from Half Ear, her son, friend of the white man.

The sound of the words that Sylvia had spoken that night by the banks of Sangamon River, repeated half unwittingly now, awakened memories that she tried to keep buried in the bottom of her heart; memories that floated in tears to her eyes as she passed inside the shelter, filling her with sadness and longing. The sound of them mocked her. She had uttered them more to herself than her sister; without realizing it, she had addressed them to a

hideous fear and doubt that was raised up within her; a doubt vague, intangible, preposterous, persistent.

Her faith had contended much with Rachel's prejudice. This day she knew with bitter misery that she had more than her sister's skepticism to struggle against; for this day a white man's child had looked up into her face out of the arms of its Indian mother. Many words falling in the same place wear a hole into the bravest soul, just as many drops of water beat into the heart of a stone; now the tiny, pale hands of the babe tore into her heart.

If she could hear one word from his lips she would be restored; if she could look into his eyes and touch his hand again faith would indeed live to the last day. Alone, beset as she was by danger and distress, sick at heart, with nothing to sustain her but memories, she lost courage for the fight. Knowing it to be a sin, and with an anguish upon her that held her transfixed and dry-eyed beneath the shelter of bark, she doubted.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SHADOWS DEEPEN

SEATED on the ground in the shelter of bark, alone with her perishing soul, there came to Sylvia's ears from afar off a cry, the war cry of the young men of the Sacs returning from a raid among the whites. She had heard the cry many a time in her captivity; she had heard it in the dead of night; she had heard it piercing the storm to the accompaniment of thunder; she had heard it screaming through the solitary woods in peaceful quiet of noonday; never had it affected her as it did now. There was portent in it, coming so shrilly into her thoughts of Mortimer.

She started from her seat on the ground and rose to her feet. She hurried from the shelter and looked eagerly, tremulously, in the direction whence it had come. A hope and a deadly fear were at her heart.

The cry of the returning band had stirred the listless Indians into a ghostlike activity. They arose excitedly from where they lay upon the grass and gazed in the direction whence the young men would come, speculating with many gesticulations and grimaces. Some of the more vigorous went forth to meet them; for the return of the raiders meant

much to the starving old men and the women and the gaunt children. It meant word of the dreaded white man; it meant tales of victory to inspire them; it meant strength for fighting; it meant food; for the marauders brought what spoils they could to their starving people.

Black Hawk stood in the midst of his waiting people, silent and sad. Feather Heart crept toward him, trembling with weakness as she walked. The ghost of her beauty was left in her sunken cheeks and hollow eyes. As she came near her father, her step grew light, though the effort drew a tremor through her frame.

“It is the White Eagle! It is the White Eagle!” she cried, merrily. Yet only the ghost of joyousness was in her voice.

Sylvia, dazed, incapable of thought, left the bark shelter and hurried toward the group of Indians gathering in the center of the camp. The cry came again, nearer at hand. Excitement ran through the waiting Sacs. She could see the forms of the approaching Indians through the trees, half naked, painted, hideous. They passed from the shelter of the trees and came down the open space toward their people, jubilant and shouting. Among them they drove a prisoner. His hands were bound. He was pale, haggard, anxious; courageous, defiant, magnificent. It was Mortimer!

As they came, she saw the beautiful eyes search among the Indians until they found her. They

rested for an instant; a sign of gladness and good cheer and warning flashed from them, and they left her face. She believed that it was his necessity and hers that made his glance pass so swiftly; but she wished that it could have tarried another instant. There was a destroying hunger in her heart.

The returning warriors stopped and circled about their prisoner with cries and gestures. The old men of the Sacs, and the boys who hunted, joined them. The women and the children waited at a distance. Only Feather Heart of the women went to meet the young braves, walking by the side of her father, the chief, greeting the Eagle with a look of love and pride as he circled, chanting, about the prisoner.

Sylvia, among the women, saw Rachel standing beside her. Rachel looked dumbly into her face, overpowered by the situation. Sylvia instinctively reached out and took her hand, cold and stiff from nervous tension. Her eyes clung to her lover; not once did he turn his gaze toward her.

They dragged him about among them. His hands were bound, and once he fell to the ground heavily, unable to save himself. He rose to his feet with calm dignity, ignoring his captors, and turned his face toward Black Hawk. Between the two there flashed a look of recognition. It left the face of each at the same moment. The countenance of the chief hardened into relentless condemnation. The features of Mortimer became fixed in an expres-

sion of serene courage. The heart of Sylvia sank at the sight.

The circling dance stopped. The sound of the chant died upon the air. White Eagle and Half Ear came before their chief. There were words in the Sauk tongue which Sylvia could not understand. Mortimer glanced once at Sylvia and smiled bravely. The chief nodded his head. The savages turned to Mortimer and dragged him to a tree. An excited murmur went among the women. Rachel uttered a sound that was half a shriek and half a whispered prayer. Sylvia made no sound or motion. She passed through the events that followed, swifter than emotion could follow, dazed and stunned, like one in a delirium.

A dozen hands bound him to the tree. A score of hands brought dry brush and faggots, piling them about him. Without a tremor, Mortimer looked forth from his pyre. The Indians finished. A warrior, kneeling, made ready to light the heap of brush from the firing pan of a flintlock. There was a hush. In the hush, the lips of the doomed man moved.

“Is there an Indian here who speaks the English tongue?” he said, quietly, looking from face to face. “I have a message for the Hawk from the White Beaver.”

The face of Half Ear filled with sinister light; he made no response. Sylvia struggled to cry out; something clutched her throat; something smothered

her soul; she could not speak. Rachel, clinging at her side, screamed.

“Half Ear!” she cried, pointing to him. “That Indian can——”

The hand of Light Foot pressed heavily over her mouth; the arm of Light Foot was about her shoulders.

“Let the white squaw hold her peace!” grunted the Indian woman. “The white man is a liar. Why should Half Ear parley with a liar?”

For an instant the attention of the Indians was diverted to Rachel. Mortimer understood, but held his peace, having no hope in Half Ear. In another instant the powder in the pan of the flintlock flashed. A tiny blaze sprung up in the edge of the pyre. It leaped and crackled. Smoke filled the heap of brush and poured out of it. Through the smoke came a smile of farewell; a smile that bade Sylvia be of good cheer. She could make no response. She could only stare dumbly into the smoke. Her soul was dead within her. Her faith in him struggled into life as he was about to die.

The flames gained headway, crackling louder and louder. The savages, lifting their spears and hatchets, danced about the burning pile in howling, screaming frenzy. Black Hawk, standing motionless, looked on stolidly. At his side was Feather Heart, wavering slightly like a reed in the breeze, her lips compressed and her hands clenched, gazing

constantly upon the White Eagle, who lead the dance and the frenzy.

Sylvia, standing like a statue among the women, staring with fixed eyes, saw Raven Hair appear like a vision by the side of Feather Heart, with Fire Fly in her arms.

“The child of the white man must see how the white man dies!” she heard her say. In the moment that she said it, the veil of smoke drifted, and the face of Mortimer was once more revealed, calm, serene, magnificent in fortitude. Staring dumbly, Sylvia saw Raven Hair thrust the child into the arms of Feather Heart, saw her leap to the burning pile and snatch the brands away with bare hands, crying loudly in the Sauk tongue.

Half Ear, his face distorted with rage, rushed upon her. She thrust him aside, crying out in the Sauk tongue. The White Eagle—a score of young men—swarmed upon her. She threw the fire brands among them, calling loudly in her own tongue.

Feather Heart, leaving her father’s side, glided to White Eagle. She laid her hand on his arm. She whispered in his ear. Sullenly, he held the braves off.

Raven Hair, tearing frantically at the crackling brush, stamping the fire with her feet, arrested the blaze. Feather Heart, the babe on her arm, spoke to her father, the chief, pleadingly. The White Eagle stood apart, his arms folded, taciturn and baleful. Half Ear, slinking behind the young men,

who stood in a wondering group, listened and watched.

Raven Hair drew herself up in front of the man whom she had saved from the fire and confronted the chief and the young men. Mortimer, blackened by smoke, with distress and anguish contending with his determination to endure without flinching, looked on, marveling. He turned one searching glance upon Sylvia.

All this Sylvia saw like one in a dream, not understanding it, not trying to, not caring to understand; not daring to guess why this woman had saved the life of that man.

There was rapid and vehement speech between the Indian mother and the chief. It was in the Sauk tongue, and Sylvia could not understand. Feather Heart joined in it briefly from time to time, addressing herself pleadingly to her father. The young men muttered among themselves. In the midst of their talk, Mortimer spoke.

“Raven Hair,” he said, “tell the Hawk I am not afraid to die, but that I bear a message for him from the White Beaver, which he should hear before he kills me.”

Raven Hair turned to the chief and repeated to him in Sauk what the paleface said. The Hawk made answer.

“Let the white man say what he has to say,” Raven Hair said to Mortimer.

“Tell the great chief of the Sacs that the White

Beaver does not wish to destroy and punish the children of the Hawk," he said to her. "Tell him that the Great Father does not wish to bring sorrow to his children. He only wishes them to go beyond the river, where they had promised to go. If they do that there will be peace and love between the Indian and the white man. Tell him that the Great Father is kind, and will let the people of the Hawk go across the Father of Waters if only the Hawk will send back the young white women he has captive, and go himself to see the Great Father in the Big Wigwam. If he will do this, his people may go in safety beyond the Mississippi."

An angry murmur arose among the Indians when the woman made known to the chief what the white man had said. Their resentment arose against the bearer of the message, who had already aroused their malice because of his rescue. The White Eagle was bold in his displeasure.

Black Hawk, lost in thought for a space, held up his hand and forbade the angry complainings of his young men. Looking fully into Mortimer's face, the chief spoke long and mournfully in the Sauk tongue, Raven Hair repeating it in English from time to time.

"The Hawk is sorry he came," said the woman, translating. "The Hawk is sorry that he has made the Great Father angry. It is not well for the red man to anger the great chief of the palefaces; for the red man is the child of the Great Father. He

came to make corn, believing that the palefaces would let his people work in their fields through the summer. But the whites have driven him from his fields and his people are perishing. For himself, he is old, and the night cometh upon him, but his people are brave and strong, and the time is not come when they should die. He is an old leaf, trembling on the bough, but his people are like the green shoots of spring. He will do as the White Beaver says. He will take his people across the Father of Waters. He will send the paleface squaws back to the whites. He will go to the Great Father in the Big Wigwam. But how shall he know that the word of the paleface is true? Many times has the paleface said one thing, and done another. How shall he know? He will first take his people across the river, and then he will come to the Great Father for his blessing. He will lead his starving women to the land of the Ioways, and then he will give back the paleface women to their own people. First the white man must do what he says he will do, and then will the Hawk fulfil his word."

Sylvia heard nothing of what was said. Her eyes were fixed on the face of Mortimer. Her brain was struck dead by a growing fear. Why had this woman sought to save this man? What was there between them that made her plead for him against the tribe of relentless and hostile savages? Was it the true answer that Rachel, standing beside her, was staring into her face? No! Until the last day

she would hold to her faith, unless the man himself destroyed it. But why did this woman save the life of this man?

They were unbinding him from the tree. They were releasing his wrists from the cords that bound them. Their chief was talking to them, staying their anger and disappointment.

“The Black Hawk says that the white man shall go back with the answer he has made,” said Raven Hair, when the chief had finished. “The White Eagle will go with him until his way shall be safe. The Hawk will do that which he has said he will do when the palefaces have done that which they have said they will do.”

He did not tell them there was no hope in such an answer. They gave him his own horse to ride. They gave him his gun and his knife. The White Eagle, surly and grim, mounted and led the way. Without another glance at Sylvia, Mortimer headed his horse to the southward and passed from the camp. Watching him as one whose soul is afar off, Sylvia saw him turn his head slightly as he left and make a signal to the woman with the papoose. Watching, she saw the woman steal among the trees and follow him with her babe in her arms.

With a low moan, she groped her way back to the shelter of bark.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RISK

WHEN Mortimer Randolph, liberated by Black Hawk and sent back to the whites without opportunity to see Sylvia, made a signal to Raven Hair to follow, he had no other purpose than to send a message of comfort and encouragement by her to the captives. A plan to bring about their escape, through the agency of the squaw, had grown in his mind as he rode by the side of White Eagle.

It was vague and indefinite and hazardous; he could not be sure when or how he could coöperate in its execution, or that he could do so at all. He concluded to discuss it with Raven Hair, if she should follow, confiding in her friendship, and leave it to her decision, subject to the approval of Sylvia. Of her courage and ability to undertake any plan that might be devised, he had little doubt.

They traveled slowly. Mortimer contrived to delay their progress by making Powhatan feign a lameness; a trick he had taught the horse for diversion and display. They were hardly out of sight of the camp when they heard the voice of the woman calling after them through the woods.

White Eagle, hearing her, supposed that the Hawk had sent her with a further message for the

white man, she being the one who had acted as interpreter. He stopped his horse and waited. She came to them breathless, Fire Fly slung at her back.

“What does Raven Hair want of us, that she cries after us?” asked White Eagle, in the Sauk, as the woman paused for breath. He was in an ill humor, both because the white man had been spared and that he had been sent with him, away from the side of Feather Heart. “Has the Hawk thought of something more that he would say to the White Beaver?”

Raven Hair, quick to see the advantage that his conjecture gave her, replied that he had guessed her errand. “He thinks I have come from the Hawk to speak more words with you for the White Beaver,” she explained, turning to Mortimer. “We may talk without danger. I will tell him lies as we talk, that he may think I parley with you for the chief. What would the white man have of Raven Hair?”

“You have done much for me, Raven Hair,” said Mortimer. “You have braved your own people, and saved my life. I cannot reward you now, but I will not forget.”

“The white man has already rewarded Raven Hair,” returned the woman. “He has saved her from the blows of her husband before the women of her people, and he has saved her husband from loving another.”

She sat on a fallen tree, being weary. Mortimer dismounted from his horse and stood beside her.

The White Eagle, watching them closely, remained on his horse.

“What do you say to the white man?” he demanded, in the Indian tongue.

“That the Hawk would ask the White Beaver to come to parley with him at the Devil’s Cave, in the Dalles of the Ouisconsin,” replied Raven Hair, adroitly.

“And what does the white man say?”

“He has not said,” answered the woman. “What will you have of Raven Hair?” she asked, turning to Mortimer. “The Eagle is cheated.”

“I would ask much of you,” returned Mortimer. “I would ask more than you need to do for me. One of the white women that you have captive is my own dear love”—it was necessary that the woman should understand wholly—“and I want you to help her escape.”

He watched for the effect of the suggestion upon the woman. The eye of the Eagle was upon her, and she made no sign.

“What does the white man answer?” asked the Indian, looking keenly at her.

“He says that the White Beaver will not wish to come so far,” she answered; “but he has more to say. Hold your peace until he has finished. I do the work of the chief?”

“How shall they escape?” she asked, turning to Mortimer again.

“You must help,” he answered, eagerly. “You

must find a way. Can you get horses? Can you get them out of camp? Can you ride with them? Can you come to me? We can appoint a place. White Eagle will leave me in the morning. I can meet you in the morning.”

It was beginning to seem possible to him. Raven Hair thought deeply for a moment.

“What is the white man’s answer?” asked the White Eagle.

“He has not finished. He asks if the Hawk will come without any of his braves to Koshkonong, where the White Beaver has built a fort.” She turned to Mortimer. “Toward the rising sun, as far as a horse can go from noon till night, is a great lake,” she said. “On the lake, toward the setting sun, is a rock; a high rock, as smooth as the face of Fire Fly before hunger was upon him. Beneath the rock, toward the lake, is a cave. There I will bring the white women before the sun rises again, if they will come with me. But the risk is great. It will be evil for them if they are found. Are the white women brave? They are well with our great chief, and the risk is great. Raven Hair will bring them, if they will come, and they are not caught.”

“Tell them what you will do,” Mortimer made answer, beginning to falter at the risks involved. “Tell them the risk. Let them decide. If they stay with the Hawk, I will come to their succor. If they come, I will meet them.”

“How shall you know?”

“If they do not come, I shall know,” he answered.

“If they do not come before the sun is upright above the rock, they will not come,” said Raven Hair, positively.

“Raven Hair has spoken long,” complained the White Eagle, frowning impatient. “Can Raven Hair hold parley like a chief? Is there no answer to the message?”

“The white man says that the Hawk must send a young man to the White Beaver to tell him whether he will come to Koshkonong,” she answered. “If the Hawk will not come to Koshkonong, the Beaver will go to the cave in the Dalles, bringing all his men. The Hawk must send a young man with the answer.”

“Has Raven Hair done? Has the white man done?” asked the White Eagle, angrily. He did not like this parley with the enemy of his people. His blood was stirred against the palefaces; he would speak with them only with the rifle.

“We have done,” she made answer, rising. “Until the sun is upright above the rock you may wait,” she added, to Mortimer.

“I cannot give you reward now, Raven Hair,” said he, gratefully. “But when Raven Hair comes with the white women she shall go with us to the land of the whites, where Fire Fly shall grow fat.”

“Raven Hair will return to her people,” replied the Indian woman, solemnly. “The bones of Fire

Fly shall rest among the dead of the Sacs. She will bring the white women if they will come; but she will return to her own people."

"Is the white man done?" grunted the young brave.

"He bids you come," said Raven Hair. "Go."

Randolph mounted Powhatan and rode with the Eagle through the grey shadows of evening, leaving Raven Hair to await the darkness before she went back to the camp.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WHITE MAN'S FRIEND

NIGHT had fallen upon the camp of the starving Sacs. Night noises of nature were in the air. The rustling river whispered to its banks. Crickets rasped in the grass. Frogs held sonorous converse along the low margins of the river. The owl hooted among the trees. The night-hawk called through the forest. The timber wolf howled out of the distance.

Among the sleeping Indians there was a hush, save for a low, grating sound that Light Foot made as she ground the corn that White Eagle had brought her, and the sound of her voice raised in bitter complaint. She was kneeling beside a small fire that blazed in the bark shelter—the only fire in the camp.

By the side of Light Foot as she ground her corn sat Sylvia, composed once more. The storm had left her soul—left it a crushed and twisted wreck, but left it her own. She had fought, and she had lost. In her defeat she was growing strong again. Hope was dead, but dread had passed. She knew the worst. There was nothing now that life could bring her which she could not meet. The regret, the bitterness, she could conquer in time. For the present

she was herself—broken, shattered, miserable, but herself.

Rachel lay sleeping fitfully on the ground, her head in Sylvia's lap. Tears clung to her dark lashes, for she wept in her sleep over the grief of her sister. With an honest purpose she had sought to destroy the faith of Sylvia in this man; now that the faith was dead she sorrowed. While her soul was not great enough to grasp the immensity of the tragedy, the magnitude of the event that had come filled her with a sense of oppression. The one whose grief it was had comforted her out of her greater strength, so that she slept at last, fitfully, weeping as she slept.

“Woe to Light Foot, mother of an evil son,” droned the old Indian woman as she knelt by the side of the fire, pounding corn. “Shame and dishonor are hers; for the White Eagle, her son, is an enemy to her people. He has stirred the palefaces to wrath; but Half Ear, his brother, is a friend of the whites, and has lived in peace among them. Now we are starving; the White Eagle makes us starve. He makes the whites seek our lives; but Half Ear was their friend. Unhappy is the mother of an evil son.”

There was the sound of a footstep in the grass close to the shelter. Some one approached, cautiously. Light Foot, hearing it, arose and went into the darkness. Sylvia paid little heed. What was to

happen would happen. She had lost hope. She was prepared for all the misfortune life can hold.

Light Foot, walking softly through the grass, saw some one standing beneath the trees. She stopped and challenged in a low voice. A voice made answer—the voice of Raven Hair.

“What does the squaw of the white man want, that she comes through the night to the lodge of Light Foot?” demanded the old woman, gruffly.

“I would speak with the white women,” made answer Raven Hair.

The murmur of their voices in the still night reached the shelter; Sylvia might have heard if she had listened. She would not have known what they said, for they spoke in the tongue of the Sacs. She would only have known who it was that came through the night to the lodge of her keeper.

“What would Raven Hair say, that she comes in the darkness?” asked Light Foot, jealously.

Raven Hair hesitated. “I have corn for them,” she made venture.

“Must corn be brought in the night?” persisted Light Foot.

The other was silent.

“What would you say to the white women?” asked Light Foot again, more insistently.

“Light Foot is kind, Light Foot is good,” said Raven Hair, coaxingly. “Light Foot will have pity for the women of the palefaces. One of their race has come and been sent away. He could have no

word with them. He bade me bear it to them. Light Foot is kind. She will not deny it to them."

The eyes of the old woman closed to slits. She looked at the other craftily, suspiciously.

"Must you come in the night to bear it to them?" she asked, harping on the point. "Come in the morning. They are tired. They sleep. The morning will do."

"The white man bade me speak with them to-night," returned Raven Hair, too anxiously. "They will be waiting; they will be glad for what I shall tell them."

"Who is the white man that you so quickly run with messages for him?" asked the other, abruptly, in a tone full of innuendo. Her attitude was almost threatening.

"He is the friend of the poor Indian woman," replied Raven Hair, proudly. "He has saved her from the hand of her husband before her people. He kept the love of her husband from another!"

She spoke half defiantly, to deny the implication in the other's tone. Light Foot tossed her head shrewdly, without making response. In the wisdom of her years, she guessed near the truth. She was a woman; she had known jealousy.

"Light Foot will let me go to them," resumed Raven Hair, after a moment. "It grows late, and Fire Fly must rest soon."

"Raven Hair will tell Light Foot what she would

say to the white women," suggested the other, slyly. "Light Foot will bear them the message."

"Raven Hair must tell them!" exclaimed the younger woman. "The word is for them."

"Ha! It is not for the ears of Light Foot?" cried she. "Then it is not for the ears of the white women."

Before Raven Hair could make rejoinder, a shadow came from behind a tree and Half Ear stood between them.

"I have heard," he said. "I know. I am the white man's friend. They would have slain him, but I saved his life. Let Raven Hair speak with them to-night."

Raven Hair turned a look of deep suspicion upon him. He saw and answered it.

"Half Ear tells the truth," he said, solemnly. "Half Ear is no more as he was in the days that have gone. Half Ear would help. He is the white man's friend. What did the white man say? Did he tell his white sisters to come to him through the night, that he might take them to their people? Is that what the white man would have said? That have I prepared to do. He has said it to me. Our horses wait in the grove. He has said it to me, and I have made ready to do his bidding."

Raven Hair, thrown off her guard, revealed with a look that he had guessed the truth.

"He said nothing to me of Half Ear," she observed, full of suspicion.

“How could he have told you what Half Ear was going to do, when the brother of Half Ear listened?” explained the Indian. “Does not the brother of Half Ear know Half Ear’s name in the English tongue? Look! We lose time. We must hasten. It is better that Raven Hair should go her way, lest some see her talk with the women of the whites and think evil of it. It is better that Raven Hair should go among the old women and let them see her, that they may think no evil. I will take the pale face squaws on the horses that are waiting. To-morrow we shall be far away. And to-morrow the Hawk starts for the Father of Waters in flight. He dare not pursue us, lest he fall into the hands of the whites.”

Raven Hair, full of doubt, was at a loss.

“Come,” said Half Ear, addressing himself to her, “Raven Hair must not be seen here talking. She must go among the old women and speak not of the white man. I am the white man’s friend; I will do his will.”

Taking her by the arm, he led her into the darkness toward the place where the women were. So far his plans were working well. It was his first return to the main band since his meeting with Frake at Kellogg’s Grove, where he had loitered after the departure of the band that had billed the men that Lincoln found. Half Ear had come away full of schemes to abduct the white women, made bold by

the reward offered by the government for their return, and by the inducement Frake had added.

Returning, he had fallen in with another band of Sacs and joined them, for his own safety. Luck had placed Randolph in his hands. He had begged for the life of the paleface at the time, thinking he would gain favor with Frake if the man were tortured and killed in the presence of the white woman. He did not entirely foresee in what way that would benefit him, but his native shrewdness suggested that there would be profit in it, in the end.

The escape of his victim disconcerted him at first, but it indirectly brought him advantage now that, by accident, he had stumbled upon his mother and Raven Hair and intercepted Randolph's message. The incident gave him an opportunity that he was shrewd enough to seize. He would be able to get them out of camp more easily. In the circumstances Raven Hair would not reveal how they had escaped when their absence was discovered in the morning; the women themselves could be more easily induced to accompany him, and the white man Randolph would be thrown off the track.

He had no misgivings that the Indians would recover their captives if he once got them away, for he had spoken the truth when he said that Black Hawk was going to set out for the Mississippi in the morning, and would not risk stopping to hunt for them. There would be no danger of meeting any roving Sacs, for they were all with their chief.

In the morning they would be thirty miles to the southward in the white man's country. There his only danger would be in encountering Randolph; for he could make satisfactory explanations to other white men, with the corroboration of the women themselves. Wherefor he was in high spirits when he returned to his mother, who awaited him where he had left her.

"What will her people say of Light Foot when the women are not in her lodge in the morning?" moaned the old woman, as he returned, fearful of herself. "The face of the Hawk will harden against her; his hand will be raised in wrath; she will be without honor among her own people."

"The hope of the Sauk is with the paleface now," made answer her son, hearing her fears. "I will take the women to their own people. I shall be made rich. The whites will be my friends, and the friends of my mother, she who helped to free the paleface squaws from the Hawk. When the war is done. Half Ear will bring his mother to live with the palefaces; she shall dwell among them in honor. The Sacs are nothing; the hope of the Sauk is in the whites."

With such craft and device he argued, to set her mind at rest. She being a mother, though of an evil son, believed him and was reassured. Together they went to the shelter.

The fire had burned to a red and dying coal. Sylvia still sat near it on the ground. Rachel,

awakened by her troubled dreams, leaned, trembling and shivering against her. Light Foot spoke to them.

"Half Ear is the friend of the whites," she said. "He has come to take the paleface squaws back to their people. The white man who was here awaits them in the forest. He will take you to safety. The horses stand ready. Make haste, before the moon comes."

Rachel, with a little scream, grasped her sister. "No! No! No! I dare not," she cried.

"Black Hawk leaves to-morrow for the Father of Waters," said Half Ear, urgently. "He cannot take the paleface women with him. He will kill them before he goes."

Rachel, in an extremity of fear, fell sobbing on her sister's neck. "Oh, what shall we do? What shall we do?" she moaned.

"We will go with the Indian," made answer Sylvia, calmly, rising and lifting Rachel to her feet. "We are ready."

She confronted the lowering and sinister Indian, prepared for what fate might have next in store for her. She did not entirely believe that he intended taking them to Mortimer. If he did, she could meet the situation. If he did not, she would not be in worse case than she was with these starving and fugitive Indians. She need have no dread of the gravest thing a defenseless woman has to fear from a man. That the Indians never gave white women

cause to apprehend. So she would go with him without anxiety—having lost hope.

Half Ear, seeing that she would follow, snatched the bag of corn which his starving mother had been grinding and left the shelter silently, not stopping to bid her farewell. Sylvia and Rachel followed, disappearing into the night.

CHAPTER XX

THE CAVE IN THE ROCK

IT is not pleasant to ride by night through a lonely and unknown forest at best, and terror stalks by day in the vicinity of hostile Indians. It is peculiarly unpleasant when one's companion on the ride is an Indian whose inherent savagery has been aroused to ferocity by acts personally witnessed. Nor does it make it better when he is known to have recently been deprived of the satisfaction of producing one's death by slow torture and fire.

Mortimer had sufficient confidence in Black Hawk to feel that he would not connive at his being killed and scalped by one of his young men on a journey assumed under his direction and auspices. He could not be equally secure in White Eagle's fidelity to the trust reposed in him by the Hawk. He had seen the young man fired upon when he bore a flag of truce to the Americans. He himself had thrown him from his horse in flight, and deprived him of revenge. He believed that White Eagle was one of the leaders in the belligerent faction of the Sacs. He considered it reasonable to suppose that scruple would not deter him from any act of violence to the white race. He had personal and recent experience to prove that his present companion

might kill him without compunction. He realized that all to withhold him from the act was a sense of duty to the chief. He had no means of ascertaining how strongly that sense would hold the Eagle; therefore he was constantly on his guard as he rode with the Indians through the dark.

One circumstance aroused his caution. White Eagle, instead of bearing to the south-eastward, in which direction lay Dixon's ferry, or to the eastward, toward Koshkonong, where soldiers might be expected to be encountered, turned in a southerly direction toward a point unlikely to be occupied by troops. This led him to doubt the sincerity of the brave, and caused him added uneasiness. He feared that he was being led into an ambushade.

However, as the night grew on and the moon rose without his companions doing anything further to arouse suspicion, he concluded that it was probably a strategy on the part of the Indian to delay his reaching General Atkinson with the message. He had deduced from the opposition which the White Eagle appeared to offer against the sending of the message by the Hawk, and by his sullen deportment during the last interview with Raven Hair, which the Indian supposed to be part of the parley, that the young brave was not in sympathy with the negotiations he was intrusted with, and would be glad if the reply of his chief never came to the ears of the American general.

Nevertheless, Mortimer abated nothing of his

watchfulness. Tired as he was, and occupied as was his mind with the prospective escape of Sylvia, he constantly kept his attention upon the Indian by his side, and upon the road ahead, in so far as the darkness permitted, to prevent a possible surprise.

As the night wore on the other's taciturnity seemed to disappear. He could see by the light of the moon that the sulky cast of the Indian's countenance was passing, and the sullen hatred that had been in his eyes was slowly submerged in a more genial light. In course of time White Eagle grunted a few fragments of English words that he had picked up. They were disjunctive and not strikingly appropriate to any topic of conversation which they might have pursued had they been provided with a vehicle for communicating their thoughts, but in the circumstances they were highly eloquent.

By an elaborately intricate and largely unintelligible system of signs, too, White Eagle, gradually conveyed to the mind of Mortimer that he was not insensible to the favor that the white man had done him in the episode at Saukenuk the year before. Mortimer believed that he detected a desire on the part of the Indian to impress upon him the idea that Feather Heart was especially grateful for that act; and that out of respect for her, at least, the Eagle would not do the paleface damage, but was rather inclined to be friendly with him, when such a relationship could exist between them without sacrifice of principle.

Mortimer was not unaware that the savages frequently resorted to just such devices on the eve of their most nefarious and brutal acts, but he was disposed to make the most of the necessity he was under of accepting as honest the other's demonstrations and to receive them with an appearance of truth and faith. He did not cease to be wary, but he felt less and less apprehensive of this savage; his principal fear now being that he might be followed by others of the young men not so amicably disposed toward him.

It was nearly two in the morning, as he judged by the position of the moon, when White Eagle, stopping abruptly in the bottom of a little rocky defile through which a brook coursed, dismounted, and made a sign for him to do the same. He did so, half expecting and fully prepared for a lively denouement.

The Eagle held out his right hand. "Hand shake," he said, laboriously. "Me friend."

Nothing in the night had so aroused Mortimer's foreboding. He took the extended hand with a forced readiness, smiling, as pleasantly as he could.

"Hand shake! Me friend too!" having been repeated, the Eagle seemed gratified, and threw himself down on the ground without further ado.

"Sleep," he grunted, as he stretched his splendid limbs upon the grass.

Mortimer, whispering Powhatan to stand close, lay down more deliberately. He did not approve of

the nature of the place White Eagle had selected for a camp. It was deep and dark, with rocky banks on either side of the brook, which made a double bend through the ravine, so that little of its length could be seen. The spot was entirely enclosed. It was an ideal place for treachery. Nevertheless, he could not make objection without running the risk of incurring the displeasure of the Indian; a result that would aggravate matters if the case was as he feared, and which certainly would not improve the situation if his anxiety was groundless. He accepted the circumstances, therefore, only resolving not to permit himself to fall asleep, but to watch guardedly against any surprise.

The night was warm and pleasant. The moon, which had arisen in the middle of the evening, was now well down toward the west, as he could see by observing its light on the eastern rim of the defile. The noises of the night were hushed. Only the purling of the brook, the deep breathing of the sleeping Indian and the restful sounds made by the browsing horses disturbed the silence, which they served rather to intensify than destroy.

Mortimer was weary, in body and brain. He had traveled far under great worries. He had eaten little. His rest for many nights had been meager and superficial, compelled as he was to be constantly watchful. The blow on the head which he had suffered in the encounter with the Indians when he was captured still affected him. The physical and mental

strain of his experience as an intended victim of torture had exhausted his strength. His distress of mind for Sylvia, the bitterness of coming so close to her without being able either to assist her or speak with her and his anxiety concerning her possible attempt to escape had depleted his nerve force. In spite of his necessity and his determination to remain awake, the soporific hush about him slowly mastered his consciousness, and he drowsed into profound slumber.

He was awakened by the neighing of his horse. It was daylight. The first fact that struck upon his attention, with the force of a blow, was that the White Eagle was gone. Neither was the Indian's horse to be seen. He was on his feet, in instant alarm, fully awake.

His gun was at his feet. He snatched it up, searching the rocky inclines about him for sight of a foe. A motion in the bushes at the eastern rim of the gulch caught his eye. He fixed his attention there, just in time to see the head of Half Ear vanishing from sight.

His first impulse was to follow, directly and immediately. Before he responded to it, he considered the possibility that the Indian's appearance and disappearance at that point were a decoy to lead him into ambush. He resolved to pass down the bed of the stream a short distance, climb the bank and circle wide through more open country in order to

approach the ambush, if there were one from the safer side.

With this intention he saddled Powhatan, who stood nervously expectant at his elbow, leaped upon his back, and sent him down the creek as fast as the rough character of the footing permitted. The course of the stream was disastrous to his strategy. Beyond the bend which enclosed the spot where he had been it turned to the west, abruptly, away from the direction in which he wished to circle, and so continued for a distance.

Nevertheless, he rode down the creek for an eighth of a mile before he turned to mount the bank. Approaching the side of the ravine, he found that the walls were so rocky and precipitous and so tangled with brush that egress there was impossible. He had already gone far in the wrong direction in his flanking movement. Instead of proceeding further down stream, he turned and retraced his steps, keeping close watch for an opportunity to get out of the defile, at the same time scrutinizing the thickets for Indians.

He had nearly reached the place where he had slept before he found a point where he could ride out. He was at the top of the acclivity in a moment. A thin strip of woods fringed the ravine. Beyond it was open prairie. He struck out for it at right angles. Once clear of the trees, he rode to a safe distance in the prairie and turned his horse toward the place where he had seen Half Ear.

No Indian was to be seen. He scanned wood and prairie. He followed the edge of the strip of wood until he had gone beyond the point where Half Ear had been. He was about to turn in there, cautiously, when he saw the tracks of a horse in the wet grass. They led away from the ravine, and were fresh.

Without hesitation he followed them. They were easily seen, for the grass reeked with dew, and the feet of the horse had made a vivid wake across the prairie.

At a distance of a quarter mile was another stretch of timber, wider and more dense, which skirted a larger stream into which the little creek, making a broad sweep, emptied at a distance below, where the two belts of wood came together. Thither the tracks led, and thither Mortimer followed, urging Powhatan to speed.

Entering the edge of the woods, he came where a number of horses had stood; he did not stop to see how many. Here the tracks he followed mingled with the others. He knew that here the Indians had joined companions and had fled thence with the other horses. He could see their foot prints, not so plainly as on the open prairie in the wet grass, but readily enough to be able to follow at a good pace. There appeared to be three or four in the party.

Instantly he set out in pursuit. He knew that he could overtake any Indian pony the Sacs had with them, and he was in a mood to stop the annoyance he had experienced from this particular Indian.

Sacs in general he sympathized with, but this specific representative of the tribe he was willing to consider an exception.

He had not gone a hundred yards before the thought of his rendezvous with the escaping sisters burst into his mind. It was already daylight; the sun was above the horizon. It was late July, and it could not lack seven hours until midday, which was the last hour set between him and Raven Hair. He had ridden slowly southward for nearly eight hours. The lake and the rock and the cave, and Sylvia, lay a half day's ride to the eastward from his point of departure. It all came to him in a flash, and he pulled up short.

Stopping for a moment to make mental calculation of the distance and direction of the place set for meeting Sylvia, he turned Powhatan and started off on a brisk lope, bearing a little east of northeast, making allowance in his course for the slow rate of travel southward during the night.

He rode hard and pitilessly through the morning. His heart sank beneath many misgivings, and he charged himself bitterly with faithlessness and blundering negligence. There were streams to cross and woods to penetrate; the grass on the prairies was long and whipped about his horse's feet, retarding him. He steered by the sun as best he could, keeping as nearly on the course he had laid as the topography of the country permitted.

With every bound of his tired horse the quest

seemed more nearly hopeless. To reach the point he aimed at in the time that remained would have been difficult enough, if he had known the way there; but the necessity of covering the distance and finding the smooth rock before midday, traveling blind and by guess as he was, appalled and dismayed him. Had he been strong; had his bruised head not throbbled with each motion of the horse over the uneven ground, his native fortitude and self-reliance would have held him in courage. But he was weak and sick and momentarily grew more dizzy and faint.

He had ridden, as he guessed, between six and seven hours; as nearly as he could judge by the position of the sun it was eleven o'clock; there was no sign of a lake before him. He was on the point of concluding he had miscalculated and was not headed toward the lake he sought, and was about to change his course, half frantic with the thought that he was lost, when he observed a high, sloping ridge ahead of him as he came out of a patch of timber. It was prairie land, promising a view of the country about, and he pressed toward it, with a flicker of reviving hope.

His heart leaped with joy when he came to the top and could look beyond. Blue, serene, peaceful, beautiful, with stately forests skirting its gently curving shores, stretching away into the broad distance was a lake. Shouting in his gladness, he urged Powhatan into a run and went toward it.

As he was crossing a depression in the interven-

ing prairie, eager and unobservant, Powhatan called to him with an admonitory neigh. Mortimer cast his eyes about. Beneath the very feet of his horse, extending to a breadth before and behind, were tracks made by many horses, fresh in the grass, leading to the westward. He stopped. For a moment he was at a loss to account for them, believing that they had been made by Indians. In the next moment he knew that it must be the path of the army on Black Hawk's trail, and he hurried on toward the lake. His relief in the conviction that friends were in the country added to his happiness in discovering the lake. Succor was at hand. It only remained to find the rock and Sylvia.

As he thought of her once more, his hopes fell. He had not found her yet. What if this were not the lake? What if the rock he looked for were many miles away?—for the lake was large and the location of the smooth rock upon it was indefinite in the description that had been given him. And what if she should not be there?

Agitated by conflicting hope and fear, he reached the woods that fringed the banks. He had come upon its western edge, but near to the southern extremity. The rock might be far to the northward. He rode to the water's edge to see whether he might not be able to get a glimpse of it from there. His view was cut off by a wooded point extending far into the lake, half a mile above him. Beyond it there seemed to be a deep, wide bight, for the next point

he could see was at a great distance. He would go beyond the point and make a survey from there.

Powhatan was growing tired. Randolph did not urge him as he had done, but rode more leisurely, walking and trotting. In the easier pace he was able to collect and calm his thoughts, and steady his whirling brain. He kept close to the water, for the rock he sought, as he understood it, was near the lake. The woods were free of underbrush, but were so densely grown that the view was not extensive. As he neared the point he kept further in from the water, to save the distance of the indentation.

As he was in the midst of the woods, penetrating to the other side of the base of the point, he caught a glimpse of something between the trees that made his heart stop. Ahead of him, by the edge of the water, was a great, gray, symmetrical rock, smoothed by the wind and weather of many a century since its fellows had fallen into decay and dust. Shouting in his gladness, he hurried toward it.

As he came near he called loudly the name of Sylvia. There was no answer. Yet it was possible that there was more than one such rock. It was possible that there were many.

He was at the edge of the huge boulder. He dismounted, not willing to trust his haste to the feet of a horse. He ran around toward the side that faced the lake. He did not call her name now. He had not the courage. He would hope while hope remained.

He came to the front of it. In the middle was a great cave, hollowed out by the waves when the shores were further inland. He crept toward it. He had not the fortitude to run. He was at the opening. The light of day flooded the hollow throughout; for it was shallow. He looked within. It was vacant. There was not the least sign of humanity.

He looked over his shoulder. The sun was up right above the rock.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BEGINNING OF THE TRAIL

FOR an hour he waited. He found berries in the woods, and clams in the shallow water, to stay his hunger and to bridge the time. Powhatan, exhausted, lay down to rest, after Mortimer had removed saddle and bridle. At the end of an hour he replaced them and mounted. He retraced his steps until he came to the track of the army. He turned Powhatan's head in the direction they had gone, and urged him on.

Heavily, wearily, he followed. There was nothing now but to remain on Black Hawk's trail until—until that happened which would happen. He knew that there was slight hope left in negotiations, after the answer the old chief had given. The hope that remained depended upon his overtaking the army, moving on Black Hawk's trail, and preventing an attack by it. It would effect little to see General Atkinson, even if he proved willing to accede to the Hawk's terms, were these troops permitted to go forward and attack the Sacs meanwhile.

In two hours he saw the rear of the column, passing slowly across a prairie. He continued at an even pace until he overtook the rear guard.

They were troops under General Henry's com-

mand; that much he learned in the first greetings. The soldiers paid little heed to him, except to remark that he had ridden hard, believing him to be an express from Fort Atkinson, on Lake Koshkonong, where they had taken their departure.

Without waiting to exchange talk with them, he rode forward until he found General Henry, who was consulting with Colonel Dodge, in command of the Ouisconsin troops that had joined the command.

“You are not going to attack?” he said, eagerly, without preliminary, as he rode up to the commanding officer. His hope in negotiation was slight, but he would not abandon it without a struggle.

“I certainly am, as soon as I can find anything to attack,” answered General Henry, vigorously.

“But negotiations are under way,” pursued Mortimer.

“Who are you?” demanded the general, bluffly. He did not intend rudeness. He only asked for information. Mortimer identified himself, overlooking the form of the request.

“Oh, you are the man, are you,” observed General Henry. “Have you seen the Hawk, then?”

“I have, and he has practically agreed to the terms,” replied Mortimer, stretching a point. “We should not attack him.”

“If he has agreed, where are the girls?” demanded General Henry pertinently, in his brusque manner.

Mortimer, somewhat disconcerted, explained the

details of his conference, not yet mentioning the possible escape of the Hall sisters.

“That won’t do!” exclaimed General Henry, with emphasis. “He ’s got to come to the scratch. Besides,” he went on, “General Atkinson has withdrawn his offer. It is too late now. We have orders to punish him. He should have answered before.”

Mortimer made the plea that he had not had opportunity.

“Can’t help that!” ejaculated the other. “Seems to me you are pretty anxious about the hide of the old fellow?” he went on, sarcastically.

“I am more interested in the safety of his hostages, if they still remain with him,” returned Mortimer, ignoring the tone and manner of the man.

“What do you mean, man?” demanded General Henry, catching the “if.”

Mortimer made answer at length, telling such parts of the story as he considered of consequence to General Henry, making two points. One was that if the young women still remained with the Hawk, an attack by the whites, after the Indian’s offer to return them conditionally, might be fatal to them. The second was that if they were fugitives from the savages, seeking shelter with their friends, they should be sought for.

To the first General Henry returned shortly that they would have to take their chances in case of attack. For the consideration of the second he sent

for William Hall and William Munson, who presently appeared.

The wrath of those two at what they termed the meddling of Randolph in the affairs of the sisters was full and bitter. Only Mortimer's equanimity and the interposition of the commanding officer averted an open physical quarrel. Mortimer was surprised at the angry antagonism of the two, but gave it little thought, having weightier matters on his mind.

The band was halted to discuss what had best be done. Hall and Munson, arguing from their knowledge of women in general and Rachel Hall in particular, maintained that they would not venture upon an attempt to escape, and were still with Black Hawk. They urged immediate pursuit.

In the end it was decided that a dozen rangers should be despatched to make a search for the girls, while the others continued on the trail of the chief, now made plain for them by the report of Mortimer. Mortimer himself, thinking only of Sylvia, decided to go with the main body, believing it more probable that the sisters were still with Black Hawk.

They rode hard, Mortimer keeping up with them, despite his own fatigue and the exhaustion of his horse. As he rode he learned of such few events as had happened since he left to seek the Indian chief. General Atkinson, not hearing from the message to Black Hawk, did not long delay in pressing the pursuit. The militia and a body of regulars marched

northward along the Rock River to Lake Koshkonnong, in search of the Sacs, who skillfully eluded them. At Watertown, in southern Wisconsin, a large body of the militia was sent home because of a failure in provisions, the rest taking up the trail which they discovered leading toward the Wisconsin river. Among those thus dismissed from service was Abraham Lincoln.

Late in the afternoon the soldiers came to the site of the camp on the bank of the Wisconsin. All about were the signs of hasty departure. Fires where the Indians had cooked the crumbs of corn brought them by the raiders were scarcely cold. The ashes were fresh and undisturbed. A few utensils lay about, abandoned, being of no further use to the Indians, who had nothing to cook in them. There was a fresh grave by the banks of the river, which the soldiers, in brutal spite, uncovered as they hurried through the place.

They rode, before they stopped to eat and rest, until it was so dark that they were in danger of missing the trail. Mortimer had difficulty in continuing on with them. He was weak from exhaustion and hunger, and a feeling of sickness crept over him from time to time. His head reeled and a cold tingling numbness passed over his skin, like wind squalls across the surface of water. The fatigue of Powhatan, too, was pitiable and reacted upon the condition of his master, bringing it still lower.

The soldiers gave him a bit of corn cake, some

jerked venison, and a tin of weak coffee. It was all they had that night. Their provisions were running low, and they could not tell when more would be sent them. Famishing as he was, he could scarcely eat the little they gave him. He put what he could not eat into his pocket, and lay down upon the ground to sleep, depressed and dizzy.

As soon as the dusk of morning showed them the way, the troops were in motion again, not stopping to heat water for coffee. The trail was plain before them. Marks of horses' hoofs and prints of naked feet were in the path that led northward along the river. On either side the grass was crushed and trampled.

Mortimer, still dizzy and with the little cold skin squalls sweeping over his body, rode in the forefront. Powhatan had recuperated somewhat, and was able to maintain the pace without distress to himself or rider. The soldiers, revived in spirit by signs of their quarry, shouted and laughed as they rode, flinging coarse jests back and forth and towing each other in rough play.

Mortimer, in no mood to witness such a display of humor, rode a little ahead. The sun, above the horizon, struck among the boles of the trees, lighting the grass or sending long shadows across it. The birds twittered busily in the day's work. Mists steamed up from marshes across the river. The loud, rude noises of the boisterous troops jangled harshly on the serene peace of the morning.

As he went forward, miserable in body and mind, Mortimer kept close watch ahead, hoping against all reason that he might yet avert a tragedy if he should be first to see Black Hawk's band. Riding among the trees, his eye caught sight of the tuft of an Indian's scalp lock at the foot of an oak, and a dusky form laying half concealed behind it. He glanced over his shoulder to make sure that he was not venturing too far from the troops, and went cautiously forward.

The Indian did not stir. He came within a dozen paces, stopped, and called to him. There was no response. He went to the foot of the tree, keeping close watch on both sides as he proceeded. He passed around the trunk. The Indian lay still, face downward. He spoke to him again. There was no answer of voice or muscle. He dismounted from his horse and touched the prostrate form. It was cold. The Indian was dead.

It was the body of an old brave, horribly emaciated. The scalp lock was a thin wisp of white hair, tinged with yellow from excess of age. He turned the face upward gently with his hand. The agony of the death he had died was in the open, sightless eyes, the twisted lips, the sunken cheeks.

A squad of soldiers, seeing him kneeling behind the tree, hastened up.

"What you found?" demanded one gruffly.

He looked up. It was William Hall.

"Do you know what this means, men?" said

Mortimer, rising, appalled by the spectacle. "This savage has starved to death!"

"That's a good way for 'em to die; saves powder," laughed William Hall. "Here! Wait till I get his scalp."

Hall leaped from his horse and hurried to the side of the dead body, drawing his knife as he went.

"For the love of God, man!" cried Mortimer, aghast. "You will not mutilate the dead?"

"You go to hell, Randolph!" roared Hall, flaring into anger. "Is it any of your business? You're altogether too friendly with these Indians for your own good! I know you! These boys know all about you! I've told 'em; and they won't put up with none of your tricks. You'd better tend to your own affairs!"

He was down on his knees at the side of the dead Indian. His knife reached for the naked, withered crown. Mortimer, with a cry of wrath and horror, grappled with him. Hall threw him off with ease, so great was his assailant's weakness.

"Now see here!" he bellowed, taking him by the throat and raising the knife threateningly, "you leave me alone, or, by God, I'll make you!"

Three or four of the soldiers, who had dismounted, grasped Mortimer's arms and held him helpless.

"Let him alone," they growled to Mortimer, with ugly looks. "He owes it to 'em."

Mortimer, rendered powerless to interfere phy-

sically and knowing the futility of words, held his peace. Hall glanced fiercely at him and returned to the body. He made a few clumsy gashes of his knife through the thin flesh against the skull, twisted his hand in the thin white hair, and jerked. The scalp came away.

“You mind your business after this, Randolph, or you’ll be sorry,” growled William Hall, close to his face.

The others, muttering warnings, released their hold. Mortimer mounted Powhatan and rode on. He was not angered against them. He would not quarrel with them. He had other work to do. He was only filled with horror, and marvel that such a one as this man should be brother to Sylvia Hall.

All through the weary, wicked day they rode, and into another day. From time to time those in front broke into clamorous and exultant shouts, and those behind presently passed bodies of Indians, scalped and bleeding, who had fallen famished by the way-side. Children there were, with shrunken frames, who had lain moaning until the soldiers came, when they moaned no more; old women whose grey hair fell over their haggard, staring faces. Mortimer did not know that one of these was Light Foot, mother of Half Ear. If he had known, he would have felt a deeper pity.

The trail was ghastly with sights of death and despair. To the horror of it in Mortimer’s mind was added the dread of what might befall Sylvia, fleeing

with the starving, fugitive Indians; Sylvia, weak, soft, tender, gentle, beautiful. His head reeled; his skin was parched and hot.

It was the afternoon of the second day. The sun in its declining course passed behind a dark and murky cloud. Lightning flashed across the heavens; thunder rolled through the woods. Raindrops pattered on the leaves and dashed little spurts of dust from the dry ground. The storm broke in wild, fantastic fury. The bodies of dead and dying Indians, lying along the trail, spattered and drenched, showed in the lurid lightning. Mortimer lifting his face to the lowering sky, made a silent prayer for the safety of his beloved. If the Indians died, how should the white woman escape?

The swiftly moving column came to the edge of a prairie that opened to the river. Beyond it rose the heights of the Ouisconsin. Beyond the heights was low, swampy ground where the river shallowed and could be crossed. It was this crossing which the Hawk strove to reach before his relentless pursuers.

Looking beyond the prairie Mortimer saw, in the daylight that remained, the last of the Indians straggling and struggling up the heights, dragging their weary, bloodless limbs across the steep places. He could have cried out in his pity for them — and his distress for his beloved.

The soldiers saw also. Sounding the army cry, they put spurs to their horses and urged them forward with voice and lash. Living excitement ran

through the command. Men came hurrying out of the woods where the column still passed and rushed across the plain. As they hastened forward the rain ceased, — and Mortimer's fears for Sylvia rose higher. What would Black Hawk do with his prisoners when the soldiers attacked?

A shot rang out from the thicket on the crest of the ridge. The Indians had made a stand. The soldiers in advance paused. Their comrades came up. The men dismounted. The line of battle formed. It swept up the hill, the men firing as they ran from tree to tree. The Indians made answer, fifty against four hundred. It was the White Eagle with the young men of the tribe, covering the retreat of Black Hawk across the Ouisconsin.

Up the ridge, from tree to tree, crept the four hundred. The flash of rifle fire gleamed through the gathering dusk, along the top of the ridge, and over its slopes. Bullets whined through the air; the grunts and moans of the stricken filled the evening. The fifty stood well. They became forty, and thirty, and still stood their ground.

Mortimer, thinking only to succor his beloved, went in the forefront, musket in arm. He did not load and fire. The pity of it all was upon him. He only went that he might save Sylvia in her extremity.

“Charge.”

General Henry broke through the line, sword in hand.

“Charge!” Colonel Dodge, further along the ridge, echoed the order.

The soldiers dashed up the slope. The Indians held their ground. The soldiers closed with them, musket butt to hatchet. The Eagle, watching the willow fringed islands in the river, cried out a signal. The Indians, such as were left, turned and fled down the hill. The Hawk was safe.

The soldiers followed the fleeing savages into the ravine beyond the ridge, where the gathering darkness obscured the enemy. Night was upon them, and they halted, glorying in their victory over a famished foe.

Mortimer, sick at heart, weary and oppressed, sought out Powhatan from among the horses the soldiers had left when they went into the fight, cared for him with loving hand, and lay to rest close by him, having no other comfort in his heavy misgivings for the safety of Sylvia.

CHAPTER XXII

THE END OF THE TRAIL

IN the midst of the night there came a cry to the ears of the slumbering soldiers; a long, low, sonorous cry, intoned from the top of the hill beyond. Mortimer, hearing it in his sleep, awakened with a start. It fitted his dreams. He had dreamed of Sylvia, done to death by the savages, calling to him. He listened. Not hearing it again, he thought it was from his dreams, and turned to go to sleep once more.

Turning, a hot, tingling flush went through him. His head whirled. He put his hand to his brow to steady it. It was dry and hot and throbbing. The trees above him and the shadow of the hill assumed a vastness, and overpowering immensity that was delirium. His weakened limbs shivered and trembled. Fever was upon him. His heart sank beneath the knowledge. Not for himself, but for her whom he would save. He set his determination against it, composing himself to sleep by sheer force of will.

Into his ears there came again the cry. Chills coursed through him at the sound. He tried to rise. He could not. The effort only sent the cold more swiftly through his weakened frame. He lay still, listening. It came again. He knew it to be the call

of an Indian. He knew that the Hawk wished to parley. He waited to hear an answer, intense, excited. He was like one at a play. He awaited the event as one who watched it, having no part. He no longer strove to rise, to answer the call, to bring about a parley, to put an end to the horror of the chase, to save the life of his beloved. Like one having no volition, he waited for some one else to do it, taking no part himself. Waiting, he passed into troubled slumber, full of fantastic dreams, and so slept fitfully till morning.

In the morning he was better, but the fever still fought for possession of him. He said nothing of it to his companions, who had been surly to him since his encounter with William Hall. He ate what he could of the food they grudgingly offered him, scanty and poor at best, and waited for the next step in the drama, unable to think into the future, glad only to rest on the grass for the present.

General Henry, going to the top of the heights in the morning, gazed across the river, cursing and stamping his feet. The Hawk had flown from his island in the night. His soldiers had little food left. They could not pursue until General Atkinson came with the regulars and more provisions. He sent an express to report the fight and to hasten forward the others. Having done that, he abandoned himself to impatience, and waited. In a day General Atkinson arrived, with commissary. The troops moved at once in the direction which the Hawk had taken.

Mortimer, slowly burning, half dazed, scarcely knowing what he did, or why, went with them, mounted on Powhatan, who had been refreshed and strengthened by his rest. He rode in the van, his head afloat and his spirits sunken. His companions, looking into his burning brown eyes and seeing the look on his face, pointed at him, touching their foreheads and chuckling. He did not know, nor would he have cared.

The way was easy to trace. The bodies of Indians, fallen famished by the side of the path, aroused no further interest now than that they blazed the trail. They found horses that had succumbed to starvation and exhaustion and been partially eaten by their masters, ere they hurried forward to escape the vengeance that pursued. There was no pity for them. There was only exultation and rejoicing among the following soldiers.

Mortimer, riding far ahead on a morning, half delirious, saw a squaw seated by the side of the trail, her head hanging on her sunken breast, her bare and bleeding limbs, little more than bundles of bone, folded beneath her. In her lap was a tiny bundle, wrapped in a blanket. Something about the woman recalled Mortimer's wandering faculties, flashed memory and rationality into his brain. He looked more closely at her. It was Raven Hair.

He spurred his horse. She did not raise her head as he drew up beside her and dismounted.

“Let the white man finish his work!” she said, in even voice.

“Raven Hair!” he cried, laying his hand gently on her shoulder, “You, too?”

She looked up at him. Her eyes were sunken, her face a shadow. Yet a light passed across it as she recognized him. “Let the white man finish his work,” she said again, in the same even voice. “Raven Hair would have crossed the river to lay her Fire Fly far from the hand of the white man who has slain him, but her time has come. Let the white man finish his work.”

Mortimer lifted the corner of the blanket that covered the bundle. Beneath was a baby dead, horrible.

“God!” he muttered, closing his eyes to the sight.

Raven Hair, replacing the blanket which he had let fall, was silent.

“Come! Quick! Take my horse,” said Mortimer, full of compassion, remembering what he owed to the woman. “I will bury the child. Leave it with me. I shall not let them harm it.”

“Fire Fly died in the arms of Raven Hair; in the arms of his mother he shall rest when she dies,” returned the woman doggedly.

The sound of horses came closer in the trail behind. Without thinking what he did, Mortimer raised the woman, pitiably light, in his arms and placed her on the horse, before she could resist.

“He will return to me,” he said. “I will find the horse at the river.”

“The white man is good; Fire Fly will sleep in the land of the Ioways, among his ancient people,” said the woman, who thought only of saving her dead child from sacrilege.

A word from his master, and Powhatan, with a whinny of unwillingness, bounded down the trail just as Hall and Munson appeared behind with some of the soldiers.

“There ’s the cursed squaw now!” cried Hall to Munson, and the two beat their horses into run, firing a shot after the retreating Indian.

Mortimer would not have understood what they meant had he attended to their words; and he did not listen. For as he saw Powhatan, breaking into a run under the urging of his rider, distance the pursuers and disappear through the trees, he remembered that he had not learned of the woman the one thing he would have given his soul to know,—the fate of Sylvia. Recalling that, he burst forth into a laugh that sent the blood chilling through the veins of those who heard it.

The soldiers, looking askance at him as he staggered along, laughing and muttering to himself, passed him rapidly. General Atkinson, coming upon him and recognizing him through the spectral shadow of his delirium, called an orderly to him.

“Find that man an animal and get the surgeon for him,” he said. “He is sick. Get him a pack

animal, anything," added the general, seeing the perplexity in the soldier's face and interpreting it.

The orderly, saluting, went to Mortimer and took him by the arm, with some apprehension. Mortimer looked vacantly at him, and laughed.

"I guess I am only sick, my fellow," he faltered. "Have you seen Sylvia anywhere?"

The soldier, kind in his rough way, stayed by him until the surgeon came. He gave him what he could to soothe him and relieve him of his fever.

"Seems to have been through a hard strain which has broken him up pretty well," he reported to General Atkinson. "I should judge the man was half starved. It's just a touch of the fever. He'd be all right in a jiffy with rest and proper care. Shame he can't be taken somewhere. Nothing for it but for him to stay with the army, though."

There were a number of pack animals to carry provisions, some of which had been divested of their loads. The orderly, with the kindness of a brother, put his saddle on one of these and made Mortimer ride it, himself mounting the bare back of his own horse. Thus he traveled through the woods on Black Hawk's trail, alone with his fantasies among a thousand men, whispering of Sylvia by day and calling her name as he slept by night.

How long they travelled he did not know. To him it was an eternity. One morning as he rode he was aroused from his delirium by the sound of shouting and the firing of guns. An excitement ran

through the column which tingled in his blood, making life real. He awakened to a half possession of his faculties. He was only partially aware of where he was, and how he had come there, but beneath his sensations, partaking at once of reality and fancy, was a consciousness of why he was there. Thoughts of Sylvia mingled with his vagrant hallucinations about her. These thoughts he grasped and clung to, for the final moment was come, and the end of the trail was at hand.

Riding toward the confusion and sound of battle, which swelled constantly in his ears, ignoring the soldiers and ignored of them, he came upon the scene of struggle. Black Hawk's warriors were making a last stand. On one hand was the Mississippi River, their goal. On the other hand were the soldiers. It was at the mouth of the Bad Axe River. A line of low wooded hills extended parallel to the Mississippi, distant half a mile. Between the hills and the river was low ground, overgrown with thick and tangled grass, reeds and scrub willows. In the stream were islands, covered with willows. An hour sooner and they would have made their escape. But the hour was not theirs, and now the famished and desperate band made a last stand, hoping that their women might find time to cross.

Of the three hundred braves with Black Hawk in the beginning, not a hundred were left. Those who survived were weak and sick from starvation. The militia and the regulars, strong and inspired

at sight of their quarry, rushed upon the braves confronting them along the hill. Mortimer dismounted and standing on a shoulder of the hill beyond the line of the fighting, saw the army sweep down. He saw their ranks melt and scatter beneath the bullets and bayonets of the assailants. He saw those remaining of the line swarm down into the tall grass of the lowland and disappear. Beyond, at the margin of the river, he saw the women and the children and the old men leaping into the water or standing stolidly to meet their fate. Weak as he was, he cried aloud for mercy toward them and went forward into the tall grass.

His knees trembled beneath him. He reeled as he walked, leading his horse, unaware of its presence. "Be strong, be strong," he said to himself. "The hour of need has come."

He entered the low ground from the hill above the point of contact between the soldiers and the Indians. He was alone. He walked toward the group on the bank of the river, searching for Sylvia there. He sang a song as he went; a hymn of his childhood.

The grass rustled at his feet. An Indian sprang up and aimed a gun at him; it was the brave of Saukenuk, the White Eagle. Before he could fire, a woman, with the wreck of youthful beauty on her face, arose beside the brave and grasped the gun, speaking swiftly to the Indian in the Sauk. It was

Feather Heart. He knew her, through the mask of hunger and grief that was on her face.

The horse tugged at the lines, startled by the conflict. Mortimer at that moment remembered the animal. He led it in front of him, pointing to it and handing the lines to the brave. "Take him. Fly!" he cried.

There was no need for them to understand the words.

The Indian, looking at him, shook his head. Mortimer pointed behind to where the soldiers were hunting the Sacs out of the tall grass and the reeds like rabbits. The Indian glanced over his shoulder. He gazed into the face of the woman. He lifted her onto the back of the horse. Running beside the animal, he turned toward the hills to the north, beyond the lines of soldiers. Mortimer, watching them, saw them reach the hill. He saw them join another Indian; a small, bent man on a white pony. Even at the distance he recognized Black Hawk in the sorrow-laden figure. As he watched, they disappeared. He turned and went toward the group on the shore, singing a song.

His thoughts wandered. He held them with his will. The soldiers were shooting and slaying through the grass with mad, glad shouts. The women and old men huddled closer on the bank. They leaped into the water. Some of them sank. Others reached the islands close to shore.

There was a sound in the water below; a hissing,

muttering, chugging noise, a thick yellow smoke across the sky, and a steamboat came toward the group. At the taffrail trailed the American flag. Coming closer to those who cowered on the bank of the river, Mortimer saw the Indians wave a white flag to the boat. He heard them hail. He heard parley. He saw a flash at the bow of the boat and a rolling, leaping cloud of white smoke. The roar of a gun came to his ears, and the singing of the missiles that hurtled into the Indians. They were firing canister. He knew. He had been in the army once. They were firing into the defenseless savages, who sought to surrender. His song changed to a cry of wrath. He hurried to the edge of the water.

There was a moan in the grass at his feet. He saw a crouching figure; the figure of a woman, a living skeleton. She bent above something that she held in her lap.

“The white man finishes his work, little Fire Fly,” said the voice of the woman. It was Raven Hair.

He grasped her by the shoulder and raised her to her feet. She looked at him. There was indifference in her face, at first, and resignation. There followed a gleam of recognition and, after that, resignation and indifference.

“Where is she? Where is she?” he asked, eagerly.

A puzzled look was her reply.

“The white woman? The woman who was with you? My sweetheart?”

She understood now. “Gone!” she said. “She did not come to you? She went with her sister in the night.”

His amazement made her continue. “With Half Ear, the friend of the whites!” she said.

His thoughts ceased. He could not comprehend. He did not try. After all, what did it matter? He laughed softly, to himself. “Fire Fly is dead,” he said, simply.

She looked at him, wondering at his unconcern for the white woman.

“Take him to the land of the Ioways,” he went on. “Look, there is the river. Beyond is the land you seek. I will help you.”

She shook her head.

“Come.”

He half dragged her to the edge of the water. On its surface, between the steamboat and the spot where they stood, the heads of swimmers bobbed across the waves. The boat was firing canister. He could see the shot skipping over the river’s surface, dragging up after it little spurts of water, which fell back in pretty dimpling ripples.

“Swim!” he said, leading her into the water.

With her burden in her arms, she waded into the current, to her knees, to her waist, to her breast. She leaned forward. She leaped. She struck out with her legs, and with one arm. The other held

something close to her breast; something black and awful.

He returned to the shore, and stood watching. A horse whinnied softly at his back. A lean roan nose nuzzled into his elbow. He reached his hand up without taking his eyes from the swimming woman and laughed.

“Powhatan!” he said, laughing again, softly. “I knew you would come to me.”

He watched the woman swimming. A numbness crept into his head. He laughed at it. The woman was in midstream, swimming more slowly. One arm she did not use. His thoughts floated above him. He held them until he could watch the woman across the river.

The water was filled with swimmers. Many of them sank. Those who neither swam nor sank, died on shore when the soldiers reached them.

Raven Hair was beyond the center of the sweeping flood that divided the bank from the nearest island. She struggled through the yellow, lapping current with her legs and one arm.

The air was again filled with noise; they were firing canister. A swarm of jumping jets scattered along the top of the water, swift as light, thick about the woman who swam.

The water around her was no longer churned by her strokes. Peace came upon it. Her head sank lower. It passed from sight. A little whirlpool formed where she had been. In the midst of the

whirlpool there floated a tiny bundle, done up in a blanket. It whirled and tossed in the turbulence. Quiet came over the water. The bundle floated down the stream on the silent current, mysterious, awful.

A man with sunken cheek and flaming eye, who stood at a distance on the bank of the river, turned with a laugh in his throat and made his uneven way toward the hill. At his heels trailed a roan horse, wonderingly, with ears erect. Up the hill they passed, and over the top, beyond the sight of those who might have seen.

CHAPTER XXIII

RESIGNATION

SYLVIA HALL, erect, graceful, certain of step, with a brave look in her blue eyes, slowly walked along the street of New Salem. Her old beauty, the beauty of youth and happiness, was gone. In its place was a new and sublimer beauty; the beauty of sorrow, of strength in adversity. She had fought down the past. She had built up from the wreck of her heart fortitude for the future.

It was late in August—a month since she and Rachel had escaped from the Indians by the aid of Half Ear. Their flight had been without any startling event, although Rachel had nearly succumbed to excitement and fear. They had found the horses that Half Ear had secreted in a glade half a mile above the Sac camp, and had ridden on through the night, making a wide detour to avoid the Indians. Then they had turned to the southward.

Only twice had an alarm come to them. Once they had seen a solitary Indian making his way slowly northward in the first light of the morning, but had escaped his observation. The other incident was more exciting. It was later on the first morning. Half Ear, leaving them in a strip of timber along the banks of a stream, had ridden across a

narrow prairie toward a smaller piece of woods which he told them concealed a ravine where they must hide during the day. Presently he had come back in deep consternation, telling them that a band of Indians was concealed in the defile. Thereupon they fled precipitately through the woods.

They had not been followed. Nevertheless Half Ear, in a state of trepidation, had not halted until they had hurried many miles. Then he had stopped only to cook some of the corn meal he had taken from his mother,—which Sylvia had not had the heart to eat,—after which they had ridden slowly southward, keeping in the timber as much as possible, and not resting until evening.

In the night they had taken their course again, traveling more directly under the shelter of darkness. On the second morning they came to a grove. A rough trail led through it, but this the Indian avoided, keeping in the edge of the woods until he came to the mouth of a dry creek, hidden by thickets. This he entered, telling them that must be their hiding place until night.

Passing up the creek bed, they came presently to a pocket, where the bushes opened into a clear space. Here, to the astonishment and dismay of the Indian, they found a white man sitting. He proved to be Isaac Frake. By what rare chance he had come there was not revealed by him. He released them from their conductor, whom he took in custody, and

they went thence to Fort Armstrong, where the Indian disappeared.

Frake brought them to New Salem; and Frake now walked by her side as she passed up the street of the settlement. When she met him in the grove she saw him without surprise, without fear, without concern for what the meeting might signify. She was prepared for anything that fate might hold for her. She was glad that he released them from the hands of the savage, whom she mistrusted had learned too much of the ways of the white man.

Isaac Frake had been kind to her, and to her sister as well. To herself he had been almost tender, in an uncouth way. She knew the meaning of it. She had been sorry; she surely had not been glad; perhaps she had been indifferent. She did not analyze, for she did not know.

He had been kind since they came to New Salem. He had been pressingly kind, at times. He had stayed in the village for no obvious reason other than to be kind to her. That she understood, and the reason for it. She would rather that he had not remained, perhaps. She had not given it much thought.

Now he had just been telling her why he stayed, and that he wished to take her with him when he went. She had fought down the past and was ready to meet the future. She was alone in the world, or would be soon, for Rachel was to be married to William Munson within a month. She could not stay

always with her kin in New Salem. She would not do so, if she could, yet she was in a sense helpless. Fate had offered her this refuge.

If fate had presented this to her a month before, or a week, her heart would have rebelled against it. If she had permitted herself to confront the thought of going with this man a month before, or a week, she would have shrunk from it. She had subdued the past in so far as the struggle lay within herself; she could not have been sure of conquering it if the old memories had been awakened from without, as they would have been awakened a month or a week before by the thought now obtruded upon her.

For until the week before a spark of hope had lived, unknown for the most part, and resisted when known. Until the week before there were moments of weakness when her soul denied the terrible truth; when shreds of faith persisted in weaving themselves into her life. But within the week her brother and William Munson had returned from the war. They had told of Mortimer Randolph's friendship with the Indians, and protection of them, with many exaggerations and no omissions. They had told of seeing him give his horse to the Indian woman; they had told how he had sent her into the river to save her, and had turned away distraught when she was killed.

Last, and not least for her struggling soul, they had told how he had vanished from the face of the earth and had not been seen again. That he was

dead she was thankful. It was a wicked and selfish gratitude, perhaps, but it brought its own absolution; for if he was dead she could hold to the truth, and in the truth there was nothing from which he deserved more than her wish that he had not lived.

Now Isaac Frake walked beside her to know her choice. "I don't want to be hard on you, Sylvia," he said, humbly. "I know your feelings. I know how much you thought of this man, and how bad you feel about it."

She interrupted him. "There is no man of whom you may speak like that, Mr. Frake," she said, quietly, without emotion or reproof.

"I know, I know," he hastened to say. "I don't mean that. I know that is all past. But I can't help feeling that you have not got over it entirely yet. It was a terrible blow."

She stopped him by lifting her hand.

"Excuse me," he apologized. "What I want to say," he went on, endeavoring to avoid the forbidden thing this time, "what I mean to say is, that I don't want to hurry you, and I'll wait for your answer; but I'd like to have you tell me now if you can. I want to get back to my place on the Rock River. I've been away a long time, and there's no telling what has happened there. The Indian troubles are all over now, and we won't be bothered any more by them pests. I want to get home, and I want to take you with me, but——"

He did not consider it safe to conclude his qualification. There was a pause.

"I am not sure that I should make you a good wife, Mr. Frake," said Sylvia, ending it. "I am not sure that I should want to."

"Why not?" he asked, bluntly, with a general intention of obtaining some specific basis for discussion and argument.

"I am not sure that you would be able to make me contented," she replied, thoughtfully.

"Why not?" he asked again, not seeing an opening.

"I have told you that I do not care for you," she made answer, frankly, but as kindly as she could. "That is why."

"And I have told you that I don't care if you don't care for me to begin with," he rejoined.

"You should care."

"Well, of course, I 'd want you to before we got through, and I think you would," he asserted.

Frake was sufficiently shrewd, but his mind did not move delicately enough for finesse. He was losing his self-possession.

"I am not sure that I ever would," observed his companion.

"Now, Miss Sylvia," rejoined the man, a little less adroit in his tone and manner, "I 'll take my chances on that."

"I am not sure that I dare take mine."

Frake changed his tactics. "I don't see why,"

he said. "You don't know me yet. I am sure I have been good to you —" she nodded her head slightly, conceding as much. "I got you away from that Indian; there 's no telling what he would have done." She agreed. "You might never have got that far from the Hawks if I had n't induced Governor Reynolds to offer a reward. That 's what the Indian was after in the first place. I brought you down here; I took good care of you; I did not force myself upon you; I have n't bothered you or urged you; I am willing to wait for you now." She nodded as he catalogued his devoted acts. "And if it had n't 'a' been for me, you might never have found out about that other man," he added, visibly encouraged. She did not nod. If he had known the dangerous chord in her mind which he had tangled, if he had realized how often she had remarked that circumstance in the days of the struggle, he would have turned pale; he would have had great cause to be thankful that she believed the other man dead.

He saw that he had made a mistake, though he could not comprehend its gravity, believing it to be only a trespass on the forbidden subject. He began again after a pause, in which it became apparent that he was to get no help from her.

"If I have been good to you lately, you ought to know that I will be after this," he said. "God knows how I love you. I have got a good place, lots of rich land and plenty of stock, and a man to help me work it. I 'm going to build a new log

house. I've got furniture for it, and utensils. I can give you a good home, and you haven't got any to go to. Where are you going to live? Who is going to take care of you in your old age?"

He did not perceive that the inducement he held out to her grew to be almost a threat in its conditions, or that he was taking advantage of her helplessness. She made no sign that she realized it as she nodded her head in acknowledgment of the point he had driven home.

She made no reply. They walked in silence until they came to the door of the house where Sylvia and Rachel were living. She stopped and faced the man.

"I wanted you to know what was in my mind, Mr. Frake," she said. "I wanted you to be certain of the considerations that might enter into my decision. Are you sure that it would be fair to you if I should go with you? Are you sure you would care to have me go with you?"

She looked fully and frankly into his face. His eyes fell before her's.

"You know what I think about it," he said. "You know what I have said."

"And you would like to have me answer you, now?"

He nodded greedily.

"I will go with you at the end of a month," she said.

"Oh, Sylvia, Sylvia," he said, with cumbrous

tenderness. He came closer to her. He reached out his hands to hold her. He thrust his face toward hers. She drew back with complete calm.

“No. Not now. At the end of a month,” she said, and entered the house.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MAN FROM THE DEAD

ON a day in August there came into the street that ran between the log cabins clustered about Fort Armstrong, a man dreadful to look upon. He was cadaverous and spectral, with glistening, flaming eyes of brown, deep in his head, as though they had burned their way through the lean flesh of his face. His skin was the color of death, save that in each cheek glowed a round, red spot. He had no hat; his hair was scorched by the sun of summer, and fell in a tangle about his ears and forehead. His clothes were tatters. On his naked breast were wounds as though he had pressed his way through thick brush. At his heels stalked a horse, thin and woeful, of a faded roan color.

An Indian lying in the street; a pitiable, drunken Indian, with bent and cringing frame, with narrow eyes, disfigured, lacking half of an ear, saw him and arose from his drunken stupor with a shriek. The man came toward him, jibbering, with a new light in his glistening eyes. The Indian, seeing him come, crouched, screamed, and fell lifeless, a prey to terror and the liquor of the whites.

Soldiers, hearing the scream, came running from the fort to see. The man walked among them. They

stood aside, appalled. An officer appeared, cried out an order, and placed a hand gently on the bony shoulder of the wanderer. The man looked at him, vacancy in his glistening eyes.

“Sylvia,” he whispered, and laughed.

They led him into the fort. They stripped his torn clothing from his body. They bathed him and cooled his fevered head, laying him in a bed. He looked upon them listlessly, submitting to what they did for him without thought. The surgeon, attending him, gave him a draught. He sighed, and sank to sleep.

General Atkinson, coming in curiously to see the stranger as he slept, gazed long upon the face, passing from side to side of the bed.

“It is he,” he said at last; “the man who went to find the Hawk.”

The man slept deeply, and long. When he awoke the fever was strong within him.

“It is going to be a hard fight, and a close one,” said the surgeon, working over him. “The man has been through some sort of hell, I should guess. We ’ll see what we can do. I ’d like to hear him tell about it. It might be valuable to a professional man to hear his story.”

There was much to agitate and excite the garrison in the fort through the days that followed, and the sick man was forgotten by all save those who cared for him, and the surgeon who wanted to hear his story. Black Hawk had been captured, betrayed

to his enemies by an Indian of the Winnebagos who believed that it might be worth while for an Indian to do the will of the white men. He had been tracked to his lair in the Dalles of the Wisconsin through this fellow's treachery. Now Lieutenant Jefferson Davis had gone to bring him to the fort, and they awaited his coming with lively expectation.

Lieutenant Davis returned. Black Hawk, riding his white pony, unutterably sad, ignoring the stare of the soldiers, rode at his side, with a proud look. Behind, in the escort of the soldiers, rode the White Eagle, the bravest and fiercest of the young men of the Sacs. Behind them all, Feather Heart, defiant, with a spirit that rose higher under calamity and ignominy.

There was rejoicing among the soldiers, who had suffered much to bring this thing to pass. There were cheers and jubilations. Between the cheering lines rode the captives, haughty and disdainful.

The Hawk was to be sent to Jefferson Barracks, near St. Louis. Thence he was to be taken to Washington to be interviewed by President Jackson, and to be admonished. Jefferson Davis was to escort him. The young brave was to be taken with them. As for the young squaw, she would be given into the keeping of Keokuk, the friendly Sauk in the land of the Ioways, whither the imprisoned chief and the young warrior would be brought after the prospective inculcation of moral doctrines at the hands of the whites. Such were the orders, and such were

the plans. Their execution only awaited the arrival of the steamboat *Warrior* from Jefferson Barracks to bear them thither.

Lieutenant Jefferson Davis, sitting that evening with the officers of the fort at the mess table, exchanging talk with them, in course of conversation heard about the stranger who had come among them a week before like a man from the dead. He listened keenly to the story, fascinated by the romance and mystery of it.

“He seems to be pulling through all right now, but it was a close fight,” said General Atkinson. “We are rather impatient to hear what he has to say. He seems to be some one of consequence. We have no idea who he is, further than that he was the man who undertook to bear the message to Black Hawk from Dixon’s Ferry.”

Hearing that Lieutenant Davis sprang from his seat with an exclamation of astonishment. Without pausing to explain he hastened from the quarters to the door of the room where the man lay ill. The physician, coming out at the moment, encountered him.

“What ’s up?” he said.

“How is he?” returned Jefferson Davis, eagerly “He is a lifelong friend. I want to see him.”

“So?” said the surgeon. “You can’t see him to-night, my lad,” he went on. “The fever has broken and he is sleeping normally. He has had a

fine day. But you can see him in the morning, I guess."

The young lieutenant submitted impatiently to the necessity, and returned with the surgeon to the mess-room.

In the morning, before the sun was warm, he was knocking gently at the door of the sick-room. The surgeon thrust out his head.

"All right; come in," he said, in answer to the questioning look. "Go easy, though."

The man lay on the bed, pale and quiet. His eyes were closed. His hair, thinned by the fever, lay across his high brows, bronze on alabaster. Jefferson Davis stepped softly to the side of the bed. He took one of the thin hands in his own.

"Mortimer! Mortimer!" he whispered. "God bless you! Mortimer!"

"Go easy, there," warned the surgeon.

The sick man opened his eyes. The glisten had gone from their brown depths. He gazed, puzzled and questioning into the face that bent over him.

"Jefferson, Jefferson," he said, "Is it you? Perhaps you can tell me. Something seems to have happened. I can't quite understand it. Where am I? What ——?"

He did not finish. As he spoke, a change came over his face. A look of pride, of coldness, of formality succeeded.

"Don't look at me like that, Mortimer!" cried the other, observing the expression. "It is all right

now. I knew it was all right as soon as you were out of sight, when you left me at Dixon's. I've been foolish, Mortimer. I want you to overlook it."

The face of the sick man softened.

"I knew all the time that I was making a fool of myself." The other hastened on, earnestly "I knew that there had been a blunder somewhere. I don't want to know where. I don't want you to tell me anything about it. All I want you to tell me is that you are well again." He spoke with a pressure of the thin and feeble hand that he held.

"Don't make me weep, Jefferson," said Mortimer, smiling at him. "Don't make me weep. I am outrageously weak."

"Steady, there," interposed the physician watchfully. "Go easy, now."

Mortimer turned to him. "Doctor," he said, "You need have no worry for me now. You have done your work too well for that. I want to talk to this man. He is an old friend of mine. We were boys together. It won't hurt me to talk to him; it will do me good."

The surgeon half shutting his eyes and pursing his lips, scrutinized them both for a moment and left the room without further word. The eyes of the two friends met. There was a moment of bounteous silence.

"It is a mistake, Jefferson," said Mortimer, presently. "Shall I tell you about it?"

“No!” exclaimed the other decisively. “I don’t want to hear about it.”

“Jefferson, it does me a world of good to hear you say that. If you don’t have to hear it, so much the better. If the truth is not necessary, I am glad, for the truth would hurt, somewhere.”

“Where have you been? What have you done? What has happened?” asked the lieutenant, dismissing the other subject finally, with a look of affection at the sick man.

“You’ll have to tell me something that has puzzled my head, before I can begin,” returned Mortimer. “I have been trying to figure out how I came here. Do you know? Have you heard them say?”

“You came into the fort like a ghost, raging with fever,” explained the other. “That’s all anybody knows about this part of it.”

“I thought so. The last thing I remember is that horrible slaughter of Indians up there on the Mississippi. It was on the Mississippi, was n’t it?”

Jefferson Davis nodded his head.

“Was n’t there a steamboat there?” pursued Mortimer, ruminating. “It seems to me that I can remember a steamboat. It fired canister among the Indians. Yes, I can see it again now; the spurts of water scurrying across the river’s face in among the swimming savages. God! It was awful. There was a steamer, was there not?”

“Yes, the *Warrior* was there.”

“Who commanded?”

“Captain Throckmorton.”

“I should not like to be Captain Throckmorton when the time comes for me to answer to my maker,” said Mortimer, solemnly.

Lieutenant Davis made no audible comment, being in the service of the Government.

“And tell me another thing,” resumed Mortimer, looking fearfully and anxiously into the face of his friend. “The sisters, Rachel and Sylvia Hall; were they saved?”

Understanding broke upon the intelligence of Lieutenant Davis. “They were brought in by an Indian and are in the hands of their friends,” he replied. “They are safe and well; but I don’t think both of them are entirely happy,” he added, his eye twinkling.

Mortimer ignored the innuendo with some apparent annoyance. His love was not a thing to be alluded to in a spirit of levity, even by his lifelong friend. Of all the world, only two had heard him speak of it.

“Where are they?” he asked, with an attempt at composed indifference.

“Somewhere down in the middle part of the State, I think,” Davis made answer, regretting his intrusiveness.

“And one more thing, Jefferson,” Mortimer continued. “I had a horse once. Can you tell me anything about that?” His hope was faint.

“That fine roan of yours?”

Mortimer’s eyes lighted. He nodded affirmatively. “Powhatan,” he said.

“He ’s here. He followed you into camp. He ’s fat and fresh—and lonesome, waiting for you.”

Deep satisfaction settled on the countenance of Mortimer. He sighed with relief and contentment, as he began his story.

“Let me see,” he commenced. “The last time you saw me was when I left you at West Point on furlough, to visit my people in Virginia, was n’t it?”

Jefferson Davis nodded his head.

“That’s where my story begins,” Mortimer resumed. “When I reached home I found trouble brewing. Before my time for returning was up, things came to such a pass that it seemed to me best for all involved that I should leave. That I should disappear—exile myself—immure myself in a wilderness. All I took with me was my horse Powhatan, a sum of money that was my own, and the execrations of my people. Only a firm of attorneys in Richmond knew where I was. I kept them informed in my travels.

“We wandered rather aimlessly, Powhatan and I. I don’t know how it came about; perhaps it was the lure of the army; perhaps it was fate; but we found ourselves at last at Jefferson Barracks. I did n’t have much to do with the army men, because it was better for many reasons that I should not be known, and there was risk of meeting old acquaintances

among the officers at the Barracks. But I stayed because I liked the taste in the air.

“Finally I came to know a man named Thomas Forsyth, who had been an agent of the Sacs and Foxes, and was then living at Jefferson Barracks. Through him I became interested in the Indians, and undertook a mission or two of slight consequence. I was with General Gaines when he drove Black Hawk across the Mississippi a year ago last spring. I knew the old chief, and felt sorry for him. I felt sorry because I believed that he was an honest old fellow; pig-headed and mistaken, but sincere and without any viciousness.”

“He is a capital old fellow!” interjected Jefferson Davis. “He is a sterling old man! I have a high regard for him.”

“Yes, he is,” rejoined Mortimer, his thoughts on what he was telling. “When I returned from Saukenuk last year I met a man in central Illinois who impressed me as a great and wonderful man. I met him in a little settlement on the Sangamon River, near Vandalia, on my way to the State capital on business for Forsyth. He is young, little more than twenty-one or two, but there is something about his soul that makes me believe he will be a giant among men. He is rough, uncouth, even vulgar in some respects; and yet I believe that there springs in the bottom of his heart a flow of inspired wisdom, of tenderness, of loving sympathy and understanding, which would flood the world if events should tap

it. He is of the most humble and insignificant origin, a product of the destitute frontier, without any advantages, with only such education as he has been able to grub, without opportunity, without inspiration from his environment; and yet I believe that if the chance comes, he will cope with destiny and mold it. He held me from the first, and I stayed in the little village to be near him."

"Who is this man?" asked Jefferson Davis, deeply attentive.

"He is Abraham Lincoln," returned Mortimer.

"Lincoln," repeated Jefferson Davis, thoughtfully, trying to recall. "Was he not with the militia at Dixon's ferry?"

"He was captain of militia," Mortimer told him.

"A great, tall, lank awkward fellow with a homely face and a marvelous smile?" pursued the young lieutenant.

"You know him?" asked Mortimer, with a trace of surprise and pleasure, by way of answer.

"He told a funny story at a council one day; I remember him."

"Was n't the story shrewd?" asked Mortimer, as one who takes pride in the deeds of his friend. "Was n't it pointed? Did n't it mean something? Did n't it clear something up for all of you, generals and all?"

"Yes, it did," Jefferson Davis conceded; "and it was funny, too, the way he told it. But we all

thought it somewhat out of place in a militia captain to crack jokes at a council of war."

"My dear Jefferson," rejoined Mortimer, pleased, "did it occur to any of you as possible that you were all out of place except him?"

Jefferson Davis smiled and nodded his head, and Mortimer took up his story again.

"There was another reason that might have kept me in the settlement," he said, looking afar off, "if Lincoln had not been there." It was in his heart to tell this friend, too, about his love. "Sylvia Hall was stopping there with kinsfolk of hers; a delicate flower in the midst of a desert; a fragrance in the wilderness—what are Gray's words?

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

His voice fell; the other could scarcely hear. "How such a soul was brought from the stars into this wild spot, God alone can answer. Dainty, beautiful, noble, pure in heart, with lofty instincts and an innate delicacy of feeling and sentiment, she was like a wanderer among these rough and barbarous people; a rare and exquisite exotic in a rugged soil. She is even different from her own family. For her only I should have stayed; with them both my life was full to the brim.

“I did not tell her of my affection. There was this thing in Virginia that forbade me. In the autumn she left and went to her home at Indian Creek. In the spring following—this spring—I received papers from Henderson and Lee, my attorneys, that told me I was restored in the sight of men, and left me free to go to her with my love.

“Before I reached her home, I heard of the danger from the Hawk. I thought I might be able to avert it, having been among the Indians, and having sympathy for them, which I feared few other white men had. So I stopped only to warn them, and went to do what I could do. I failed, and then—I cannot speak of it yet; I am too weak. She was taken captive, and I tried to find her. I had some hard, rough journeys. I believe the hardships and distress of mind were too much for me. I don’t remember. I am tired, Jefferson, and I must rest. But I am well now! I am well again! God bless you, Jefferson, this has been a glorious day. Come back to me, won’t you?”

He held out his thin hand. Jefferson Davis pressed it for a moment in silence. Releasing it, he turned to leave the room. At the door he looked back.

Mortimer, with a smile of peace upon his face, rested, with even breath, and the color of returning health creeping into his wasted cheeks.

CHAPTER XXV

DARKNESS

THE month of respite that Sylvia Hall had given herself before becoming the bride of Isaac Frake was near its close. Another day would be the last. Frake, who had been at his place on the Rock River, had returned to New Salem two days before, resplendent in a new suit of butternut and a high, stiff-crowned hat that he had gone all the way to Chicago to purchase, and was conducting himself in lofty manner at Rutledge's tavern. In obedience to a promise made to Sylvia, which he had the craft to observe, he had not proclaimed his errand in specific and definite terms; but he had deeply hinted at it, which was sufficient in a village with the news facilities of New Salem.

Sylvia was sitting in the large room of her kinsfolk's cabin, which served as kitchen, parlor, dining-room, and nursery by day, and bedroom by night. The children were at the little school kept by Mentor Graham; the father and mother in the harvest fields. Rachel, married to William Munson, lived in a home of her own. Sylvia was alone in the house.

She sat by the open door, looking out upon the cluster of houses and the street that led between them to the mill behind the bluff. Her hands were

in her lap. She was idle. She was not even thinking. A perfect calm was upon her—a final stoicism. She had chosen, and was adjusted to life.

As she sat there she saw the angular form of Abraham Lincoln ambling up the street. He was keeper of a store now, having failed in his election to the legislature. Her heart felt a pang for him as he walked slowly along; for a great grief was close beside him. Ann Rutledge lay at her home desperately ill, a prey to the morbid sensitiveness of her conscience. She had always accused herself of breaking faith with the man who had betrayed her confidence and deserted her. Sylvia understood the story with a woman's intuition, and pitied the man.

As he came near he raised his eyes from the ground and looked at her. Without removing his gaze, he came toward the open door. She arose and bade him enter. He did so, in silence. Pacing up and down the room without speaking, he confronted her at last, fixing his sad eyes upon hers. "I have good excuse for coming here this afternoon," he said.

She told him he needed none. He acknowledged her graciousness with a momentary lowering of his eyes.

"I have something for you," he went on.

She murmured something that was nothing and waited for him to continue.

"I had a very dear friend once," he said, soberly. "He was the finest man I ever knew. One day he

set out on a dangerous journey. Before he went he gave me something that I was to give to you if he never came back. I do not think he is coming back.”

His voice faltered. She stepped toward him with a quickening heart. There was that in his manner and tone which told her the matter was portentous.

“It was one night when I was with the soldiers, in camp near Dixon’s. It was just after you had been captured by the Indians. He came into the camp that night; he had just come from Indian Creek with the alarm. He had gone there to see you, and found the place in ruins. Your brother had told him what had happened to you, and he was setting out alone to find you. He was afraid he would not come back, and he wanted me to give it to you if he didn’t. He said it would remove a shadow. I have waited a long time. I am afraid he is not coming. Here it is. Do you know who it is from?”

He held out toward her a large envelope.

“Yes,” she whispered, trembling throughout her frame as she reached out a hand and took it.

“There will be no harm if you read it and he does come,” went on Lincoln, looking tenderly down upon her bowed head. “He was going to have you read it when he started for Indian Creek this spring. He wanted you to read it; only, he wanted to give it to you himself. But I am afraid he is not coming, and I thought you ought to have it before it is too late.”

There was a significance in the tone of his closing

sentence that caused her to look quickly at him. He had turned toward the door and she could not see his face. Before she could command herself to speak, before she could be sure whether she wished to hear more from him, he was gone.

With a fluttering heart, she hastened to the light by the door, clasping the envelope eagerly in her hands, like hope new found. Reaching the doorway, she paused, her eyes staring wide into the future before her. The letter dropped from her hands. She leaned against the door post. She dared not read. She dared not brave the past. What if this letter should tell her that what she believed were not true? What if it should tell her that it was true? She was contented with what she knew; why should she know more? She had won the fight with her past; why should she risk the struggle again? She had adjusted herself to the future; should she hazard it all on a bit of writing? It would be folly. And had he any right to wish her to read it now? Was there any shadow that could be removed? He was dead now; should she revive her buried memories?

Being at the last a woman, she picked it up and read.

It was a letter to Mortimer Randolph, Esquire, formerly of Roanoke, Virginia, indited to him by a firm of attorneys in Richmond, Virginia.

“We find ourselves at liberty to inform you,” it ran, after formal salutation, “and take great pleas-

ure in so doing, that the recent unfortunate misapprehension under which you considered it advisable to leave your home and family connections has been removed. Through the death of your brother, facts have come to light which make it obvious to all acquainted with the circumstances that, instead of being a malefactor deserving the execration and contempt of your family and friends, under which you suffer, you are in truth worthy the greatest honor and respect; that you have made a courageous and noble sacrifice of yourself, and taken the blame of another's sin, out of consideration for his wife and children, who would have been keen sufferers had the truth been known; a belief which you will permit us to say we have entertained throughout the trying episode. In brief, your brother, dying, has confessed to the infamy of which you permitted yourself to be suspected. We are requested by your parents to communicate with you, to this effect, and to forward to you letters from them, severally, which we herewith beg to enclose. Congratulating you most heartily,

“We beg to remain, dear sir,

“Your obedient and faithful s'v'ts,

“HENDERSON & LEE, Att'ys at Law.”

As she finished she sank upon the chair which she had occupied before Lincoln came, bringing the letter. In the tumult of her feelings she was forced to

wait and calm herself before she could collect her thoughts.

She looked for the enclosures; they were missing. She glanced about the room to see if they had slipped from the envelope to the floor. She could not find them. She opened the letter again, which, in her emotion, she had folded and folded into a thin, hard strip, and read it a second time. She arose from the chair and walked to the doorway, oppressed, seeking light and air.

Why should she be so perturbed by the communication? Why should it stir the mighty powers of all that lay in her past into contention against her readjustment to life? What had this, whatever it might mean, to do with that other thing? What could they of Virginia know of an Indian squaw on the banks of the Mississippi River? How could a brother's guilt clear him? Why should it disturb her to know he had ever made such a sacrifice? Why should it arouse an anguish in her soul before which she felt herself becoming helpless? It had no bearing. It must not, it should not, unsettle her!

The sound of a horse's hoofs crunching in the sand of the roadway; a low whinny; the glad cry of a voice; someone was moving swiftly toward her! She was half aware of it all through her obsession. She recalled her eyes.

They rested upon the face of Mortimer Randolph, wan and worn, beautiful in the joy of seeing her.

“Sylvia! Sylvia!” he murmured, coming close, with eager haste.

She shrank from him. Her countenance was blank. He stopped, troubled and at a loss.

“Sylvia!” he said.

She turned from him and entered the house, making no response. He followed slowly, uncertainly. He passed to her side. He touched her hand—the hand that held the opened letter. She withdrew it from his touch; she shrugged her shoulder away from him.

“Don’t touch me—yet,” she said, in hollow voice, averting her face, and extending the hand with the letter in it as though she would have held him off with it.

Instantly he became all repose and self-possession. “Miss Hall, I humbly crave your pardon,” he said, with calmness and formality. It was not rebuke, it was not offended dignity, it was not wounded pride; it was only the delicate consideration of an instinctive gentleman for a woman’s wish that molded the form of his speech and gave it its tone. He believed that she had changed in her affection; he would not question her privilege. “I ask you to forgive my effrontery. It was not my intention to be rude. Perhaps you will be able to condone my blunder; perhaps you will be able to understand how I fell into it. I—in the circumstances, I was led to expect another form of greeting from you. I again ask your indulgence for my unwitting mistake.”

The tone of his voice pierced her soul; the sincerity and generosity of his words rent her. Her body was wrenched by her unhappiness. He saw, and knew he had caused her pain.

“I beg you will not misunderstand me,” he hastened to say, still calm, and misunderstanding her most completely. “I had no intention of insinuating that your welcome should have been different. I hope you do not think that. It would be most unwarrantable presumption in me to question your attitude toward me. That I have no cause for doing and should have no right to do if I thought there were cause. There was nothing in our former intercourse that would give me the privilege of asking of you the consideration I did myself the honor to expect on a renewal of our acquaintance. If there had been, I should not now have the right to press you for a renewal of kindness, after the lapse of time and events which have intervened since our parting. I am grieved to have given you pain. I beg you will not permit yourself to believe either that you owe me any regard because of our former acquaintance, or that I feel that you do. I am indebted to you for the great pleasure of such companionship as you accorded me. I can only thank you, and beg that you will permit me to look back upon my association with you with pleasure and gratitude.”

He spoke slowly, with a feeling in his voice that he could not hide, though he made an effort to do so. He labored to make her understand that he held

her free to change in her regard for him, without implying what the regard had been. His eyes were on the floor as he spoke. He did not see that she trembled with stifled sobs as she heard his chivalrous, magnanimous words.

“No, no, it is not that,” she said, with averted face, still holding the letter extended toward him. “This letter,” she added, fluttering it in her trembling hand. “Is there anything more than this letter?”

For the first time he observed what it was, having refrained from looking at it before, believing it private. He was puzzled to see her with it.

“Where did you get it?” he asked, nonplussed. “When did you get it?”

“He gave it to me, today?”

“Abraham Lincoln?”

“Yes.”

“Did he know I was coming?”

“He said you were not coming.”

“There were enclosures,” said Mortimer, after a pause, beginning to think that he saw her meaning. “I have lost them, I am afraid. I have been ill, and they were mislaid. I can tell you what they said.”

“No, no,” she repeated, in a heavy voice. “It is not that. Is there nothing else you have to tell me?”

She was losing the fight! She knew it, and was glad! He could tell her all the horrible truth now, and she would be rejoiced to yield the fight, to surrender herself to him. Only, he must tell her. She

dared not look at him as she awaited his reply. She waited long, for he was lost in an effort to fathom her meaning. To her heart, each moment that she waited was a lifetime.

“There is nothing I can bring to mind to which you might be referring” he said, at length, slowly. “There seems to be some strange and subtle misunderstanding between us, Miss Hall,” he added, still in his formal tone. “Perhaps we should be able to remove it by mutual explanation. Can you tell me more definitely what you mean? Are you willing to?”

She could not speak for a moment. “Is there nothing about an Indian?” she asked, slowly, with a struggle between each succeeding word.

“I have had experiences with the Indians recently,” he replied, perplexed. “If you will be more definite?”

“About an Indian woman?” with an effort which cost heavily.

Mortimer was more confused than he had been. “I do not know what you mean, Miss Hall,” he said. “Can you not help me a little further?”

“No, no, no, no,” she cried, in a voice that was between a moan and a whisper. “I can not! Oh, he will not tell me! He will not tell me!”

She placed her hands before her face, and walked slowly toward the door, weeping. Mortimer followed her with his eyes, amazed.

As he watched her, he saw the figure of Isaac

Frake in the doorway. Sylvia saw it at the same moment through her tears. She recoiled and stood in the center of the room, like a statue.

“Well, what’s going on?” demanded Frake, angrily; for he feared this man as one fears another to whom he has done deadly injury; and fear is anger and hatred.

“What you doing to this woman? What do you mean by coming here and taking advantage of a defenseless woman? You needn’t think you can play any of your tricks here!”

There was silence. Mortimer overlooked the bitter, burning insult for the time. His eyes were fixed on Sylvia. He watched her closely, trying to understand.

“What you doing here?” demanded Frake again, with a show of the heroic. Seeing Randolph with Sylvia, and seeing Sylvia in distress, he thought the man was seeking a reconciliation, which he knew could be effected, given the opportunity. From this false premise, he concluded, shrewdly enough, that his greatest security lay in vigorously braving the other down, depending for his advantage on Sylvia’s conviction that Randolph was a guilty man.

Mortimer, wholly ignoring the other’s bluster, spoke quietly to Sylvia.

“Is it your wish that I should answer this man?” he asked, deferentially.

“He has the right to ask it,” returned Sylvia, meeting his gaze with sublime courage.

“Mr. Frake,” said Mortimer to him, advancing and extending his right hand; there was no sign in his face of the surprise, the dismay, the grief that was in his heart, “I offer you an apology. In regard to my visit to Miss Hall, I have to say that I came here this afternoon after a long absence with the desire of renewing an acquaintance with her which I once found enjoyable. I found her averse to a resumption of our former friendship, which she had given me no reason to suppose she would care to revive. I protest to you, as one entitled to my confidence in the matter, that I have no knowledge of the cause of her perturbation, and do not feel myself at liberty to conjecture.”

Frake considered it best to take the hand extended to him, and to express briefly his satisfaction in the explanation offered by Mortimer. This done, the Virginian dismissed the entire subject with a word, and turned toward Sylvia. She was pale and slightly trembling; but for that her outward calm was complete.

“Miss Hall, permit me to say good bye, and to express again my regret in having annoyed you,” he said, respectfully, bowing to her in strict formality. Again it was not to rebuke her, but to relieve her, if necessary, from any embarrassment that her memories might have caused her. It was to erase all that had been between them; for such seemed to be her wish.

“Good bye, Mr. Randolph,” she said, evenly; and he was gone from the room.

CHAPTER XXVI

LIGHT

ABRAHAM LINCOLN lay on his back in the grass at the foot of an oak that grew in front of his store, one of his grotesque feet resting high on the trunk of a tree. A book leaned against his up-raised knees—a volume of Blackstone. He was endeavoring to read it, but was making little progress. It was not often that he failed to concentrate his attention upon his reading when he was able to assume the position which he now enjoyed. It was his favorite attitude. To-day it availed him nothing. He had shuffled his feet higher and higher along the bole of the tree to the extreme length of his long legs, to no purpose. He could not keep his mind on the pages before him.

Isaac Frake was the cause of his mental disturbance. He was worried and annoyed because Isaac Frake had returned to New Salem, and because there appeared to be foundation for the rumor that Isaac Frake was about to take Sylvia Hall to wife. He knew Isaac Frake from top to bottom. He knew Sylvia Hall as well as it is given man to know woman. He knew Mortimer Randolph with the informing love of one strong man for another. He knew the tender and abiding affection that Randolph

had borne for Sylvia. Mortimer had told him of it upon occasions, most memorably upon the eve of his departure for Indian Creek in April, after the day he had received a certain important and interesting communication from his attorneys in Richmond, Virginia.

Knowing these things, he was disturbed and made anxious by the prospective marriage of Frake and Sylvia. He was positive that Sylvia could not know what manner of man Frake was, or how he had concerned himself in her affairs and the affairs of her lover. Making every charitable allowance for the circumstance that Sylvia was a woman, he still could not credit that she would marry this man if she had even a suspicion of the truth about him.

From which, being logical, he deduced that there was a bitter misunderstanding somewhere, and that a great and irreparable blunder would be made if something or someone did not prevent it. So far he could go, and no further, in Blackstone or out; for Mortimer was among the dead or missing. He had not been seen or reported since the day of the fight at Bad Axe, when he had been observed passing over the crest of a hill leading his horse and raging with fever, or—worse. If Mortimer were here, or known to be alive, something might be effected. He himself was in possession of certain facts which would go far toward bringing about a better state of affairs. But without Mortimer he could not see the way.

Lying on his back with his feet high on the trunk

of the oak, Abraham Lincoln felt that he had much to blame himself with, as he thought of Mortimer. He believe that he had blundered, largely and fatally. When he overheard the conversation between Frake and Half Ear in the creek bed at Kellogg's Grove he had not interfered then in the designs and machinations of the man for reasons that he thought good. He argued that Mortimer, roaming among the Indians, would be in no graver danger from Half Ear, under instructions from Frake, than he already was exposed to. Half Ear, as well as any other Sauk, would probably kill him anyway if the chance offered.

As far as the plan involved the release of the Hall sisters, he approved of it. If Half Ear could succeed in abducting them from Black Hawk's band they would at least obtain their freedom, and Sylvia could subsequently be rescued from Frake, either when Frake met the Indian at Kellogg's Grove or when he brought the girls back to civilization. Indeed, he had so far followed out a counterplot in that direction as to send Slicky Bill Green, his faithful follower, upon a secret mission to Kellogg's Grove as soon as he himself had returned from his discharge at Watertown. But Slicky Bill had failed him lamentably, just as others were to fail him later in life when matters of greater moment depended.

Even now, in the midst of the miscarriage of his counterplot, his conviction that he had erred arose rather from his failure to effect his purpose than

from any flaw he could find in his schemes by process of logic. Nevertheless, the conviction was strong and depressing, and whether the fault were his or not, the fact existed that Sylvia was about to be precipitated into a tragic disaster, and Mortimer was out of reach, to say the least.

The state of affairs had engaged his agitated attention for some days; ever since Frake's return, in fact. A delicacy about interfering in another's concerns, increased by the element of uncertainty arising from the circumstance that that other was a woman, had deterred him from any open activities until this day. This very afternoon his sense of obligation to his friend and of duty toward the young woman had impelled him to take one step. He had gone to Sylvia with the communication that Mortimer had received from his Richmond attorneys and which he had entrusted to him for conditional delivery to Sylvia when he set out on his hazardous search for her. He had explained to her the circumstances of his having it. In fact, he had not returned from his errand ten minutes before, to resume his Blackstone and his recumbent attitude.

But his thoughts persistently wandered from Blackstone to Mortimer and Sylvia. The more he thought of the matter, the more convinced he was that the cloud that the attorneys' communication was intended to clear away was not the only darkness that existed between Mortimer and Sylvia; that it would not of itself be sufficient to induce her to repu-

diate Mortimer and marry this other man. He did not know anything about the elaborate and lucky devices by which Frake had prevailed upon her to think that Mortimer already had an Indian wife when he fell in love with her, but he was convinced that something more than a shadow had destroyed her faith in his friend, and that the letter alone would not suffice in setting matters to rights.

Coming to this conclusion, he took his feet down from their elevated resting place and stood upright upon them, resolved to return to her and utterly blast Frake before her eyes, if nothing more were to be effected by it than her own salvation. Turning in the direction of the cabin where she lived, which was within sight of his tree, and casting his glance thither, his heart jumped.

Standing before the cabin he saw a horse; a beautiful roan thoroughbred which he could not possibly mistake. As he gazed at the animal in stupefaction, in which was mingled a trace of superstitious alarm, he saw Isaac Frake approach the door of the cabin and enter. Without further delay he clapped his book together, threw it without regard into the open door of his store, and plodded up the street, thankful for the first time in his life for the length of his legs.

As he came near he heard a voice within, a low, modulated voice. It was the sweetest sound he had ever heard, and gave him the greatest throb of joy he had ever known, for it was the voice of Mortimer

Randolph. He put his legs to a greater strain, and ran forward, arriving at the door just in time to fold Mortimer himself in his great arms, as he was coming forth, so unutterably sad and woebegone that he did not see his friend until he felt his embrace. Without stopping for other greeting than the accidental hug, Lincoln bolted through the door, dragging Mortimer with him, struggling as much as a gentleman from Virginia could with decorum on being brought into the presence of a lady.

Frake, with his back to the door, was standing before Sylvia, talking to her in rough expostulation, evidently demanding to see the letter that she still held in her hand. She gave him no response, either of look or word, seeming utterly dazed and lost.

“Howdy, Miss Hall,” said Lincoln, scarcely able to repress jocosity in his voice, so great was his exultant delight in finding matters as they were. “Howdy, Frake!”

Sylvia stared blankly at him, and at Randolph. Frake turned abruptly and fell into a state of bewildered consternation at sight of the two. Randolph, not yet released by his friend, stood with his hat in his hand and his head bowed, like a recalcitrant schoolboy.

“Miss Hall,” said Lincoln, gazing gloriously around, “I suppose the first thing I ought to do would be to apologize for coming here like this, but I’m not going to do it. If I’m right I won’t need to apologize, and if I’m wrong I’ll have a whole lot more to

apologize for than just coming here, so I'm not going to waste time doing it now."

Sylvia Hall, feeling the imminence of a great event in her life, made no answer, unless the recalling of her attention from abstraction and the fixing of it upon Lincoln with an intentness that he could almost physically feel might be termed a response. Frake remained staring, with a sullen gleam of anger and fear coming into his eyes. Mortimer continued as he was, fairly in the hands of fate.

"I may be right and I may be wrong," Lincoln went on, his voice ringing with gladness and enthusiasm. "I'm willing to take the consequences, and the responsibility is all mine. I'll answer for it. I might as well be brief. The truth is somewhere about here, and we can never get to the truth too soon; sometimes not soon enough."

Mortimer ventured to raise his eyes toward his friend. His thoughts were all afloat. He could not wait to hear what Lincoln had to say. He could not listen to it with his eyes on the floor. Sylvia still looked at Lincoln. Frake, overwhelmed by the suddenness and surprise of Lincoln's interruption and his own fears, looked from one to another furtively.

"Miss Hall, something seems to be wrong here," Lincoln continued, looking into her eyes with a sympathy and sincerity that made her heart flutter again, and build up hopes. "I am not a great believer in meddling with others folks' affairs unless I am asked, but something seems to have gone so

far wrong here that I am not going to wait to be asked."

The words were prophetic of the events that were to make him a great character of history, belonging to the centuries.

"My excuse is my love for this man and my regard for you," he said, jerking his head toward Mortimer and Sylvia in turn. "I'd risk making a big mistake for either. That letter doesn't seem to have done much good;"—he inclined his eyes toward it—"it doesn't seem to be all that's needed to set things right. Frake"—he turned suddenly—"Frake, I want to ask you a few questions."

He paused longer than he had at any time in his talk, with his eyes fastened upon the man. Frake met his gaze with sullen defiance.

"Did you ever happen to know a miserable little Indian by the name of Half Ear?" Lincoln asked, quietly.

"Now see here, Lincoln," growled Frake, his face growing intensely red and ghastly white in swift succession, "none of your blamed jokes, now! I won't put up with 'em."

Sylvia, in quivering expectancy, turned her eyes upon the face of Frake, and saw there much more than the answer he refused to make. Mortimer glanced at him for a moment, returning his gaze to Lincoln. Lincoln, releasing him and gesticulating with his long arms as he proceeded, spoke again. Mortimer might have left now, but he did not. He

was held by something stronger than the strong arm of his friend. He was held by the expression on Sylvia's face, which he saw in a glance as his eyes returned to Lincoln.

"You make it pretty clear that you do know him, Frake," the tall, thin man resumed. "Now, Frake, do you remember seeing this Indian in the woods at Kellogg's grove that afternoon when we found the five dead bodies?" Frake was speechless with surprise and dismay. "And do you remember meeting him in the bed of a dry creek that same evening?" Frake only stared at him. The eyes of Mortimer and Sylvia, fixed upon him, seared into his soul.

"Do you happen to recall what you said to him that night?" continued Lincoln, not deeming it necessary that Frake should make verbal acknowledgment of the truth of the incidents which his questions suggested as having happened.

"You seem to know more about it than I do," muttered Frake, hoarsely, with an abortive attempt at bravado.

"I reckon I know more about it than you think I do," returned Lincoln, "because I was lying in the bushes right behind you while you talked with him." Frake gasped. The attention of Sylvia became more intensely fixed, if that were possible. Mortimer began to see the first faint glimmerings of a light breaking ahead.

"I am going to tell these people what passed there, since you won't do it," said Lincoln, earnestly.

“I think it would interest and enlighten them. If I go wrong, you will correct my mistakes. First, you gave the Indian your bottle of whiskey—there wasn’t much left, I reckon. He seemed to expect whiskey from you. You told Half Ear that he was no good because he let that red-headed paleface get away from him on the morning before the massacre at Indian Creek—the morning when Mortimer Randolph rode with express to Ottawa—didn’t you, Frake? And you told him that he was a fool to let Black Hawk get hold of the Hall girls after he and Mike Girty had stolen them for you from Indian Creek, didn’t you, Frake? You told him that if he had turned them over to you instead he would have a barrel of whiskey for his pains, didn’t you? And you renewed the offer of a barrel of whiskey if he would kidnap them from the Indian chief who held them captive and bring them to that same spot where you sat. Am I wrong? You also said that he could have half of the reward of a thousand dollars offered for their return, which would keep him in whiskey until it rotted his pesky hide. I hope you gave him his share, Frake. And you gave him promise of still further reward. You told him that if he got a certain red scalp and brought it to you, he could have another half barrel of whiskey. Frake, your sense of color or your choice of adjectives is not very good. The scalp you meant is not red; it is more nearly the color of bronze!”

He spoke without passion or malice. His voice

rose as he went on, but the increase in pitch was more from joy and gladness rather than from other excitement; for the grim jest he played was dear to his heart. His disclosures poured so rapidly from his lips, their significance and intimate bearing upon those who listened were so stupendous and of such moment to all of them, that there was not a sound or the movement of a muscle in the room as he uttered them. As he concluded with his reference to the scalp of red hair, he turned his eyes critically toward Mortimer and looked quizzically at his head.

“What the hell were you doing there?” cried Frake, utterly routed and confounded. Lincoln smiled at his unwitting confession to the truth of all he had just said.

“I didn’t quite know why I was there that night,” replied Lincoln, with a drawl, “but I am beginning to find out now. I merely thought at the time that you would bear watching. I didn’t interfere with you then, Frake, because I thought your scheme might be a good way to free the Hall girls. And it was. It was. So far it worked out right. We are all grateful to you for that, Frake.”

“I saved their lives,” blurted Frake, seeing a loop-hole.

“You cannot complain of ingratitude on that score, Frake,” rejoined Lincoln, shaking his head and his long forefinger at him, “because, unless I am mistaken, Sylvia Hall is going to marry you for that.” He was guilty of the indelicacy wittingly,

with specific intention and purpose. He said it because the moment was psychological.

A sob that was half a moan escaped from Sylvia. She turned away her head and covered her face with one arm, clinging with the other hand to the rough wall of the cabin, wavering, unsteady. The soft look of love in Mortimer's eyes, fastened upon her, became more tender, more compassionate, more yearning. Involuntarily he made a move to go to her, but checked himself. The time was not yet come. Frake, confounded, cast his gaze upon the puncheon floor.

"There's one thing more I want to ask you about, Frake, before I go," Lincoln began again. "I don't know that it applies at all. If it does, I don't see the connection, but it has to do with facts concerning yourself, and facts about you should not be overlooked at present. Do you know anything about an Indian woman named Raven Hair?"

Raven Hair! At the sound of the name Sylvia reeled against the wall. She closed her eyes behind the arm that hid them. She dared not meet the look in any face. Mortimer, seeing its effect upon her, wondered, seeking vainly in his memory for explanation of it, believing in his heart that here lay the solution of the enigma.

"Ask him!" snarled Frake, jerking his thumb toward Mortimer, intending to sneer and leer.

Ask him! Ask him! Mortimer, beginning to understand, looked at Sylvia. She shuddered against the rough logs of the wall. The light began to break

upon him. The clouds rifted and scattered. The time was coming swiftly.

"I might ask him," returned Lincoln, calmly. "He might know something about her. But you probably know more, because she was your wife."

Sylvia, leaning against the rough wall, uttered a low cry. Mortimer heard, and the light was full upon him. The time was close at hand.

"The hell she was my wife!" growled Frake, at bay. "She was not my wife."

"It's your shame to say so, then," rejoined Lincoln, solemnly. "She should have been."

A tense silence. Lincoln broke it.

"What do you know about it?" growled Frake, beaten.

"Why that old Indian who came into camp on the night after we left Dixon's ferry, whom you tried to kill, told me about it," replied Lincoln, "and I don't think he was such an awful liar as you tried to make out, Frake!"

Frake, in the wrath of defeat, turned fiercely toward Sylvia.

"I've had enough of this, Sylvia," he snarled. "Are you going to let these men come here and insult me? If they won't get out, we will. Get your bonnet and come with me!"

It was a command, a command in which all the brute and the coward and the bully that was in him found voice. Sylvia stood apart from the wall. She took her arm from before her face. She was a



“Sylvia!” His hand reached forth and touched her’s, gently.

tigress; a princess of the Goths a thousand years out of the past; a priestess of Greece; erect, raging, magnificent, sublime in her lofty dignity.

“Go!”

Her arm, the arm that had hidden her eyes, extended toward the door. Her voice was solemn, awful. Frake, quailing before her terrible look, cast his eyes furtively about the room, from one face to another, and slunk out. Lincoln, watching him go, followed. As he passed through the opening there came into his eyes a look of unutterable, wistful sadness, for as he left these lovers his thoughts were of his own love, of Ann Rutledge, who lay dying in her father's house.

“Sylvia!” Mortimer whispered her name, coming close to her, where she stood by the wall of the cabin. In his voice was all the love, all the compassion, all the tenderness that was in his eyes. The light was full within him. The time had come. Her head was upon her breast. Her hands were clenched at her sides. She wavered and swayed. Her heart burst within her with joy and with grief. Her gladness was smothered beneath the weight of the wrong she had done this man, her lover, whom she loved with her whole life.

“Sylvia!” His hand reached forth and touched hers, gently.

“Leave me,” she said, in a heavy whisper. “I

cannot lift my head. I cannot look into your eyes. I have sinned against you.”

He raised her stiff and clutching hand. Gently, sweetly, he lifted her head.

“Sylvia!”

She raised her lids, slowly, timidly, falteringly. Her eyes met his. In them was contrition, humility, adoration, inestimable love, unutterable joy.

He kissed her upon the lips.

THE END.

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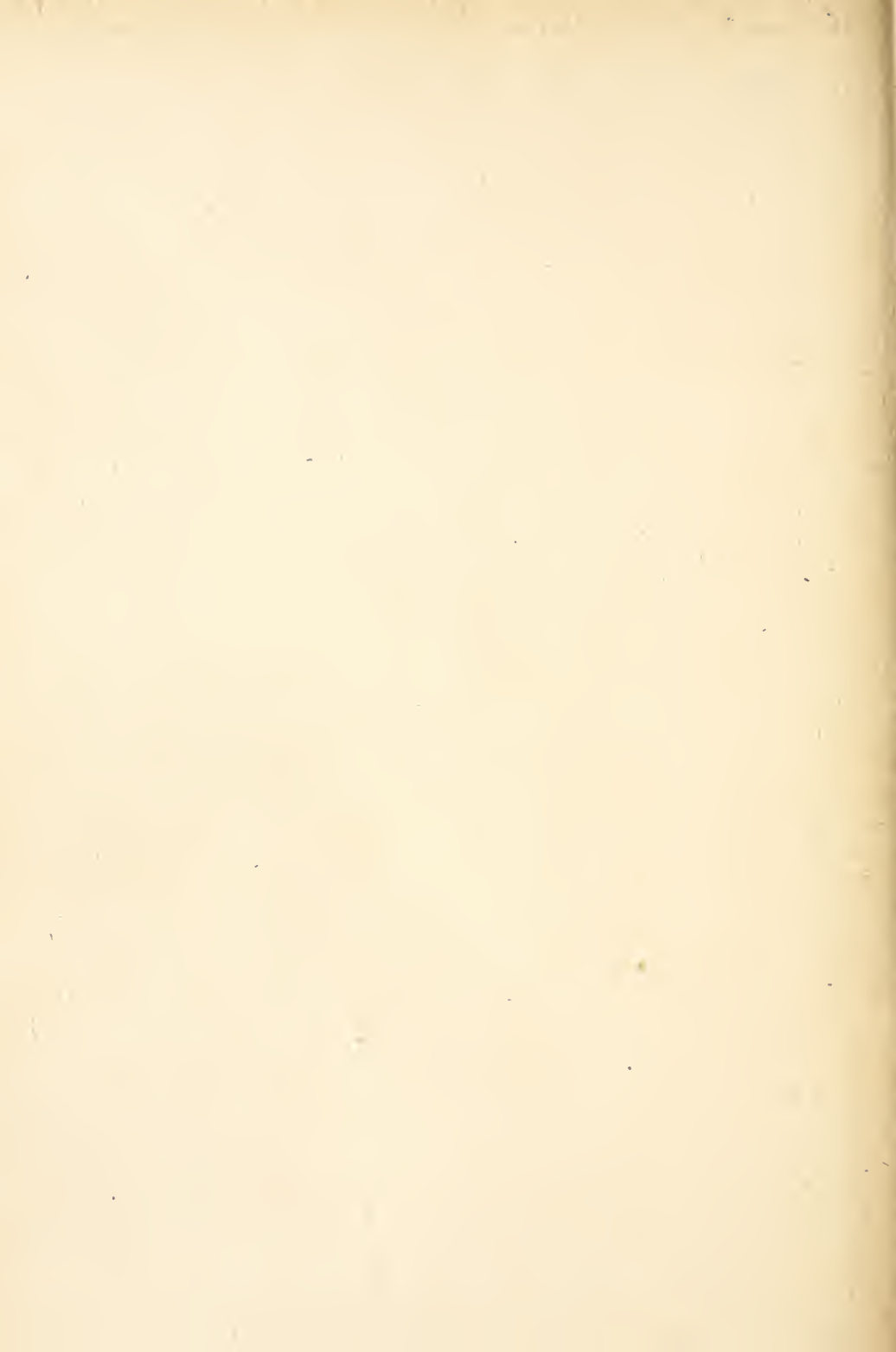
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