THE RANGER

HERBERT STRANG

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ROB THE RANGER

A STORY OF THE FIGHT FOR CANADA

By

HERBERT STRANG

Author of

Jack Hardy, In Clive's Command
On the Trail of the Arabs
Fighting on the Congo

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

W. H. MARGETSON

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ROB THE RANGER

CHAPTER I

ROB AND HIS FRIENDS

Somewhere about noon, on a hot August day in the year 1757, a party of three was seated on a small pebbly beach at the bend of a little rivulet flowing from a spur of the Alleghanies into the Hudson River. It was a spot that, serving them now for shade, might have served equally well for concealment. Two huge elms spread leafy arms over the little bay, itself not a dozen yards across, and all around stretched the mighty forest, which, a hundred and fifty years ago, extended almost unbroken from the Hudson to the Ohio and the Missouri. The stream rippled musically over the pebbles, shining white in the sunlight: but the sward at the edge was shaded by the canopy of foliage, and there the three men lazily reposed.

They had just finished a meal, washed down by the limpid water of the brook. One sat up, his hands clasped about his knees; the other two lay on their backs, resting their heads on their hands and gazing up into the mass of green. Now and again one would address the other in low tones, but their conversation was disjointed and

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fitful, and it never included the sitting man, who remained silent, motionless, like a figure of wood.

"Seems to me," said the elder at length, "we might just as well lie snug to-night and fetch Edward in the morning."

There was the hint of a question in the remark, but his companion merely grunted. The speaker, it was clear, was not so much asking for an opinion as avoiding the appearance of discourtesy. They lay in the easy attitude of men who have traveled far and are accustomed to make the most of casual opportunities of repose. Side by side they presented a strange contrast. The elder man was thin, wiry, somewhat undersized, clad in a garb half Indian, half backwoods—a fringed frock of buckskin, scarlet leggings, and beaded moccasins. His face was almost hidden by a thick and ragged growth of black hair streaked with gray; shaggy eyebrows formed dark arches above his blue eyes. He might have been any age from forty to fifty-five. His companion was much younger—a thin, tall youth of perhaps seventeen, his clean-cut, hairless face bronzed by sun and wind, alive with the alert and self-reliant look that comes to those who have dwelt much in the backwoods, trusting to the protection of a quick eye and a ready hand.

Different as these two were, the third member of the party differed still more markedly from either. His skin was red with the redness of nature; his high cheek-bones, arched nose, and black scalp-tuft decorated with plumes proclaimed him an Indian. About his loins a half-yard of broadcloth was fastened by a girdle; his legs from the knee down were covered with tight leggings of leather ornamented with embroidery and porcupine quills curiously colored; on his feet he wore moccasins of undressed buffalo hide. A hunting-knife was stuck into his girdle, a bullet-pouch hung from his waist, and heavy ornaments

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of brass wire dragged at the lobes of his ears. As he sat at the brink of the stream, his head bent forward upon his knees, his bronze features solemn and impressive, he might have been taken to come between the two white men in point of age; in reality he was the youngest of the party.

No further word passed between the reclining men, and they were dozing into somnolence when a movement on the part of the Indian caused them to open their eyes and spring suddenly to a sitting posture. They saw that he had raised his head in an attitude of intent listening. Both reached silently for the long muskets that lay beside them, and, all their senses alert, gazed fixedly at their colored companion. For a minute or two all three were as motionless as statues; then the Indian rose to his feet and, pointing in a direction which, from the position of the sun, was northeast of their resting-place, he uttered in a guttural whisper the one word, "Gun!"

"I didn't hear nothin'," whispered the elder man, turning to the boy, "but that ain't to say thar' warn't a gun. Redwing's ears are quicker'n our'n, I reckon."

Even as he spoke the Indian raised his hand.

"Two guns—big!"

"That so, eh? Well, ayther they're practisin' at William Henry, or the Frenchers are at 'em; and if that is the truth of it, we must have a middlin' care of our scalps —eh, Rob?"

"That's all right, Pete," returned the boy with a laugh. "But what are we to do?"

"Well, seems to me t'ud be safest, and most in keepin' with common sense, if we makes tracks immediate for Fort Edward. Gosh! the Mohawk is right—he mostly is; did ye hear that big gun? 'Pears that the Frenchers are havin' a rale set-to at William Henry: and if that's so, the woods'll be thick with moonsers and redskins, and

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we couldn't get through 'em. Ain't that the common sense of it?"

"I don't know about common sense. Dad's in William Henry: and if there's fighting I ought to be there, too. Risk or no risk, I ought to get in if it's at all possible. Can it be done, Pete?"

"That's accordin'. I've knowed the country all my life; the redskin or Frencher as could keep me out would have to ha' bin born *very* early in the mornin'. And Redwing, too; he knows his way about. Me by myself, him by himself, course we could. But three together—no, it ain't common sense to think we could do it arm in arm, so to say; and you by yourself—"

"Oh, come now, Pete, you've often told me I'm a pretty good backwoodsman—thanks to you and Redwing. Why shouldn't you and I chance it? If we *must* part, Redwing can make his way to Edward and then back to his village."

Hitherto the Indian, without relaxing his attitude of attention, had listened in stolid silence to the whispered conversation. Now he interposed.

"Where my brother goes, I go," he said. "That was my brother's word; will he break it?"

"He's right, Pete. We arranged to stick together, before we started. I'm not going back on it."

"Jest like a pig; pull his tail and he goes for'ard! Wal, two's company and three's fun, as Caleb Blodget used to say, and if you will—but I warn you thar's no common sense in it."

While this conversation was proceeding, the travelers had been packing into their wallets the remnants of their meal and the tin cans from which they had drunk. This done, they obliterated all traces of their sojourn, and resumed their journey. Pete led the way; the others followed him in single file, Redwing bringing up the rear.

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A spectator, had any been present, could not have witnessed their march without admiration. He might also have been surprised at the change in the mien and bearing of the men. The laxness of their siesta had given place to a keen alertness which nothing could escape. Bending forward, they trod so lightly on their moccasined feet that no sound betrayed their movements. As they cut into the undergrowth, and then into the thick woods, they avoided unerringly the innumerable twigs that beset their path, choosing soft places where there was nothing to creak or crackle beneath their tread. Pete dodged in and out among the trees, with a rapidity only possible to the practised woodsman; and his two companions copied him with mathematical exactness, planting their feet where his had fallen, so accurately that none but the acutest Indian could have discovered that three men, not one, had passed.

Rather more than half an hour after they left the brookside they came almost unawares upon a long, narrow clearing, made, not by the careful axes of woodmen, but by the passage of a tornado. Uprooted trees lay here and there, felled, as it were, recklessly by the mighty blast, some crossing the path that seemed to have been cut clean out of the mass of green, others piled confusedly on either side. True to the woodsman's instinct Pete was just about to turn off and skirt the opening, so as to lessen the chance of being observed, when suddenly he raised his hand as in warning, and in the twinkling of an eye dropped down before a huge trunk that obstructed the path.

Rob Somers, three feet behind, was but a second in following Pete's example. Yet, quick as he was, he had been anticipated by Redwing, whose sharp ears had caught, at the same moment as his leader's, the faint sound which had so suddenly arrested his progress.

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"What is it?" whispered Rob, wriggling noiselessly to Pete's side.

"Hush! Listen!"

And then Rob, the least experienced of the three, heard a slight crackling ahead, and knew that some living creature, man or animal, was moving rapidly over dry twigs. Pete ventured to raise his head and peep over the tree trunk in the direction of the sound. He saw a man threading his way with all speed through the sparser trees on the farther side of the clearing. Almost at the same instant the runner swerved abruptly to the left, as though he, too, like the trapper, was loath to cross the open space. But even as he did so a shot rang out through the silence of the wood, behind him, and also, it seemed, somewhat to his left, for he again changed his course, and now came, running fleetly as a deer, straight across the glade toward the party in ambush.

"Scuppered, for sure!" whispered Pete; and Rob, cautiously lifting his head, saw that the shot had indeed taken effect; the man stumbled as he ran, recovered himself with an effort, then after two paces, and before he had come half-way across the glade, pitched helplessly forward on to his face.

Once more the silence was broken. A yell of triumph hailed his fall, and the watchers saw several dusky figures emerging from various directions toward the fugitive. Pete heard an exclamation at his right, and, flinging out his hand, was just in time to grip Rob's shoulder and prevent him from springing to the hapless man's assistance.

"Wait!" murmured the elder man; and Rob, recognizing that his movement had been imprudent, allowed himself to be drawn back.

The figures of the actors in this rapid drama could now be clearly distinguished. The fugitive was a white

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man, or at least a half-breed; he was clad in the semi-barbarous costume common with backwoodsmen, and but for his shaven face and a dash of bright color in his coat might have been a copy of Pete himself. The pursuers, now emerging into full view, were Indians; but even Pete's keen eyes were as yet unable to distinguish, at the distance, the tribal marks upon their skin, or the tribal arrangement of their feathers. But Redwing, who had looked on hitherto with his habitual gravity, answered in a whisper the trapper's unspoken question.

"Abenakis!"

Pete nodded, and Rob, casting a swift glance round, saw the fire of race hatred in the Indian's fierce eyes; the Abenakis and the Mohawks were hereditary foes.

It was but a moment since the wounded man had fallen. Redwing had scarcely whispered the name of his pursuers' tribe when he struggled to his feet and staggered forward; well he knew the deadly peril in which he lay! Hard hit as he was, he put forth amazing efforts; and, crouching low toward the ground, taking what cover it afforded, he gave no target to his enemy, and succeeded in reaching the tree behind which the three onlookers lay hidden before his strength again failed, and he once more fell forward upon his face. Scarcely twenty yards behind him six fierce Abenakis were bounding forward, emulous for his scalp.

"First Injun's yourn!" whispered Pete to Rob. "Second yourn," he added to Redwing on the other side. "When you've fired, load as quick as winkin'."

Rob felt a passing wonder as to what Pete himself intended to do; but he had no time to think about it.

"Now!" whispered the trapper.

Two shots rang out as one; the two foremost Indians fell almost on the spot where the fugitive had first stumbled. The others halted in their tracks, and in an instant

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were gone. It was almost as if they had sunk into the earth, so swiftly did they disappear among the trees and bushes that lay on either side of the glade. But Pete was as quick as they. The moment after his companions fired, he leaped with extraordinary agility over the fallen trunk, and, lifting the almost inanimate form of the fugitive in his arms, tumbled back with him into safety, narrowly escaping half a dozen bullets which struck the tree with sharp thuds.

Then he coolly took up the musket which he had placed against the tree, ready to his hand, and by the time the other two had reloaded, Pete was kneeling by the trunk, resting on it his own weapon in readiness for the next move.

All this had happened within a few seconds; indeed, hardly a minute had passed since Redwing whispered the word "Abenakis." Pete had but just resumed his position by the tree when the Indians, now fully recovered from their panic, fired from their concealment a second ragged volley that pattered against the trunk, nipping the bark and scattering splinters in all directions. One of the redskins incautiously peeped from behind a sapling to learn the effect of the shots. Pete's musket flashed; an instant after, the too curious Indian swayed, tottered, and fell forward.

"Surprisin' want of common sense," murmured Pete as he quickly reloaded.

Learning caution from the fate of their companion, the Abenakis made no further movement. Except the pungent smell of gunpowder, and a faint smoke that hung in the still air above the tree-tops, there was no sign of hostilities. Only at Pete's feet the wounded man lay groaning.

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CHAPTER II

BELEAGUERED

Pete flung a glance at the man he had rescued, then resumed his former position by the tree.

"Uncommon awkward fix," he muttered, as his quick eye swept the glade. "Jest so," he added, not in confirmation of his former remark, but in approval of a rapid and stealthy movement on the part of Redwing. Without saying a word the Mohawk had broken off a small twig, and, pushing it between the branches of the fallen tree, a couple of feet from where Pete had posted himself, had drawn back with it a small white object, oblong in shape. This he laid on the ground beside the the trapper, who was, however, too much concerned with their immediate danger to devote any attention to it. Rob on the other side had seen nothing of the Mohawk's action.

"In ten minutes, or less, the varmints will be all about us," said Pete, in a musing voice. The words were scarcely out of his mouth when, with a rapidity of movement that curiously contrasted with his slow deliberate utterance, he raised his long musket to his shoulder and fired. Fifty yards up the glade a dark form sprang into the air, fell and lay motionless.

"Thought so," said Pete, proceeding coolly to reload. "Jest a little bit too near. 'Twill be higher up or lower down next time, but cross they will, and we can't keep 'em from it, the reptiles."

"How many are there, Pete?" asked Rob, who knelt, fingering his musket in some agitation.

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"More'n enough fur a scalp apiece, though they don't stand all of a row to be counted." He glanced again at the man who had unwittingly brought them into this predicament. "Say, friend," he said, "d'ye think as you could make a kind o' push for it?"

The man, rousing himself from a state of semi-stupor, answered feebly.

"I can try."

Though they made no remark, both the trapper and his white companion were conscious of a strangeness of accent in the man's speech. But it did not surprise them, for among the colonists of Albany there were many Dutch and Germans as well as several families of French extraction. Keeping a wary eye on the glade the trapper continued:

"Five minutes is all I want. You boys can keep 'em off fur that amount of time; then follow in our tracks—hard as you can. Redwing'll lead the way. Five minutes by your chronometer."

As Rob took a big watch from his fob and laid it on the ground, Pete began to creep toward a clump of elder bushes some three yards to their left, his movements being screened from the Indians by the bushy portion of the tree. The wounded man, understanding with the readiness of a backwoodsman what was expected of him, crawled after him on hands and knees. Both went so quickly that the two left on guard were unable to follow their movements.

Side by side the Mohawk and the white boy kept a close watch on the ground beyond their lurking-place. The air was very still; the brooding silence, indeed, seemed ominous, for both knew that somewhere among the trees, men of the wildest and most ferocious tribe in Canada were worming their way furtively towards them. It was foreign to the habits of the Abenakis, as of

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any other Red Indian warriors, to risk the perils of a direct attack in the open when they could gain their object with a little patience by working round the enemy. By this time, no doubt, several of them, under cover of the fallen trees dotted in the track of the storm, had crossed the glade to right or left, and were stealing through the wood to take the defenders in the rear.

Not a word passed between Rob and his Mohawk friend. Each was alert and ready. If Redwing knew better the ways of the Indian, Rob was his equal in native courage, and had not been for nothing Lone Pete's pupil in the woods; and as they waited in silent watchfulness, their thoughts followed pretty much the same lines."

"They can't come fast," Rob was thinking. "They don't know how many we are, nor exactly where we are, but they know enough about our marksmanship to make 'em wary. What notion has old Pete got in his noddle? Something spry, no doubt. Hang it! I wish I could see the varmints; it's like stalking a deer, with all the fun on the other side!"

He glanced at his watch.

"Time's up, Redwing; lead the way."

Crawling as the others had done towards the alder bush, the Mohawk disappeared without a sound. Rob followed him closely, and in a few seconds both men were running at full speed through the wood, Rob finding it difficult to keep up with the other, who, nevertheless, bent almost double as he traced the trail of the trapper and the wounded man.

In spite of their five minutes' start, the forms of the two leading fugitives were soon descried among the trees. Pete was half supporting, half dragging, the other man.

"Good! I said five," remarked the trapper as Rob

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and the Mohawk came up with him. "We may cheat 'em yet. Redwing, take my gun and Rob's."

Signing to Rob to lift the wounded man's legs, he caught him beneath the arms, and pushed forward more rapidly through the wood, the Mohawk with the three guns bringing up the rear. They had gone but a few paces when a shrill yell behind announced that the flight had been discovered.

"'Tis des'prate shaky to the bones," said Pete grimly, "and I'm main sorry for it, stranger; but thar' ain't no common sense in goin' easy when thar's scalp-hunters have got their fingers in your hair."

The only answer was a groan. So they stumbled on for another two or three hundred yards, Redwing every now and then glancing back to see if the enemy had come into view. All was again silent. To find the trail would be the work of an instant, and all four fugitives knew that behind them, somewhere among the trees, the ruthless Abenakis were coming swiftly in pursuit.

"Knowed I was right," exclaimed Pete at last. They had emerged almost suddenly on a flat expanse, thinly covered with reeds—a stretch of marshland draining into Lake George, but at this time dried up by the heat of summer. It was less than half a mile across, and midway rose a steep grassy mound, some twenty feet above the flat, forming in the rainy season a little island in the midst of the swamp. Pete stopped and lowered his burden gently to the ground.

"Stranger, thar's your fort," he whispered. "Run or crawl. Do your best; we'll do our'n. Win to the top of yon promontory, and you'll be safe, leastways for a time."

The man staggered forward, half dazed, but alive to the necessities of the moment. Taking his musket from

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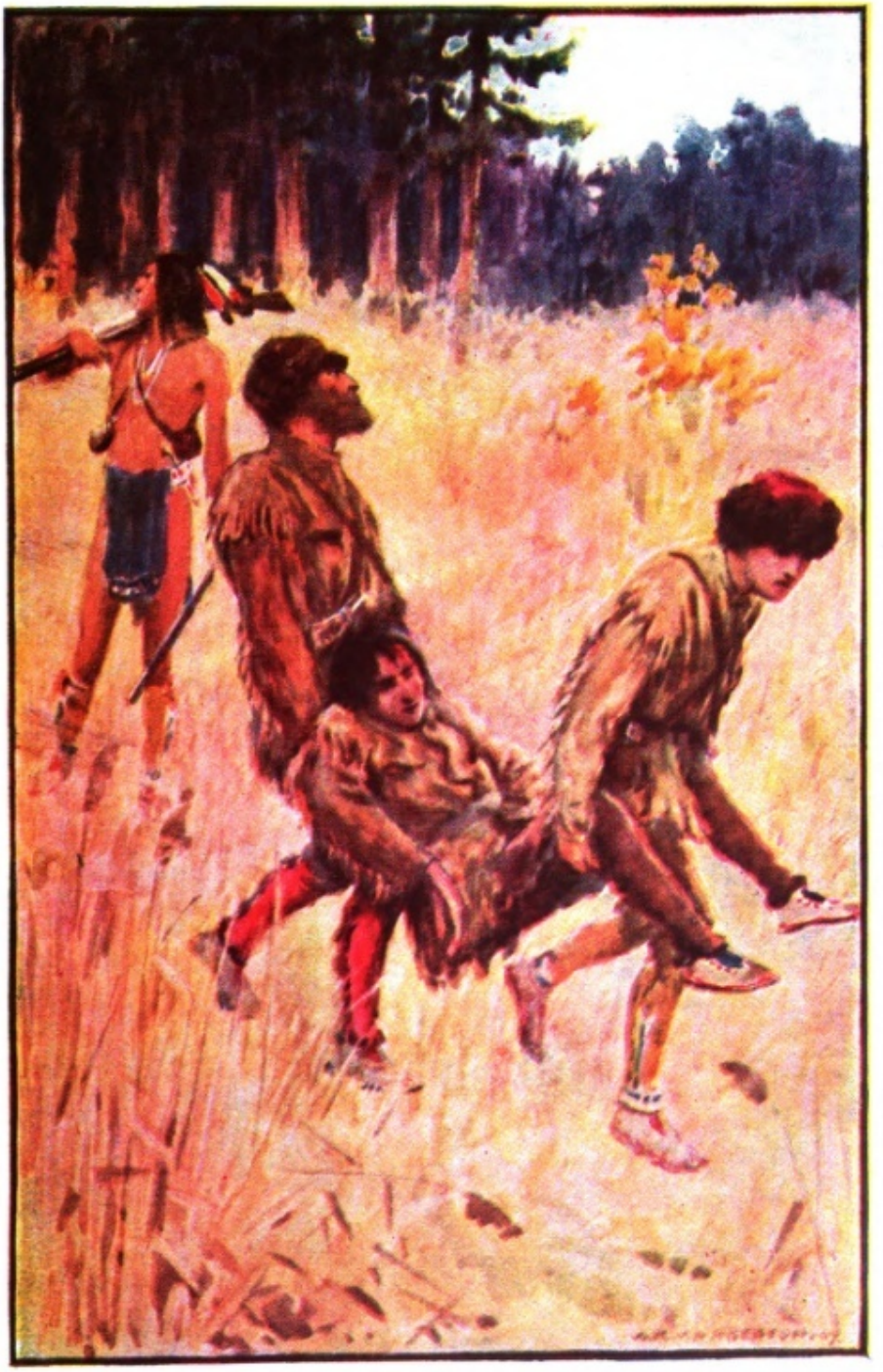

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Redwing's hand, Pete signed to the boys to seek cover among the osiers fringing the marsh. Here they would be secure from the observation of the enemy until these had come within a comparatively short range. Only a few seconds after they had posted themselves, a dusky form emerged from the trees and looked cautiously around. He was in a moment joined by a second and a third; and, peering through the rushes, the fugitives saw more of the enemy at some distance to the right and left.

Mute signals passed between the three parties of Abenakis. One in the center, apparently the leader, extended his hand towards the fringe of osiers, pointing by accident exactly at the spot where the trapper lay. Pete glanced at Redwing to make sure that the young Mohawk's plume was not in sight. Redwing caught his look, and for a moment his grave features relaxed in a smile, as if to say: "Be at ease; a Mohawk is a match in wariness for any Abenaki."

The enemy halted for a few moments at the edge of the wood, suspecting an ambuscade in the osiers. Their quarry, meanwhile, the man they had pursued and wounded, was making the best of his painful way to the hillock. One of the Abenakis, more venturesome than the rest in his eagerness, stepped out from among the trees and tried a long shot at the fugitive. But the smoke had hardly cleared away when he fell like a log; Pete's musket had made account of him and his rashness. His companions instantly darted back within the shelter of the trees, and the hidden three saw them flitting from trunk to trunk, some going to the left, others to the right, in pursuance of their plan of surrounding the little party.

Lone Pete glanced over his shoulder anxiously, measuring the progress of the wounded stranger. He had

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now covered half the distance to the grassy eminence, and was still in full view of his pursuers, though, as the futile shot of the Abenakis proved, he was beyond range of their rifles. To all seeming, Pete was as cool and unperturbed as though engaged in no more dangerous occupation than rabbit shooting; in reality he was calculating to a nicety, with real anxiety, the chances of one of the most difficult situations in which, practised woodsman as he was, he had ever been placed. At any moment the wings of the attacking party might break from the forest above and below, and then he with his two companions would certainly be cut off before they could rejoin the stranger on the mound. On the other hand, if they left the security of the osiers too soon, they must overtake the fugitive while he was still at some distance from the mound; then, burdened by the disabled man, they must inevitably be surrounded before they could gain such shelter as the hillock afforded. Rob, indeed, for his part wondered what object the trapper could have in making for a bare eminence, exposed on all sides to attack; but he had such faith in the wisdom and experience of his old friend that he did not worry about seeking a solution to what puzzled him, content to wait for the word which, he knew well, would indicate the best, the only course.

The waiting was not long. All at once Pete began to crawl backwards with infinite caution towards the further border of the osier bed, Rob and the Mohawk keeping pace with him. A moment's pause; then, at a sign from Pete, all three rose to their feet, turned about, and dashed at their topmost speed towards the grassy knoll. The wounded man, laboring and far spent, had just reached the base of the acclivity when the three came up with him. They carried him bodily with a rush up the slope, and had barely topped the crest when a chorus

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of yells broke out behind them, and the crack of a dozen muskets, discharged almost simultaneously, cut viciously through the air.

Pete gave a little chuckle, and Rob understood at a glance why the trapper had chosen this spot for their stand. The summit was about thirty yards across, but, as is frequently the case with isolated hillocks of this kind, it dipped somewhat deeply in the center, forming a kind of cup. Neither Rob nor Pete knew anything of geology, and, indeed, the explanation of the phenomenon that was to serve them so well did not trouble them. By some fault in the rock, the drainage from the top of the mound escaped, not down the sides, but through the center, and the slow percolation of water during uncounted years, carrying with it small particles of the softer soil, had formed a crater, the bottom of which was perhaps five feet below the edge.

"Now, stranger," said Pete, when they reached the top, "lay down in this hollow; you'll be as safe thar' as in your bed. Duck a bit, Rob; your bein' so well growed, your head's above the sky-line, and one of the venturesome varmints may get your range. Redwing, my son, I speak to you as man to man, knowin' you well enough to be sure you'll act accordin'. You're the spryest of us, 'cos 'tis your nature. Fort Edward, thar's no need to tell you, is ten mile or so away; are you ready to go and bring help?"

The Indian gravely nodded in assent, his fine face absolutely inexpressive.

"Now, Rob, what did I tell you?" broke in Pete. The boy was walking towards the edge of the mound.

"Well, to please you, Pete," he said, smiling, as he dropped on all fours. "But you needn't be uneasy. Look!"

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More cautious than his young companion, Pete crawled up the slope and peeped over.

"That's sense!" he ejaculated with a quiet chuckle.

The Indians who had entered the osier bed in pursuit of the fugitives, had halted when they came to the edge and were now scuttling back to cover. They recognized from the sudden disappearance of their quarry that they had been outwitted, and knew full well that before they could reach the top of the mound some of their number must fall to the muskets of determined men so strongly posted. A direct attack was hopeless, and whatever their motive in pursuing the stranger, it was clearly not strong enough to overcome their natural reluctance to face certain death for at least three of them.

As they disappeared, Pete took a long shot at the rearmost just as he was entering the sedge.

" 'Tis against common sense, not to say argyment, to waste good powder and shot," he remarked, as he saw the bullet fall short, "and in a general way I'd be the last to do it, but they reptiles understand the bark of a rifle better'n most ways of speechifyin', and I reckon 'twill keep 'em quiet, long enough for us to do a bit of consideration."

Pete had a trick of ending his little speeches now and then, with a long word, which seemed to stretch beyond its natural length through his very precise and deliberate manner of utterance.

"Now, my son," he went on, turning to Redwing, "you are goin' to make tracks for Edward. I'll take charge of your gun. For why? 'Cos t'ud only get in the way of your shanks, and thar's no time to undo tangles. 'Tis to be the hardest bit o' runnin' ever you did in your born days. And you must start at once, afore they varmints yonder make a ring o' roses round this promontory."

The Mohawk laid down his musket, saw that the

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fastenings of his moccasins were in order, and rose to his feet.

"And though I guess 'twill give a pang to your feelings, I'll ax you to leave your feather, too. 'Tis like axin' Minna Koop to go to chapel o' Sundays without her best flappers, but I know you'd do what I ax you, Redwing, special as you've got a sort of notion, I reckon, of my reasons for wantin' the bit of ornamentation."

There was in truth a hint of reluctance in Redwing's manner as he slowly removed the drooping plume from his scalp-tuft. He handed it to Pete, addressed a guttural word of farewell in his own tongue to Rob, then, crawling to the farther edge of the knoll, he cautiously took a rapid glance at the features of the surrounding country.

The marshland extended for some distance on this side, dotted with clumps of bush, which grew more thickly as the swamp merged into forest, like that which the travelers had previously traversed. The grass was parched and shriveled by the midsummer heat, except where a narrow line of luxuriant green meandered across the plain, one of its bends approaching within a dozen yards of the foot of the mound. Though the long grass and reeds hid the water from his view, Redwing knew that the greenness indicated the course of a rivulet.

His inspection lasted but a moment; then he crawled for a few yards down the slope until he judged that, if he stood erect, his head would be below the level of the summit. He then rose, turned round, and, stepping cautiously backward, descended until he reached the brink of the stream, where he bent low to avoid observation by flanking parties of the Abenakis who might already be making their way round the knoll, and stepped into the water.

His movements had been watched by the two above,

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stretched on their faces. Pete gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"Trust an Injin for 'cuteness," he said to Rob. "If the varmints come on his tracks, which is as sure as to-morrow's sun, they'll be puzzled in their heathen minds, long enough for Redwing to get out o' reach. Maybe they'll think one of us had gone down to fetch water, and afore they find out their mistake the boy'll have got too far for any of them Abenakis to run him down."

"D'you think we'd better get some water for the stranger?" asked Rob. The wounded man had lain during these few minutes motionless in the spot where Pete had placed him.

"Not by no manner of means, though I declar' I'd well-nigh forgot the critter. Give him a drop out of this gourd of mine, lad, and look to his hurt, while I keep an eye liftin' around for the Injins."

Rob went to the man. He was lying on his side, his eyes closed.

"Take a sip of this, stranger," said Rob, putting the gourd to his lips.

The man opened his eyes, gulped a mouthful of the spruce beer, and groaned. Rob saw that his head was covered with blood, and, lifting his matted hair with careful fingers, discovered an ugly scalp wound. But the man was in no apparent danger, and it seemed to Rob that his exhaustion must be due rather to the chase than to his injury. To dress the wound was impossible without water, and the boy went back to Pete and asked again whether he should run down the slope and moisten his handkerchief at the stream.

"No," replied the trapper decisively. "'Tis onsafe. I caught a glimpse of a redskin in among the trees yonder. The critter must bide. Has he got his senses?"

"I think so, though he didn't speak."

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"Well, he must do something to lend a hand in his defense. He's too shaky, I reckon, to shoulder a musket, but he can load 'em when the shootin' begins. Tell him to crawl up here. He can load mine while I'm firing Redwing's, and t'otherways about."

"Have you seen any more of Redwing?"

"Not a bit. He's gone along the bed o' the stream, and by this time is safe in the woods. Inside of three hours we ought to get help from Edward. The question is, whether we can hold on here till the reinforcements come up."

"We'll do our best, Pete. There they are, look!"

He pointed to the woods south of the mound, towards the spot where the Mohawk had disappeared. Several dusky forms were skirmishing stealthily among the trees.

"I see the reptiles. Go to t'other side, old boy, and keep a sharp eye on them osier patches. They won't all be on this side, you may be sure. And send up the stranger."

He hastened away. In response to his message, the wounded man crawled towards Pete. None of the Abenakis was visible from the northern edge of the mound, and Rob, glancing back to see whether the stranger had done his bidding, knew why the trapper had asked the Indian to leave his feather behind him. Pete had stuck it in the muzzle of his musket, which he was holding so that it rose an inch or two above the crest of the hillock. Unless the enemy had already discovered the truth, they would suppose that the Mohawk was still with the party. Rob was smiling at the ruse, when a shot from the neighborhood of the rivulet, the most accessible side of the mound, caused the feather to quiver in the still air.

"Thar's a good shot among 'em, that's clear," the trapper called softly to Rob, "and I reckon they think our

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Mohawk friend is a poor hand at the game to show his topknot like this. 'Tis like ticklin' trout, for sure. Let's give 'em another enticement."

He gently raised the musket until the feather projected slightly from the grassy mound. But this time no shot followed the movement. All was silent. There was not so much breeze as even to set the osier weeds a-rustling. Pete looked almost shamefaced as he lowered his weapon.

"That's bad," he muttered, "'tarnal bad. Thar's more'n ticklin' fur some afore sundown. And what beats me through it all is, where on airth have I seen this stranger previous!"

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CHAPTER III

REDWING'S RACE AGAINST TIME

Meanwhile, what of Redwing?

For half a mile or more, the young Mohawk followed the course of the rivulet, although its direction scarcely favored his mission. The little stream took its rise in a spur of the rugged hills between Lake Champlain and the Hudson, and to ascend it carried the runner many points out of his straight course. But it was important to conceal his track until all danger of immediate pursuit was past, even though his pace was retarded by the care he took to avoid a splash which might bring the enemy upon his heels.

As soon, however, as he reached the shelter of the woods, he quitted the stream at a stony portion of its bank where his soft moccasins left no trace that would not soon be evaporated by the summer heat, and broke into a long loping stride that carried him over the ground at the speed of a racer. Moving, it would seem, rather by the instinct of locality than by observation, he held his course almost in a bee-line, through all the changing features of the rough countryside. Up hill and down dale, through spurs of the forest, across natural clearings, over little streams, many of them almost dry in this season of torrid heat, he pounded along almost without a break in his gait. He had the sure-footedness of a mountain goat, and the lightness of an antelope; and his spare, sinewy form moved with the easy grace of a woodland creature.

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Nearly twelve miles of rugged country lay between the mound, where he had left his comrades in peril, and his goal, and in these twelve miles there were two bends of the Hudson River. A less enduring runner might have chosen to take the rough but practicable road that had been made for the passage of troops between the Forts Edward and William Henry, but this would have involved a detour of almost three miles from the direct line, and in addition there was the risk of meeting roving parties of hostile Indians. He knew that the Marquis de Montcalm, the French commander-in-chief in Canada, was leading an expedition against William Henry; the shots he had heard earlier in the day denoted probably the opening of the siege; and it was likely that the party of Abenakis recently encountered was only one of many bands of the Frenchman's native levies, who, little amenable to discipline, were ever ready to make raids upon their own account and snatch scalps to prove their prowess when they returned to their wigwams in the north and west.

Coming by and by to the bank of the Hudson, Redwing fell on his knees, gulped a few mouthfuls of water, and plunged boldly in. The current flowed swiftly, but the Indian was as strong a swimmer as he had proved himself a fleet runner. He made no attempt to breast the stream, for its course was in some measure his own. Touching shore far down on the opposite bank, he sprang to his feet and continued his race against time; but the exertions he had already made were telling upon his youthful frame; his breath came in gasps, his pace was less even, his gait more labored, though his speed was as yet no whit slackened.

Redwing felt the importance of his errand. It was the first time any responsibility had been thrown upon him, and the fact that the men in peril were his wise

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friend, Lone Pete, and his almost brother, Rob Somers, nerved him to put forth all his strength on their behalf. Rob and he had been playmates ever since their babyhood. The "castle" of his father, chief of a Mohawk clan, lay but a few miles from Rob's home. Twenty years before, George Somers, emigrating with his young wife from the Hampshire village of Durley, had settled on land granted him by Sir Peter Warren, in the New York colony, beyond Fort Johnson on the Oswego road, the fortified house where William Johnson, Sir Peter's bluff Irish nephew and manager of his estates, lived with his Dutch wife. Like Johnson, himself, Mr. Somers, from the first, maintained pleasant relations with the Mohawks of the district. His log house, named Durley, after his English home, had been the center of peaceful labor, undisturbed by the alarms of war. The farmlands, cut out of the surrounding forest, were brought by incessant toil to yield plentiful crops of beans, maize, wheat and other produce, which supplied the needs of the household and its dependents, and a considerable surplus that fetched good prices in the markets of Albany.

But Mr. Somers had not been content to remain merely a farmer. His proximity to Oswego and Lake Ontario had enabled him to become a fur trader on a somewhat large scale. It was in the course of trade that he became acquainted with Peter Tull, a skilful trapper, who, in the course of an adventurous life, had gained a knowledge of almost all parts of the English territories from the southern States to Acadia. Lone Pete, as he was generally known, had by and by settled down at Durley—so far as a man of his roving temperament could ever settle—as Mr. Somers' right-hand man. This was about the time when the New England colonies found it necessary to undertake serious operations of defense against the aggression of the French in Canada. The presence of

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military forces from England and the maintenance of colonial levies gave Mr. Somers an opportunity of extending his trade by contracting for supplies of food and of skins for the soldiers' equipment, and in this year, 1757, he was a man of substance, respected by English, colonists and Indians alike for honesty and fair dealing.

Though his wealth increased, he kept to the same simple style of living. His log house remained as he had first built it, though his outbuildings had to be enlarged to accommodate the increasing staff of workers. His wife was now buried in the forest; his household consisted at this time of his two sons, Robert and William, and a square-built, plain, good-tempered, old Dutch woman, who had entered his service when he passed westward through Albany, and had during twenty years, fulfilled the duties of nurse, housemaid, cook and housekeeper. Rob, the elder son, had remained at home until, when he was ten, his mother died. Then he was sent to a school kept by a Huguenot lady in Albany, where, among other accomplishments, he acquired a certain facility in reading and speaking French. At the age of fourteen he left school, and under the tutelage of Lone Pete learned to shoot and hunt, to follow the trails of animals, to find his way through the woods by the aid of the sun and the stars and the blaze marks on trees. Will, seven years his junior, had never left home.

Troublous times had fallen upon the New England provinces. Penned in between the Alleghanies and the sea, they were taught that all the vast unexplored lands north, west and south belonged to France. Of late years, indeed, not only was the means of natural expansion denied them, but there were signs that France intended to make herself mistress of the whole country, from the wastes of northern Canada to the plains of Louisiana.

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Instead of presenting a united front against this aggression, the various colonies, differing widely in origin, in people, in religion, and in mode of government, were constantly bickering among themselves, quarreling with their English governors, and alienating the neighboring Indian tribes, which might have proved invaluable allies against the enemy. The French settlers, on the other hand, were one in race and religion; they knew how to conciliate the red men, many of whose tribes were nominally converted to Christianity by devoted Jesuit priests. For some reason the tide of success had flowed in favor of the French. In 1755, General Braddock suffered a disastrous defeat at the hands of French Indians at Monongahela. The next year, when war was formally declared between Britain and France, and the Marquis de Montcalm was sent by King Louis as commander-in-chief to Canada, he signalized his arrival by the capture of Oswego. Now, taking advantage of the withdrawal of British troops by the English commander, Lord Loudoun, from the New England frontier on an expedition against Louisburg, Montcalm had brought a large army of Canadians and Indians up Lakes Champlain and George, and was at this moment investing the weakly-defended Fort William Henry, erected at the head of the latter lake a few years previously, and named by Johnson, after one of the grandsons of the English king.

The advance of the French had not been unheralded. Reconnoitering parties from William Henry had fallen into the hands of Indian bands, and those who escaped returned with horrid tales of butchery and torture. Colonel Monro, commanding in the fort, sent urgent messages to General Daniel Webb in Fort Edward, fourteen miles south, pleading for reinforcements; but Webb, dilatory and irresolute, like so many of the gen-

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erals sent in command of regulars from England, was afraid of moving until he himself was reinforced by levies of the New England militia, and contented himself with the despatch of two hundred men, which brought the total of Monro's force little above two thousand.

With the reinforcements went Mr. Somers and his son Rob, in pursuit of their business of provisioning the forces. From what he learned in William Henry, the far-sighted farmer foresaw the possibility of Indian raids over all the surrounding country, and sent Rob back to Durley with instructions to convey all his stores to Fort Edward, and then to return. He did not anticipate immediate danger; the advance of the French would probably be slow, allowing time for Colonel Monro to be reinforced, even yet in sufficient strength to beat back the enemy. He relied upon his friendship with the Mohawks and the sagacity of Lone Pete, for the safety of his farm.

Rob accomplished his mission; but when he was about to return to William Henry, Pete announced that he would accompany him.

"Seems to me," he said, "from what you tell me, thar's goin' to be red work at William Henry afore long, and I reckon, if your dad stays thar' and you with him, 'tis only common sense, not to say dooty, for me to be thar' likewise."

Redwing happened to visit the farm that morning. Hearing what was afoot, he raced back to his father's "castle" in the forest to ask leave to go with Rob. The two boys had hunted together from the time that Rob had been allowed to use a musket and roam afield. They were the closest of friends, each gaining something from the other. Companionship with Rob had softened the Mohawk's savage instincts; Rob had acquired an

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insight into Indian character, a knowledge of the Mohawk language, and a familiarity with the secrets of woodcraft exceptional in a white man. Redwing was his father's favorite son, and obtained the permission he asked, though not without some difficulty, for the chief had taken offense at some real or imaginary slights recently put upon him, and was maintaining an attitude of sullen reserve towards all English people. But he gave Redwing leave to accompany Rob. Thus it was that, when on that August day peril came to his friends, Redwing was at hand to use his strength and speed in their service.

Sustained by his indomitable spirit and by his deep-seated loyalty, the young Mohawk ran doggedly on, though his breath now came and went in quick pants, his body streamed with sweat, and his legs trembled under him. At last, coming to another bend of the river, he saw in midstream the island on which barracks had been erected for the British soldiers, and beyond, on the farther bank, the ramparts and bastions of Fort Edward. He knew that, to reach the only direct entrance to the fort, he would have to make a long detour and cross by the bridge of boats. His eagerness could not brook such a delay. He plunged into the river. A shout from the barracks greeted him as he rose to the surface. He was for making past the head of the island and swimming on to the farther bank; but a redcoat cried that he would shoot if he did not instantly turn his head towards the shore. In a few moments, gasping, utterly spent, he was stumbling up the bank, stretching forth his hands to the soldier as if in mute appeal. Other soldiers joined the first.

"What be it, Injin? Where be coom from?" said one from far off Devonshire in the service of his king.

"The chief!—Yengeese chief!" gasped Redwing.

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"He means the general," said a soldier in the uniform of the Jersey Blues. "Put him in a canoe, Giles; we'll paddle him to the fort."

A few minutes later they were admitted to the busy inclosure. The news of the arrival of an Indian runner had already been carried to General Webb, and he stood awaiting the messenger among a group of his officers.

Redwing's trembling limbs gave way at last when he stood before the general. He sank to the ground, but managed to gasp out his story, though in tones so low that the Englishman had to bend towards him to catch his words. Redwing's stock of English was scanty, and his distress was pitiful to witness as he strove with his weakness and his limited powers of expression. But, eking out his vocabulary with emphasis and gesture, he succeeded in making his meaning clear, and when he had finished he closed his eyes and lay like a tired dog at the general's feet.

"Give him a mouthful of cordial," said Webb, turning to one of his officers. "I don't see what we can do for them," he added, with a perturbed air. "In an hour or so it will be dark. 'Twould be merely sending men into a trap to attempt to bring them off. Besides, he may be a decoy. We know too much of their tricks already. Does any one know the fellow?"

"That do I," cried a voice from the crowd of colonial volunteers who, with a freedom unknown in the regular army, had gathered round. "He's Redwing, sure enough, and a decent lad."

"Ay, and a bosom friend of young Rob Somers," said another. "'Tis a desperate fix for old Geordie's son to be in."

Webb looked still more worried: his manner hinted a hope that his suggestion of a trick might excuse him from further action. Hesitancy was his besetting sin,

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and already there was much murmuring among the colonial portion of his force at his delay in moving up to the support of the gallant Monro in William Henry.

"Mark you," said the general to the officer next him, "the place where they are said to be surrounded is closer to the French camp than to us: and I'd give long odds the twenty or thirty redskins who're attacking 'em have now been reinforced by hundreds more. The woods are simply swarming with the reptiles, and the sound of firing will of a surety have brought 'em up from all points of the compass. 'Tis not in accordance with my duty to risk the lives of good men in a wild goose chase. I can't ask the regulars to do it—"

"Some of us would do it without asking, sir," interrupted the officer.

"Can't allow it, Gadsby, can't allow it; and what I can't ask the regulars to do I won't ask the Rangers."

"'Tis Somers' boy, sir; one would stretch a point for the old man's sake."

"We can't lose an army for one man, Gadsby, whoever he is. Besides, the Indian says that scout fellow is with the boy; if he's as cunning as our New York friends would have us believe, he'll probably be able to slip away in the darkness—if they can hold out so long. If they can't, nothing we can do will save 'em. No: I'm sorry for 'em, and there's an end. Look after the boy, Gadsby: we'll give him a trinket or two, and he'll be perfectly happy."

Thus discussing the matter he was about to return to his quarters when Redwing sprang to his feet and confronted the general.

"White man say no help white brother?" he asked, his voice resonant with emotion.

"The general says no," said Colonel Gadsby gently, Webb appearing too much surprised to speak.

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"Redwing hears the evil bird scream," said the Indian. "Redwing goes into the black cloud."

And turning on his heel, he made towards the gate by which he had entered.

"What does the fellow mean?" asked the amazed general.

"Says he don't think much of your decision, General," replied the blunt New Yorker who had already spoken; "and if you don't do nothing, he's going back to die with his friends."

"He's mad," ejaculated Webb. "Stop him, some one!"

Redwing, as though he had gained new strength, was already almost at the gate. Several men ran after him, and held him in spite of his struggles.

"What's this 'tarnal rumpus?" asked a man who had just come up. He was clad in the fringed hunting-frock, moccasins, and leggings of a woodsman, and carried the smooth-bore musket employed equally in hunting and in frontier warfare. "Why, bless my bones, 'tis Redwing. Hands off, comrades: Redwing's a friend of mine, and I'll have a little converse with him."

Redwing turned eagerly at the hard drawling voice, and his eyes lit up as they fell on the gigantic frontiersman. Caleb Blodget was a stalwart New Hampshireman, standing six feet two in his socks, and well known from Boston to Philadelphia as one of the wariest and doughtiest of the Rangers who, under the orders of the adventurous Major Robert Rogers, performed prodigies of hardihood in scouting and reconnoitering. Speaking in the Mohawk tongue, Blodget obtained in a few seconds the gist of the eager lad's story. Then, bidding Redwing wait, he strode off towards the general.

"See here, General," he said, with the blunt, bluff freedom of address common to the sturdy backwoodsmen, and not a little resented by the officers of the regu-

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lar forces, jealous of their punctilio,—"see here; this ain't oughter be. One of those white men fixed up yonder is the son of an old friend of mine—and of your army, by the token. T'other's a trapper who, more'n twenty year ago, saved my life in a tight hustle with the same murdering varmints, leastways their tribe, as be now set on lifting his scalp. T'ud be mortal shame to leave 'em without cocking a rifle for their behoof, and, with your permission, General"—he gave a curiously ironical emphasis to the word "permission"—"I'll lead a party of Rangers to the rescue."

"'Tis sheer midsummer madness, Captain Blodget," said the general, with angry impatience.

"I reckon 'tis the sort o' madness we're used to, and the redskins more so," replied Blodget grimly. "With your permission, I said, General—and by what I hear thar's no time to lose in making our toilet or such-like."

A cheer rose from the crowd. Webb's rubicund cheeks flushed a deeper shade: the indiscipline of these New Englanders was insufferable! But he knew that the general feeling was against him; he knew, too, the value of the colonial soldiery, so, shrugging his shoulders and smiling without mirth, he said:

"Have your own way, then. Your own scalp is not easy to get at, at any rate."

Five minutes later, twenty men of the Rangers were put across the Hudson in birch canoes, and, headed by Caleb Blodget and the young Mohawk, dashed northwestward along the trail the latter had already come. Having muskets to carry, their pace was the more easily accommodated to the hardly recovered strength of Redwing. But the boy seemed to have gained new life and energy, and he bounded nimbly along, knowing that what white men could do in this errand of mercy these men, the pick of Rogers' unequalled corps, would surely do.

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CHAPTER IV

THE FIGHT ON THE MOUND

Lone Pete became more and more concerned as time passed and still the Indians he knew to be lurking in the woods gave no sign of their presence. Why did they not attack? Were they fewer in number than he had supposed, waiting until the sound of firing should have brought to their assistance such fellow tribesmen as might be within earshot?

"If that's the case," he said to Rob, "I hope the critters 'll wait too long. When a kettle's on the bile it won't bile no more; 'twill only slop over."

But it was not Pete's way to sit down with crossed hands and blink at the sun. He went round the brow of the hillock on hands and knees, carefully scraping away with his knife a portion of the earth at various points of the irregular circle, thus enabling Rob and himself to get a better view of the Abenakis when they should appear, and to make any movement without the danger of exposing their heads above the crest. To some extent, it is true, these rough embrasures gave a mark to the Indians, but Pete had no high opinion of Indian marksmanship in general; the man who had fired at the feather was a rare exception. As Pete went round the circle in pursuance of his task, Rob moved with him at the other end of the diameter, to keep a careful watch. When the work was finished, the trapper squatted down beside the wounded man, and looked him hard in the face. The man blinked a little uneasily.

"Well, stranger," said Pete, "you had a narrow shave.

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'Twas as near a thing as ever I saw, and I've seen more'n one in my time."

"I thank you; you are a true friend."

"I won't say no, though I'd do as much for my worst enemy, if he was white and t'others red. Not that you're white when you come to speak of it—not white exactly. Say, ain't thar' a streak of red somewheres in your physiology?"

The man's coppery complexion took a deeper tinge, and with some animation he replied:

"I am French, French of Canada; my name is Louis Bessière."

Lone Pete knew as well as any man that a half-breed resents nothing so much as any suggestion that he is not of pure blood; but he had a reason for speaking as he had done.

"Ah! 'tis a soft sounding name, to be sure. Fair exchange is no robbery, and as you've bin so free with your'n, I'll be as free and tell you mine. 'Tis not so sugary to the taste as your'n; seems to me like the crick-crick of a grasshopper a-top o' the gurgle of a beer-bottle; but like it or not, here 'tis—Peter Tull, known to most folk atween Lake Huron and the sea as Lone Pete."

The woodsman spoke always in the same slow monotone; but as he mentioned his name he threw a keen glance at the Frenchman. No one could have learned from the expression of his face or from any change of intonation whether he had found the answer to his unspoken question or not.

"Well, now, Louis Bessière," he continued, "while we're waitin' for our red friends to visit us, pluck up your courage and explain how 'twas you came to be chased by as villainous a set of scalp-hunters as ever loped out of Acadie."

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"I was in the fort—the Fort William Henry," said the half-breed in his French accent, "and I came out, secret, by night, with a letter for—"

"Body and bones!" ejaculated the trapper, bringing his fist down with a savage thump upon the ground.

Bessière looked at him in surprise.

"Go on," said Pete, in his usual colorless tone. "You came with a letter—"

"—for the General Webb in Fort Edward. But the Indians surprise' me; I evade' them in the hours of night; but they perceive' me this afternoon as I came through the woods, and you, my friend, my deliverer, know the rest."

"True, I know the rest," said the trapper, moving away to go the round of his extemporized embrasures, Rob keeping pace as before on the opposite side. "And for an old hand," he muttered under his breath, when out of earshot, "I've made a 'tarnal bad muddle of it. The Injun laid that same dokyment by my side, under my very nose, and thar' I left it. Seems to me, Pete, 'tis time you retired from an occypation as requires common sense and purticklerness.—Well," he said aloud, as he returned to the wounded man, "I s'pose you're thankful most of all 'cos of saving the letter, for 'twill be worth a few dollars to you when you hand it to General Webb."

"Alas! I search' in my pocket: no longer is the letter there. It disappears; I am desolated."

"And so you ought to be, and worse. The idea! You, a wood runner, as they call 'em in your lingo, to save your scalp and lose a letter what might have no end of preciousness. I'm downright ashamed of you, French Louis."

Once more he sidled away to spy out the land. This time he stared more than usually long at a spot to

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the southwest of the knoll, where a zigzag of rushes, saplings, and boulders would enable an approaching enemy to creep up more closely under cover than from any other quarter. He lay on his face, never diverting his gaze from the one spot, for full five minutes before he beckoned Rob to his side.

"Cast your eye over yonder, Rob," he said quietly, "and tell me what you see."

Rob looked in the direction indicated, straining his eyes till they ached.

"I see nothing unusual," he said at length; "certainly nothing in the shape of a redskin."

"D'you see a big rock, with a young sycamore close beside it?"

"Yes, of course; 'tis quite plain."

"And a rock of goodish size, for sure?"

"Truly, 'tis a pretty big one."

"Well, it ain't. 'T ain't big, and 't ain't one, 'cos 'tis two little uns."

"Maybe you're right, but they're so precious close together that they might just as well be one."

"Ah, my lad, you'll l'arn better'n to talk such nonsense when you're as old as me. Thar's room atween them two rocks for a Injun, leastways a bit of one, and if you look a little more careful you'll see the varmint thar'—almost the color of the rocks, to be sure, but a separate critter all the same."

Rob bent his eyes once more in careful scrutiny on the spot.

"Wish I'd your eyes, Pete. You're right. I see him now. Sure enough, thar's something brown, a different color from the rocks, wedged between 'em; but if 'tis an Indian, it must be a small part of him, and where's the rest?"

"I guess he's curled himself up like the reptile he is.

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And what for?—that's the p'int. He can't use his gun while he's stuck in the cranny, and if he moves out—well, my boy, 'tis a goodish range, but I reckon he wouldn't move in again. 'Tis time for a little more trout-ticklin'. Hand me your gun, lad. I'll just fix the Injun's feather in the muzzle, and when I give the word, you lift it tender-like above this parapet of our'n."

The trapper transferred the feather from his own rifle to Rob's, then again lay flat, covering the suspected position. At Pete's signal, Rob gently raised the feather a few inches above the crest, as he had seen his friend do previously. Immediately afterwards there was a movement of the darker brown between the two rocks, and Pete saw a musket barrel slowly elevated from the short grass in front of them.

The two weapons spoke almost at the same instant. A thin shower of blue earth bespattered the little party on the summit of the knoll, and when the smoke below floated away, the greater part of the Indian's rifle could be seen lying obliquely in front of the boulders, while, except for the brown patch that still remained between them, not a vestige of the man was visible.

"I reckon thar's no more scalp-huntin' for him," said Pete with a grim chuckle as he reloaded.

"But how can you tell you hit him?" asked Rob. "He may only have dropped his rifle from fright."

"Eyes was give us for use," replied the trapper. "Use your'n. Ain't thar' some difference atween the rocks?"

Again Rob looked closely.

"There is!" he said after a minute. "There's a jagged edge where I first thought it was solid rock."

"Just so. That's where the varmint's head was. But 'tis cur'ous none of the others are in sight. What their game may be beats me holler, the sun goin' down, too. If they only knowed the feather had no scalp aneath it,

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and the owner miles away, I reckon they'd have risked a rush afore now. They lose time, we gain it: that's ekal, with a margin on our side, but a narrow one—just as wide as the distance atween the sun and the horizon, and, as you see, that's narrowin' every second."

With the sinking of the sun a gentle breeze sprang up from the north, tempering the sultry heat of the early evening. The three waited and watched in anxious silence. Imperceptibly yet surely, the sun dipped towards the horizon, the sky reddened, and a rosy glow lent romantic softness to the rugged countryside. Another hour passed; the sun was no longer a perfect orb; and each of the men on that grassy knoll knew that, when it had wholly disappeared, darkness would swiftly follow on a brief twilight.

"They'll wait till dark, then rush us," said the trapper, his manner giving no hint of anxiety.

Rob merely nodded. He lay, propping his head on his fists, gazing fixedly through one of the embrasures.

"What's that?" he exclaimed suddenly, raising his head with a start that exposed it for a second as a mark for the enemy.

"Down, boy!" cried Pete. "I thought as much. Wonder the varmints didn't think of it afore."

They had both noticed a thin spiral of smoke rising from among the rushes at the edge of the marsh.

"Quick's the word!" said Pete, now all activity. "Tear up the grass as fast as you can; you, too, Frenchman."

All three set to work to pluck up the short dry grass within reach, Pete all the time keeping a sharp lookout around the position. When sufficient grass was collected, they plaited it together and rolled it into small bundles, placing inside them a few small stones and clods. Then Pete set light to them with flint, steel and tinder, and

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threw them, burning, one after another to windward, as far as possible down the hill.

Falling twenty or thirty yards away they set fire to the grass on the slope of the mound. Fanned by the slight breeze, three or four rivulets of flame ran quickly up the hillock, spreading as they came through the sun-scorched herbage. Eddies of smoke curled up and floated across the mound, blinding, acrid, yet not thick enough to afford an effective screen to the Indians below.

At the top the three men had stripped off their coats, and, as the lines of fire reached them, beat out the flames with desperate energy, without exposing themselves to the Indians who, beyond the rushes, raised yells of rage and disappointment as they saw their plan balked. By the time the fires they themselves had kindled reached the base of the mound, the grass above on the windward side had already been burned, and there was nothing to feed the flames.

But though beaten out on the northern crest, the fire crept around the sides and, gathering force as it went, swept furiously down the opposite slope towards the forest. It blazed fiercely amongst the sedge bordering the marsh, licked up the bushes and saplings beyond, all parched with the summer heat, leaped the narrow stream along which Redwing had made his escape, and attacked with devouring fury the forest beyond. Now tall trees were in the monster's grip; columns of flame and smoke rose majestically into the air; and the watchers on the mound saw flocks of startled birds soar away, and here and there a small animal dash affrighted across the plain.

"That gives us another hour," said Pete, as he glanced with satisfaction at the result of his readiness. "If the varmints had started the fire where they had oughter, by this time we should have been either burnt out or

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forced to make tracks down the hill. And I bet thar's enough Injuns in the wood yonder, or was afore the fire took 'em, to make sure we never reached the bottom."

The sun had now quite vanished, its expiring glow rivaled by the conflagration. Straining his eyes into the gloaming, Rob fancied he saw the stealthy forms of Indians worming their silent way up the hillside. Once he fired.

"What now, boy!" said Pete.

"Did I hit him?" asked Rob, trembling with eagerness and nervous excitement.

"Fancies, my lad; shadders; idees of your brain. Thar' ain't no Injuns yet. All the same, it won't be long afore the rush comes. Dark's on us. Thar' ain't no real chance of escape—not for all of us; but if the Injuns wait till the dark's thick t'ud maybe be worth your while to have a try at breakin' through. Go straight for the fire, lad. The reptiles 'll be too skeered to keep many on that side, and won't look for any mortal man to dash into the burnin' fiery furnace. You'll be safe enough. Forest fires don't burn reg'lar, and you'll find patches as the flames have left. You'll scorch your eyebrows and a bit more, but that's nothing."

"And what do you mean to do?"

"Well, I've had a good long life—longer'n many as were my chums in the early days. Fifty year I've lived, and thirty-five on 'em a trapper. I've always had an idee I'd end up in a rumpus like this. Lone Pete they call me; and the name fits; many's the time I've been alone in the woods with the beasts. Loneness don't skeer me. But bein' a backwoodsman, it kind of goes against the grain to leave a poor critter to be scalped all alone." He spoke in a low voice, indicating the half-breed with a gesture. "In course, he ain't real white, nor to be considered as such; but all the same I s'pose he's got his

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feelin's and thar's enough white in him to make him feel scunnered like at bein' desarted."

"Very well, I'll stay, too."

"Thar's no call for you, Rob lad," said Pete. "You ain't a backwoodsman nor a trapper, nor called to act as such."

"You've done your best to make me one!"

"True, and 'tarnal proud I am as you've l'arned the ways of the woods so well. But you're young; you've a lot to l'arn, yet, and a long life to do it in, so—"

"You may preach like a Quaker, Pete, but I'm not going. We're in for this together, and I won't listen to another word."

Rob gripped the trapper's hand, and felt the pressure returned. For a few moments Pete was silent and motionless, as though communing with himself, or maybe with the Almighty Power whose spirit he had often felt brooding in the mysterious stillness of the woods and waste places. Then, from a little bag hung around his neck, he took a small, round, whitish object. Somewhat shamefacedly he held it, shining softly in the fading light, towards Rob.

" 'Tis not," he said, "what I'd call exactly common sense, but once upon a time I made a promise to use this whenever I was real downright hard-beset. And I don't see, for my life, how mortal men could be harder beset than we are now."

And he dropped the silver bullet into the barrel of his musket, and rammed it home.

"Look, Pete," said Rob, laying his hand on the trapper's sleeve.

The darkness clung about them, yet not so deep as to blot out the three figures that stood, just without the fringe of trees to the north, engaged in conversation. After a few moments they parted, one going to the right,

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another to the left, leaving the third, a tall, straight form, standing like a pillar and facing the mound.

"They've gone to fetch up the rest," said Pete quickly, cocking his rifle. "The range is long, but—"

He lay on his face, and for a few seconds Rob held his breath. Then the musket spoke, speeding the silver bullet on its way. The smoke shut the Indian from sight. A long-drawn howl came from the wood, and, the smoke lifting on the breeze, Rob saw the warrior prone upon his back and a crowd of his comrades springing from the trees, leaping over the grass towards the mound, filling the air with their blood-curdling war-cry.

"Hold your fire, lad," said Pete, ramming another charge into his still smoking musket. "Wait till they are half-way up."

The Indians came on with the speed of a whirlwind. Nothing, it seemed to Rob, straining his eyes in the gloaming, could stop the rush of the two-score yelling red men closing in upon the mound. Two or three were partly up the slope, the rest only a few yards behind. It was a matter now of seconds. Rob's finger was about to press the trigger, when a scattering volley flashed from the sedge to the right below the mound, the air rang with the shout of white men, and a young Indian came bounding up the slope and fell panting and exhausted at the summit. There were gaps in the band of red warriors; dazed by the sudden attack, those who had not fallen wavered while one might count ten. Then, catching sight of a dozen sturdy Rangers dashing towards them with a gigantic form at their head, the Abenakis turned tail and ran for their lives.

Only one seemed untouched by the panic. He stood, a solitary figure, facing the mound. Rob in his excitement had risen to his feet, and stood clear against the dying glow of the forest fire behind. Suddenly he felt

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a fiery pang tear through his shoulder. He staggered, his knees gave way, and he fell into the arms of Redwing. The Indian who had aimed so well, shouted as he saw the effect of his shot, then bounded away into the darkness, after his companions, untouched by the bullets of Pete and the Rangers.

"Just in time, my son," said Pete, looking up from his task of stanching Rob's wound, as Caleb Blodget stalked over the crest. "Another minute, and they'd have had our scalps."

"Ay, 'twas a close call, Pete. And we'd have been here afore 'cept for that blaze. I guess they tried to smoke you out! We had to go round about, which was lucky, after all, as it brought us on their flank, and the reptiles were too set on scalpin' you to notice us. Is the boy hurt bad?"

"Not so bad but what we can mend him."

"That's well, 'special for his old dad's sake. Well, I've paid you back, Pete. Always said I would. It has took me twenty year—twenty year I owed to you; I said I'd pay you back, and you can't deny as I've done it."

"And 'tis Redwing's doing, by rights. The Injun's a good chum."

"But how did you get into such a mess, Pete?—a man of your knowin' ways?"

"Why, thar's the—hang me! where's the Frencher? He was here by my side the minute afore you come up—a half-breed fellow what I pulled out of the reach o' they Abenakis. Look for him, boys."

But a search over the mound and the immediate surroundings failed to discover the Frenchman. In the darkness and the bustle of the last few minutes he had slipped away.

"That's 'tarnal awk'ard," said Pete. "I wanted him. He called himself Louis Bessière, but unless I'm dream-

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ing, he had another name not so long ago, and 'tis not unlike you've heard of Le Loup—eh, Caleb?"

"Le Loup! I just have. Was that the villain?"

"I reckon it was. That's two mistakes I've made to-day. First, when I left his letter in the wood yonder; second, when I let him slip away like a snake."

"What letter's that?"

Redwing thrust something into the trapper's hand.

"Why, bless my bones, here's the very thing! You picked it up, Redwing?"

"Yes."

"Well, your Injun head-piece is sound in common sense. This is the letter, Caleb."

"We'll read it by and by, Pete. 'Tis too dark to follow up the mongrel's trail, and we durn't stay here, for you may be sure they varmints 'll be back with a hundred more afore many hours is over. We must make tracks for Edward at once, and we can't go fast 'cos of Rob, who'll need carrying. Feel better now, my son?"

But Rob made no answer. He had swooned away.

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CHAPTER V

A RAID FROM THE NORTH

A litter of branches was quickly made, and on this Rob was carried to Fort Edward. He remained unconscious during the rapid journey, and did not know that Redwing, to whom the rescue was due, had been forgotten by the white men, and, worn out by his exertions, unable to repeat the journey, was left behind. Nor did he witness the scenes within the ramparts of Fort Edward when the party arrived. Sir William Johnson had come into the fort with a party of Mohawks, whom, with his incomparable powers of persuasion, he had brought over to the English side. Instantly there had broken out among the provincials a clamorous demand that some attempt should now be made to carry succor to Colonel Monro, besieged in William Henry, and when Caleb Blodget entered the inclosure with Pete and the Rangers, the walks were thronged with excited New Englanders, speaking their minds about General Webb with mutinous freedom. But Webb was not to be moved, even when the letter which Louis Bessière had carried, proved to be a despairing appeal from Monro for help.

Rob was still unconscious next day when a horseman rode in from the north, bareheaded, breathless, haggard, with terrible news from the hapless fort. While Lone Pete and Rob were waiting in suspense on the mound, Monro had surrendered. Montcalm promised that the garrison should be allowed to march out in the morning with the honors of war, with a force of Frenchmen to

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escort them to Fort Edward, and to guard them against molestation by the unruly Indians in his service. But the prisoners began to move off before the escort was ready. The Indians, tempted by the trinkets of the women and the rum bottles of the men, fell upon the defenseless crowd; and men, women, and children were massacred with ruthless ferocity.

As the day passed, fugitives brought fresh details of the appalling scene, and with every new report, the fury against Webb rose higher. Rob, waking at last from his long unconsciousness, asked Pete what the noise was about. The trapper gave him an evasive answer.

"You are hiding something, Pete," cried the boy. "What is it? Has anything happened to father?"

"Not as I knows on," said Pete slowly. "Jest lay still while I bring the surgeon; like as not he'll want to bleed you."

"Not yet, Pete. I know something has happened. Tell me what it is. Have the French got William Henry?"

"I won't deny it, my lad."

"And father is killed?"

"He's as 'live as I am," said Pete stoutly.

"Then he's a prisoner? I must know, Pete."

"Wal, yes; that's so, by all accounts. And as you can't do nothin', and I can't nayther, you'll jest shut your eyes and lay easy, and I'll bring Surgeon Wiggins to stick on a leech or two to cool your blood."

Now, Pete, in fact, knew nothing of Mr. Somers' fate. The farmer had certainly not come into Fort Edward; he might have been killed during the siege or in the massacre; possibly he was among the two hundred prisoners whom the Indians had deigned to spare, who had been hustled from the field, and were now being hurried to Montreal—to be sold to the governor for brandy.

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Pete had jumped at the suggestion that his master was a captive, in order to ease Rob's anxiety and further his recovery.

And Minna Koop, Mr. Somers' wide, square, Dutch housekeeper, coming over from Durley, in response to a message from Pete, told him that for once he had done quite right. They were not on the best of terms, these two; for Pete, accustomed to the careless life of the woodland, could never be brought to understand the iniquity of honest dirt. Minna liked to keep the interior of her master's dwelling as tidy and spotless as though it had been a city mansion, instead of a log-built house. The walls and floors were fleckless; Pete could never show his nose at the door without being assailed with guttural warnings or reprimands; she had a clean devil, he said, and he went his way convinced that the presence of women in the world was not according to common sense.

"You are right, for once," Minna said to Pete. "Rob must dink his fader is alive, and you must go and find out if he is or not. And be quick, out of dis room; hoots! it make me mad to see it. What is dis here? Dirt! And dat? Dirt! It is dirt all over. Go, I say. I care for de boy—I and de meester, though not much of him, wid his leeches and bolus."

"Just so, missus," said Pete meekly. "I don't hold, myself, with doctors, mor'n reason. And is young Will spry?"

"Ja, so. And now get along before I sweep you."

Pete left Minna Koop in charge. She took Rob under her capacious wing: after two days told the surgeon that he need not come again, and undertook to complete the boy's cure with good food and salves of her own preparing. Pete learned by and by, from an escaped prisoner that Mr. Somers had been recognized among

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those who had been carried off by the Indians. Pursuit was out of the question. Though the fort was now full of provincial militia, who had flocked in as the news of the terrible scenes at William Henry was carried through the country, Webb still refused to move. He was in mortal terror lest Montcalm should follow up his success by an attack on Fort Edward. Riot and disorder reigned in the settlement until Webb, learning that the French had returned to Ticonderoga and Montreal, dismissed the undisciplined militia to their homes.

Rob lay in a high fever for a week. Then he began to mend, and insisted on having full particulars of all that had happened since he was brought to the fort. He heard with impatience of General Webb's inactivity. With winter coming on a vigorous campaign would be impossible, and he fretted at the thought of his father's being kept for months a prisoner in some French fort. As soon as Minna's jealous guardianship was relaxed and Pete was allowed to visit him, he spoke his mind freely.

"I tell you, Pete," he said, "I tell you, I'm going to find my father. Minna says 'tis nonsense, but if you think I'm going to loll about till next campaign, waiting on the chance that these crawling generals will make up their minds to move, you're very much mistaken."

Pete bit at his grizzled mustache. He did not like to hint that perhaps it was already too late to attempt anything for Mr. Somers. He knew not what tribe his master's captors belonged to—whether to the heathen savages of the far west, or to the nominally Christian Indians of the northeast; in either case, his fate might have been horrible. Pete always thought before he spoke; and now he temporized.

"Wal," he said, "I reckon we've got to take a leaf out o' the book o' common sense. No one can have more'n one dad, that's sartin; and 'tis kind o' nat'ral and dooti-

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ful to want to pull your dad out o' the hands o' they varmints. But if you look at it reasonable, where are you? Here's winter comin' on; afore long the country'll be locked with snow and ice; I ax, where are you? Besides, you ain't fit to go on the trail yet a while, and when you *are* fit, there'll be no trail to foller."

Pete noted the impatience with which Rob heard him, and went on without pause:

"Now, I've got an idee. This fort's a-festerin' with fever, that's what it is, and it don't suit neither you nor me to be boxed up in a fever trap. When you can stand on your feet again, what I say is, go to the farm, and pick up your strength, thar'; then we can talk about doin' somethin' for the boss, and I guess you know without tellin' that if anythin' can be done, Lone Pete ain't the man to go to sleep like a b'ar."

After some argument, Rob agreed to this proposal. Minna would not allow him to leave the house until he had regained a fair measure of strength. At last she pronounced him fit to travel, and one day the three set off in a wagon.

It was early morning, for though the distance was only thirty miles, the road, as soon as it left the immediate neighborhood of the fort, became a mere track over rugged and unequal ground. An early start was necessary if the journey in the clumsy wagon was to be accomplished before night.

Rob was in low spirits, from which the conversation of his companions failed to rouse him. He had had plenty of time for thought since he had mooted to the trapper his scheme of following up the Indians who had captured his father; and the more he thought, the more clearly he saw that Pete had been right. His purpose, he had to confess, was a harebrained one. It involved penetrating into the heart of the enemy's country, and

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not only running the gauntlet of the French, but the still more difficult feat of eluding the vigilance of the Indians. Before he had gone far, Rob had made up his mind to give up the idea; all he could do was to persuade Gray Wolf, Redwing's father, when despatching his bands of young men on their winter hunting expedition, to make what inquiries they could, and learn what Mr. Somers' fate had been.

And thinking of the Indians, Rob could not help wondering why Gray Wolf had not been among the red men who had accompanied Sir William Johnson into the fort three weeks before. The Mohawks, as a nation, had remained neutral in the great contest between French and English; but the Wolf tribe, of which Redwing's father was chief, had been for the most part friendly towards the settlements, and, in particular, were bound by many ties to Mr. Somers, with whom they had long plied a profitable trade. Rob was perplexed, too, by the strange absence of Redwing, whom he had expected day after day to visit him. He almost feared that after the affair at the mound, the Indian boy had fallen into the hands of the Abenakis, and had suffered a cruel fate.

Hour after hour the horse plodded along, scarcely ever exceeding a walking pace. Half-way a halt was made for a meal, then the slow journey was resumed. As he neared his home, Rob began to be more cheerful.

"I shall soon pick up my strength," he said to Pete. "Our little place will be a great deal more healthy than that wretched fort."

"True," the trapper sighed. "Home is a rare word, 'special to them as never had one, like me. A chum as I once had, many a year ago, ran away from the country after a desp'rate quarrel with his dad. But one day, when he was in New York buying guns, he got a letter

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from the old man, and all it said was 'Come home.' He told me that was the finest bit o' po'try in the English language; and he went."

The last mile of the road was mainly uphill, and Pete got out of the cart to stretch his legs and lighten the horse's burden. Walking ahead, through a copse that led to the Durley plantations, he suddenly stopped, and bent towards the ground. Then he left the path, and disappeared among the trees to the right. By the time the wagon reached the spot he was back again, and Rob saw that his usually placid countenance was somewhat perturbed.

"What is it, Pete?"

"That's more'n I can say, but it looks as if some one had bin here afore us."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, 'tis no good hiding the truth; thar's a trail through the wood, leading away from the farm," announced Pete, reluctantly.

"Away from it! Have some of the men gone hunting already?"

"'Tis an Indian trail, Rob, and made by a good many o' the varmints; for the prints are deep, and not made long ago, neither."

"Perhaps Gray Wolf's people have been to the farm for something, and gone home by a roundabout way. You don't think they were enemies, do you?"

"We'll hope not. The varmints have left us alone for many a year, and t'ud be oncommon remarkable if they've took it into their heads to come raiding jest now, when their friends, the Frenchers, have gone back, too."

But Rob and Minna caught a note of anxiety in the trapper's voice. Shaking the reins on the horse's back, Pete urged it to a trot, and thus, jolting and creaking, the vehicle came at length to the edge of the wood,

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whence a clear view could be had of Mr. Somers' house and plantations.

A cry burst from Rob's lips as he looked towards what had been his home. Where the neatly thatched log house had stood, surrounded by the lower cabins of the farm-hands, was now a blackened heap of ruins. The ripe crops were trampled down, the fence had been broken; all was silence and desolation.

"God in Heaven!" cried Rob; "where's Will?"

His face, thinned by his illness, was the color of chalk. He sprang from the cart, heedless of Minna's restraining hand, and ran to Pete's side.

"'Tis a bad business, my lad," said the trapper—"bad at the best. But thar's no corpses to be seen; that's a mercy. If I hadn't seen that trail in the wood behind I'd jest have believed the place was set afire accidental. I allus had a fear Loony Dick would do some mischief. Pluck up heart, Rob; maybe, like the devil, 'taint so black as it looks."

While speaking he had hastened towards the ruins, Rob at his side. Minna followed, leading the horse. They came to the spot where the house had stood, and Pete, stooping to touch the charred wood, exclaimed:

"'Tis warm still. And look, in the inside thar's a wiffle of smoke risin'. 'Tis not twelve hours since this deed was done."

"What's become of Will, and the men and women?" cried Rob. "What can we do? What can we do?"

"Jest you sit down thar' on that big log, my lad," said Pete, observing how the boy trembled, and looked this way and that, like a hunted creature. "Sit down while I see what trails I can pick up, and make an investigation."

Rob felt so weak and helpless that he was fain to do as Pete suggested. Minna gave him a draft of spruce beer,

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mingling soothing words with fierce ejaculations against the "varmints." He watched eagerly as the trapper went around the settlement, moving quickly, stopping here and there to bend and examine the ground, then passing to another spot. In ten minutes he rejoined Rob, who sprang up and went to meet him.

"What have you found? Is there any hope?"

"I wouldn't be down in the mouth myself. I've struck three different trails. One—

"But my brother! Is there any clue to him?"

"Wal, I can't say to him exactly; but one of the trails is white, and I reckon it means as Will and all the farm folks ha' run straight off to Gray Wolf's castle."

"But is Will's print among them?"

"They're all so mixed up and close that I can't rightly say. Seems to me they had to run in a mighty hurry, and you may be sure they took Will with 'em."

Rob gave a gasp of relief. With the Mohawk, the fugitives were safe.

"And what of the other trails?" he asked.

"Wal, thar's a trail from the northeast: that's William Henry way, in course. And a redskin trail, sure enough, same as the trail I saw in the wood. And thar's another trail to the nor'west, redskin, too, on'y thar's hoof-marks along with it. I reckon the varmints swooped down early this mornin', jest about the same time as we started from Edward. By some manner o' means our folks had warnin', and I should say got clear away to Gray Wolf afore the wretches came up. 'Twas nat'ral they should run thar', the chief bein' so friendly, and Fort Herkimer too far for 'em to reach in time. The varmints found the house empty, I jedge, 'cept for vittles and skins, and the skins—who knows better'n you?—was a vallyble lot, so I reckon they loaded 'em up on master's horses and then set fire to the place,

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all the time a-gnashin' their teeth 'cos they'd got no scalps."

"We aren't sure of that. We must go to Gray Wolf at once, and see if Will is safe. Come, Pete, 'tis only three miles."

"Sartinly that's what we'll do. We'd go quickest on our shanks, but you'd better go horseback, considerin'. You come too, missis?"

"No, not a step," replied the Dutch woman. "I stay here. De villains! Dey haf burnt my bonnets and my Bible: dere is no more to do! Bring de boy back; den we go to Fort Edward, and I will say someding to General Webb, someding dat make his ears burn; I will so."

The two set off at once, Rob riding the cart-horse, following the wide and clearly marked trail to the Mohawk village. They had not gone far when Pete, who was closely examining the ground, came to a halt.

"That's curious," he said.

"What is it?" asked Rob. Every new discovery seemed to set his nerves quivering.

"Look, Rob! Thar's the trail of our folks, plain, and thar', a couple of yards to the right, thar's another, goin' the same way, a few hours older, and a redskin's. See, it has come acrost, and jest thar' it joins t'other trail, and then—yes, 'tis covered up. Some Injun went to the castle no longer ago than last night."

"Perhaps Redwing had been to see Will. Let us make haste, Pete; I am on thorns till I know the boy is safe."

They hurried on as rapidly as the uneven ground permitted. In less than an hour, they merged from the forest into a wide clearing, at the farther end of which the Wolf tribe of the Mohawks had their "castle" or settlement. A palisade surrounded the inclosure, on which, at irregular intervals, their huts were erected.

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The chief's dwelling, larger than the rest, was a log hut of considerable size, roofed with birch bark. The smaller huts consisted simply of small pliable poles, bent till they met at the top, forming a semicircle; then lashed together and covered with bark or plaited rushes. It was characteristic of the Indians that the palisade was left unguarded, and the two visitors entered the gate unchecked. The sun was declining, and fires had already been lighted for the cooking of the evening meal. The Indians, men, women and children, were squatting in groups, and near the chief's hut Rob was rejoiced to perceive the forms of white men. He called to one of them, ran eagerly forward ahead of Pete, and questioned the man who rose to meet him. A word was enough. He turned to the trapper, and said with a gesture of despair:

"They are all here, except Will! They don't know what has become of him."

"That's 'tarnal bad news," said Pete gravely. "I'll jest go and pay my duty to the chief and then come back and hear the story."

A few of the Mohawks had risen to their feet; the majority remained as they were, betraying neither by look nor gesture any interest in the arrival of the white men. But as Pete went into the chief's hut, a young Mohawk came bounding out, and hastened to Rob's side. Before the trapper returned, Rob had learned the details of what had happened.

The night before, a strange Indian had come into the camp and sought a private interview with the chief. Redwing did not know what had passed; the visitor left again, and the night was undisturbed. But early in the morning, Mr. Somers' farm people came helter-skelter through the wood, carrying a few light portable articles, and begging for protection. One of the men

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had gone at daybreak into the forest, some distance from the farm, to examine his squirrel traps. Almost unawares, he came upon a body of Indians making their breakfast in a glade, where they had spent the night in light cabins and plaited rushes, such as they carried with them when they left their permanent settlements to go hunting. Fortunately, he had moved quietly and his presence was not discovered. For a moment he supposed that it was simply a hunting party, but looking more closely, he was alarmed to notice that the red men were in full war-paint, and still more alarmed when he found that among them were several white men, whom, from their speech, he judged to be Frenchmen. He waited but to make a rough estimate of their number. There were, he thought, about fifty Indians, and five white men. Then, moving cautiously until he was out of earshot, he hurried back at full speed to the farm, to give warning of the raid there was only too good reason to anticipate.

Consternation reigned among Mr. Somers' people. If only Indians had been concerned, they might have barricaded themselves and beaten off an attack. But the success of the French a few years before at Oswego, and a month ago at William Henry, had shaken their confidence, and they decided that the safest course was to seek shelter with the friendly Mohawks, so near at hand. If there had been time to send the women and children into safety, the men would perhaps have risked their lives to save their master's property; but they dared not allow their wives and children to make the journey alone, and they were not numerous enough to divide into an efficient escort and garrison.

Hastily collecting their most portable valuables, they had left the farm within ten minutes of the alarm. Not till they were a mile on the way did they discover that

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Will Somers, their master's young son, was not among them. In the terror and confusion he had not been missed. The men were debating the possibility of returning for him, when they heard the war-whoop of the raiders behind them, and there seemed no course open to them but to make the best of their way to the Mohawk camp. There the men had pleaded with the chief to send a party of his braves to rescue the boy, and, if possible, save the farm. But Gray Wolf sullenly refused; he had, indeed, given them a churlish reception, and said that they must leave his castle within twenty-four hours. Without assistance they could do nothing, and young Will had perforce been left to his fate.

Such was the story as Rob learned it from Redwing and the men of the farm. It made him boil with rage. His father had many times befriended Gray Wolf; was this the return for all those kindnesses? Impulsively, he ran forward towards the chief's hut, but at the entrance he was stopped by Lone Pete.

"I know it all, my lad," said the trapper, laying his hand kindly on Rob's shoulder. "The ways of white men and redskins ain't the same; a leopard can't change his spots, as I've heard the minister read out o' the Book. Varmints is varmints. Gray Wolf has a grudge agin' the white men, and won't do a hand's turn for one of 'em, not even your good dad. You remember that redskin trail we set eyes on runnin' acrost the track of our folks?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"'Twas the trail of a villainous Abenaki who'd come with a wampum belt to ask the chief to hold off. The red men had not lifted the hatchet among 'emselves, he said; all white men are at the root of it; enemies of the Injuns, which I'm afeard we can't deny; and the friendship atwixt red and red is stronger than atwixt red and

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white. So the chief promised he'd do nothing; I allus thought as how Colonel Johnson was not tender enough to him, and this is what comes o' the blunder."

"Let me pass, Pete; I'll go and speak to the chief, myself—the ungrateful wretch, after all we've done for him! If he's got any shame in him—"

"That's whar' 'tis," interrupted the trapper, keeping his restraining hand on Rob. "The Almighty made him different, and only the Almighty can change him. I've knowed the redskins for fifty year, Rob; they must do as their natur' bids 'em. I've said my say to the chief, and he's goin' to call a council as soon as they've eat their vittles, and thar' he'll tell his reasons, and we'll have to listen with what patience we can. I'm kind of upset about young Will; but I don't believe they've done him no hurt, and the Frenchers ain't murderers in ordinar'."

"But they let the reptiles murder our people at William Henry."

"True: I can't deny it. But look, here comes the chief, hisself. For any sakes, lad, don't anger him. I know 'tis hard; but keep a watch on your tongue; that's the teachin' o' fifty year, and sound common sense."

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CHAPTER VI

ON THE TRAIL

The chief strode majestically from his hut. Gray Wolf was both chief and sachem of his tribe, holding the latter office by hereditary right, the former by election. He was a finely made Mohawk of about forty, with commanding features undisfigured by paint, and eyes as bright and piercing as a hawk's. He coldly returned Rob's salutation, and walked to the open space beyond the fires, followed by several of the squaws of the tribe carrying deerskins. These they spread on the ground, and then retired. The chief took his seat on the skin of a moose; the elder warriors grouped themselves about him; and the younger braves formed a second circle outside. A space was left in the middle, opposite the chief, and to this spot he motioned Rob and the trapper.

"Leave the speakin' to me, Rob," said Pete in an undertone, as they sat side by side on the skins laid for them.

Rob nodded. The Mohawks lit their pipes and took a few whiffs, then the chief said:

"Let my white brother speak."

Deep silence fell upon the company, and Rob, who had never before been present at an Indian council, was impressed, in spite of his anxiety, by the fixed solemnity of their faces. The trapper addressed them in their own language, speaking with much deliberation, and pausing at intervals as if to let his words sink into the minds

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of his hearers. He reminded them that, a year before, they had promised Sir William Johnson to assist the English against the French, and that for twenty years they had had a good neighbor in Mr. Somers. Yet they had allowed a hostile party to come within a few miles of the village, deep into the Mohawk country, to raid their neighbor's farm, and even, as it appeared, to carry off his son, without lifting a hand to prevent it. Why, he asked, had they thus broken the chain of friendship? There was only one way to mend the chain, and that was by sending a band of their young braves to follow up the marauders and rescue the boy whom they knew, who had gone in and out among them, and who, certainly, had done them no wrong.

The trapper's speech was heard in silence. For some minutes after he had concluded, no reply was made. Then the chief began:

"There is truth in what my white brother says, but it is not all the truth. The Mohawks held one end of the chain of friendship, the white men held the other; but surely it was they who let the chain fall! What does friendship mean between the white men and the red? It means that the white men come farther and farther into the red men's lands, build castles by their rivers, cut great slices out of their hunting-grounds, promising many gifts. But they forget their promises, or if they remember them, the gifts they make are so trifling that they would be sniffed at, even by the red men's dogs. True, all white men are not alike. It is the Yengeese, the children of the paleface king over the big water, of whom we Mohawks most complain. The children of the paleface father of the Canadas are different. They speak fair words to the red men, but they also give them good things—fire-water, and silver rings, and blankets of many colors like the flowers. And, more-

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over, they are great warriors: did they not chase the Yengeese at Monongahela, and take their castles at Oswego and William Henry? The Yengees are women; they ought to wear petticoats; the red man knows a buffalo from a hare."

Low grunts of approval from the assembled braves filled a pause in the chief's speech.

"It is true," he resumed, "that a band of braves from another nation came into my lands, but last sleep they sent a messenger with the wampum belt, and this messenger brought words of friendship. His people had not dug up the hatchet against the Mohawks, but had come from the great father of the Canadas, to punish the Yengeese. Why should I lift the hatchet against them? They have done me no harm. It is a paleface quarrel: let the palefaces settle it. And as for sending my braves on the war-path to rescue the boy—no, I will not do it. It is now the corn moon, and our crops are ripe; none of my braves will leave my castle until the traveling moon. And the boy follows a long trail; he goes to the castle of the great father of the Canadas; perhaps he will learn to be a man."

"Ough! ough!" grunted the warriors, pleased at this touch of sarcasm. But Rob had listened to the speech with impatience, and now, heedless of the trapper's restraining hand, he sprang to his feet and poured forth his indignation in an impetuous torrent.

"You are bad friends, you and your braves!" he cried. "Is this your return for years of kindness? You speak of gifts; has not my father made you gifts time after time? Do you forget the year when your crops failed and you were starving, and my father gave you food? Yes, you have forgotten all this; you have buried the thought of all that has been done for you; you have skulked in your wigwams, while the braves of another

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nation were doing injury to those who had been kind to you; it is as evil a thing as if you had dug up the hatchet, yourselves. Wolves, you are, and—"

But here his passionate speech was cut short. The braves had listened in growing resentment, and now, uttering loud cries of anger, they sprang to their feet and rushed towards the youth who had dared to speak so plainly. Rob stood his ground, his eyes blazing, his fists clenched, ready to fell any man who touched him. Lone Pete, looking very anxious, had risen and moved to Rob's side. But just as the infuriated Mohawks were closing upon the two, a slim figure bounded into the circle and interposed himself between them, calling aloud at the same time to the chief, who had remained aloof from the tumult. Redwing's sudden action gave just the breathing space required. The commanding voice of Gray Wolf broke in upon the uproar; the braves reluctantly and sullenly withdrew; and Redwing was left standing with the two white men in the center.

Rob was so angry that he scarcely heard the words which brought the council to a close. Something was said by Pete; the chief answered; then Redwing spoke, and was sternly ordered by his father to go into the hut. A few minutes later Rob found himself walking with the trapper away from the settlement, and became aware that his friend was taking him to task.

"Thar's a right way and a wrong of doin' everything," said Pete, "and sartin it is you took the wrong. Not that the chief would have done anything for us, anyhow; he's dead set agin us, and I reckon 'tis to they lyin' Dutch traders at Albany we owe it; 'twas them as riled the Mohawks three years ago. But your hot-headed speech made things worse'n they need ha' bin. Some folks says if a man ain't your friend, he's your enemy, but I don't hold wi' that: seems to me it ain't common

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sense; thar's many a color atwixt black and white, and gray's the right color, for speech with red men. The chief was a poor kind o' friend, to be sure; but now you've bin an' made him a downright enemy, Rob, and after I'd warned you to leave the speakin' to me!"

The trapper spoke in his usual level tones, and Rob felt that he was more gently rebuked than he deserved.

"I'm sorry, Pete," he said, "but I couldn't stand the villainous ingratitude and coldness of the wretch. What are we to do?"

"That's jest it. Young Redwing, who's a good sort, wanted to come and lead us over the trail o' them Hurons, but his father wouldn't hear of it. As things have turned out, we've lost vallyble time; and one thing I've learned; if you let time get ahead of you, you can't catch him up—not if you bust yourself."

"Yes, yes," returned Rob, somewhat impatiently, "but it isn't time: it's Indians—Hurons, you said; and Lone Pete isn't the man, I know, if he says he can't catch them up."

"That I grant you: but thar's another p'int. Thar's two of us, and more'n fifty of them. Two can't tackle fifty: not in the forest."

"But we can take our men."

"No. They're farm men, not woodsmen, no good against varmints. They must go to Edward."

"Couldn't they get help for us there?"

"Wal, if General Webb wouldn't do a hand's turn to help a redcoat colonel and two thousand men, I reckon he'd do raythe less for a settler's boy and a backwoods-man."

"But wouldn't some of Rogers' Rangers help us? Captain Blodget came fast enough to the mound."

"Bless you, the Rangers are wanted for other work. I did hear that they're to be sent north on scouting duty;

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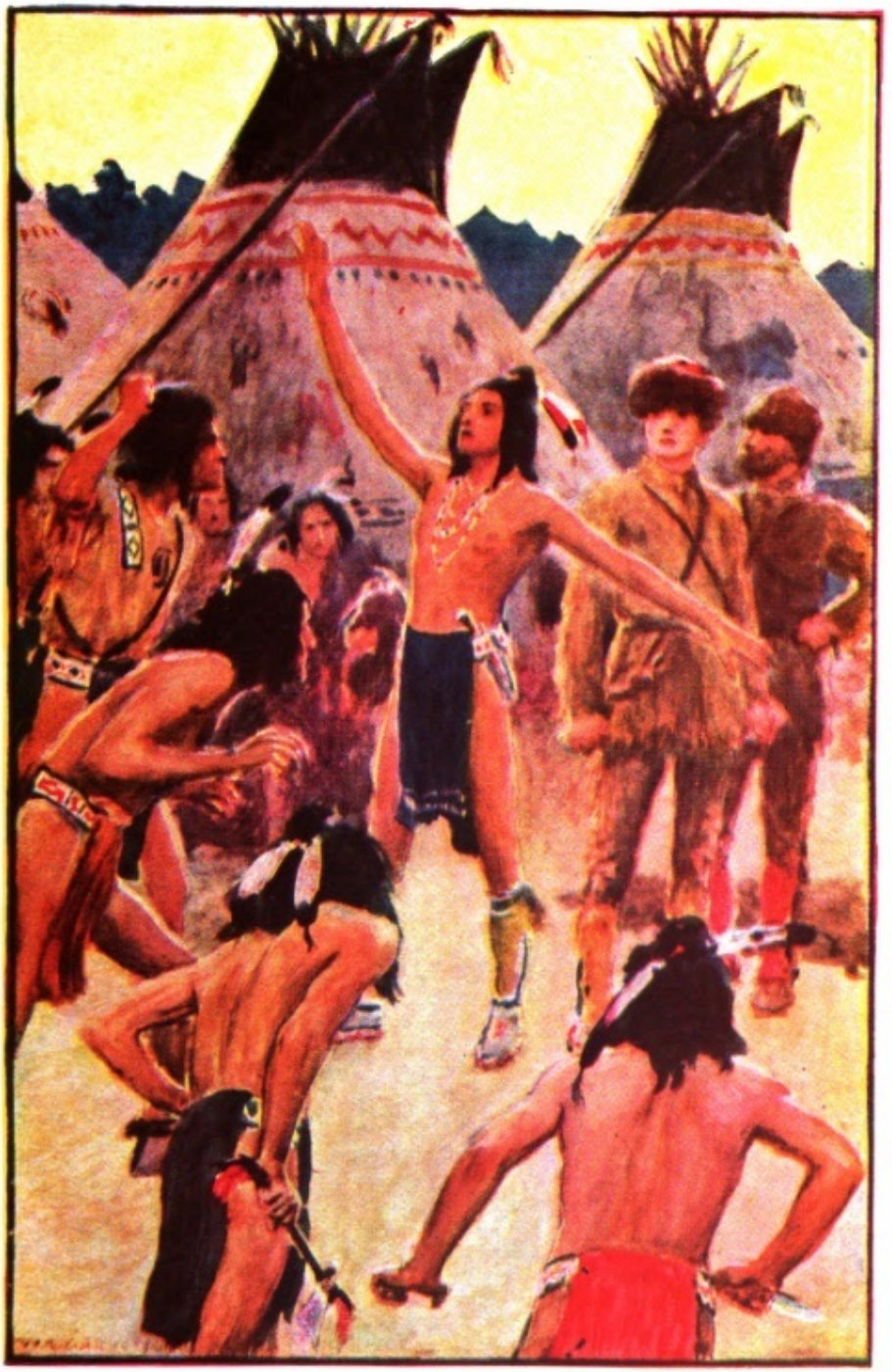

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the business of the king ranks above any little concerns of Rob Somers. Besides, we ain't got time to wait for 'em."

"Then we two'll have to do it ourselves, Pete. With father a prisoner, I'm responsible for Will. If father is in a French town he, at any rate, will not be ill-used; perhaps he'll be exchanged by and by; but Will is in the hands of a set of bloodthirsty savages—if he is still alive; and I can't rest till I know what has become of him. Besides, I've no home; those wretches have destroyed everything; I'm not going to kick my heels in Fort Edward or be patronized by the redcoats in Albany. I'm going after Will, Pete, with or without you."

"That's spoke like a true backwoodsman," said Pete heartily. "My dooty to your dad wouldn't let me egg you on; but, since that's your own mind, spoke out frank without no promptin', I'll jine you immediate, and we'll go on the trail together, on the off chance that we may find some way or other of bringin' off the boy. We'll have to stuff our wallets pretty tight, for we can't march without food; thar' was a good stock o' bear's meat in my little cabin; maybe thar's some of it left, a bit over-cooked, I reckon, but we ain't tender in our digestions."

While discussing the situation they had been walking rapidly in the darkness towards the ruined farm. When they reached it they found Minna Koop sitting with her back against the wheel of the wagon, holding a musket. Pete told her briefly what they had learned and what they intended to do. She applauded their resolution, vigorously objurgated the farm people for running away, and declared her intention of marching to the Mohawk castle and speaking her mind to the chief.

"One side, General Webb; other side, Gray Wolf; both not worth dat." She snapped her fingers. "Now,

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you, Pete," she added, "my boy Rob is in your care. If any harm come to him, if you bring not back my Will, I break my heart and hate you for ever."

The trapper's cabin, at some distance from Mr. Somers' log house, had been less thoroughly burned than the main building; and Pete found that his store of bear's meat, kept underground, had not suffered. They slept for a few hours on blankets taken from the same secret store, and rose to begin their expedition under the moonlit sky. With wallets, powder-horns and bullet-pouches well-filled, and blankets strapped about them, they set off, hope mingled with anxiety. They struck the trail, still clear, followed it for a few miles westward through the forest, then found it took a northerly direction.

"Seems as if the varmints have crossed the Mohawk," said Pete, "I reckon they wanted to keep clear o' the Oneidas, and I don't wonder at it, for thar's no love lost atween the Hurons and the Oneidas, and if thar' warn't a rale scrimmage, the Hurons would have had to pay a pretty heavy toll. Not that they couldn't afford it, for with them horses loaded with your dad's skins and things, they're richer'n any fifty Injuns ever were or ever will be."

"You forget there are Frenchmen among them."

"No, I don't forget, and that same circumstance is what skeers me most. You see, if they was all redskins, they'd set no watch when they camp for the night. That's a strange thing about Injuns which I never could understand—why, when they're so spry about surprisin' other folks, they never take precautions agin' bein' surprised theirselves. But, as I was sayin', the Frenchmen ain't built that way, not if they're real Frenchers, that is; and so we'll get no manner o' chance of stealin' into their camp and sneakin' off your brother unbeknown."

"The Frenchers are my one bit of comfort, Pete.

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They'll see to it that poor Will doesn't come to any harm. But I can't help thinking that they must belong to a larger force of the French, for a small body unsupported would hardly venture so far south."

"I don't know about that. 'Tis my belief that some Frencher must ha' got to know that your dad is a pretty warm man, with a rare heap o' vallyble skins; and made up his mind to run a little plunderin' expedition private. Most like he slipped away from the marquis' army on the march from William Henry, and got a band of Hurons to jine him by promisin' 'em a good share. Anyway, I jedge by the trail that they're bound for Lake Ontario; the snows'll soon be on us, and the Injuns'll want to get home, ready for the hunting. If that's the case, the Frenchers'll leave 'em by and by, and let us hope that they'll set-to a-quarrelin' when it comes to dividin' the plunder, 'cos that'll lose time and help us."

"If we don't catch them before then, we shan't know whether Will is with the Indians or the French," said Rob gloomily.

"Just so! You've hit the mark; that's why I said 'tis no easy job to catch up on time when he's got ahead of you."

When Rob and the trapper started to track down the raiding party, the latter was already thirty miles on the homeward trail. After plundering and destroying the farm, in the early morning of the previous day, they had hurriedly departed from the spot, not so much in fear of immediate pursuit, as in distrust of the neutrality of Gray Wolf and his Mohawks. The chief would not himself rob Mr. Somers; but if his friendship was not strong enough to induce him to defend the property of his absent benefactor, it was scarcely likely—or so it seemed to the Frenchmen among the party—that he

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would resist the temptation to wrest that property from its captors.

For Lone Pete had guessed correctly. Sixty of the band were Indians—part Hurons, part Pottawottomies, from the farthest shores of the Great Lakes. But five were French—two of pure blood, three half-breeds, typical specimens of the hardy adventurers who had pushed the dominion of France from Quebec across the Great Lakes, and thence, by the Ohio and Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico. For these pioneers the pure-blooded Frenchmen had, as a rule, a fine contempt; but, strangely enough, it was not one of the Frenchmen, but a half-breed, who in this case had the controlling voice. It was he who had organized the raid, he to whose opinions the Indians, as well as his white companions, deferred. In the alert, untiring, and masterful backwoodsman who was now leading the party on the homeward trail, it would not have been easy to recognize the scared and shrinking fugitive, who, some three weeks earlier, had stumbled, on the threshold of seemingly certain death, beneath the protecting muskets of Lone Pete and his comrades. To the Frenchmen he was known as Louis Bessière; the Indians called him Le Loup.

Save for one small boy, the whole party went afoot. There were two horses among them, but these were laden with plunder, though even their broad backs did not suffice to bear the whole burden of the spoil, much of which was distributed among the Indians. In the midst ambled a shaggy pony, upon which, for the sake of more rapid marching, rather than from any humane feeling, rode the one captive, young Will Somers. On that bright morning, the boy had left the farm early, to wander light-heartedly in the forest, where he was almost as much at home as the beasts and birds. He had been absent when the alarm was given; during the few min-

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utes of hurried preparation he had not been missed; and before he was aware of any danger, he found himself in the grasp of a hideously painted savage who, but for the intervention of Le Loup, would have added another scalp to those dangling from his belt. With all his strength he struggled in the grasp of his captor; his cry was stifled, and he was laid, gagged and bound, at the foot of a tree until the party returned from their deed of destruction and rapine. Then, half-dazed, he rode between two of the Hurons through the hot September day. There were few halts, and those of the briefest; the party moved rapidly, taking no precautions to hide its trail, which, indeed, would have been a difficult, if not impossible task.

In camp that night, one of the half-breeds, a mean-visaged creature, known as Le Borgne, from his having one eye all but blind, took occasion to congratulate the leader on the success of the raid. Vain as a peacock, Le Loup swallowed the compliment, and launched out into a self-panegyric to which the nearest Frenchman, a little shaggy sergeant of the regiment of Artois, listened with a sour smile.

"Faith of a Frenchman, you are right," said Le Loup vainglorioously, after he had tossed off a goblet of spruce beer from Mr. Somers' store. "Truly it was lucky I chanced to fall in with your party when I did. Another mile, and you would have walked right into the arms of Rogers' Rangers, and next to Rogers himself there is no man one would less have liked to meet than Captain Stark, who was commanding the party. But for me, your scalps would by this time have been hanging in the British camp."

"Bah!" ejaculated Sergeant Barbier, "the luck was to you as well. You were done up; there was no fight in you; and if we hadn't met you, and the Rangers were

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as near as you say, they'd have caught you at daylight, and then!"

He drew his hand significantly round his scalp.

"Name of a thunder!" cried Le Loup, somewhat nettled. "I am not the man to be caught by Rangers or any other pigs of English. Imagine how I tricked them that day! My faith! it was magnificent. The trapper is the best wood-runner on the borders, but no match for me. I played 'possum; I used him and the English cub as long as it was necessary; then took English leave. And what is more, I stretched my ears while they were talking; little they knew I was shamming; and the information I picked up I used to plan this little expedition —yes, and to lead you farther within the redcoats' lines than any French force this year. You may sneer," he added, marking the expression of the sergeant's face, "but I tell you that you whitecoats from France would be pretty hard put to it without us wood-runners."

"Talk as you will," said Barbier stubbornly, "the raid was yours, without doubt; but what have you got by it? Plunder, things of sale and barter; but glory—no!"

"Glory!" repeated the half-breed. "That is the whitecoats' word. You talk of glory: but you always take good care to be at hand when the spoils are divided."

"The wood-runner, it is true, knows nothing of glory," said the other, growing warm; "nor of honor, nor of gratitude. If I had been saved from a painted savage, even though my savior was a mortal enemy and the enemy of France, I would not repay him by burning his house and stealing his goods—no, not I, nor any true Frenchman."

"That is true," said the other Frenchman, a stripling of eighteen or nineteen years, who wore the white coat with black facings, the black three-cornered hat and black gaiters of the *troupes de la marine*, as the Canadian

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regulars were called. "That is true. A Frenchman thinks first of his honor."

"And it was Abenakis who pursued you," continued the sergeant. "Seeing that the Abenakis are friends of us French, it is clear they never mistook you for a Frenchman—eh, Monsieur le Loup?"

The half-breed sprang up in a fury, snatched his knife, and with his fellow Le Borgne made at the Frenchmen. The white men, however, did not rise from their blankets, but drew their swords and coolly fixed the other two with their eyes.

Bessière stopped, gave a mirthless laugh, and returned to his place, accompanied by Le Borgne. They knew well enough that in fair fight they were no match for the practised soldiers: if they excelled, it was in wiles and stratagem. They finished their supper in silence, and when they spoke again, it was to discuss calmly the arrangements for watching the camp, and the route of their march when morning broke.

Next day—the day when Rob and Lone Pete started in pursuit—the raiders moderated their pace. They were now well in the French zone; there was little likelihood of their encountering stray parties of Englishmen, or even of Indians in British pay; and the heavy-laden horses were feeling the effects of the forced march of the previous day.

The route chosen by Le Loup was a little-used Indian trail between the Adirondacks and Lake Ontario. In his reason for selecting this less direct path, there was more than a wish to run no risk of meeting Englishmen. He was almost as anxious to avoid the rear-guard of the force that had captured William Henry.

In the administration of the French governor, Baron de Vaudreuil, and the intendant, François Bigot, the Canadian officials, high and low, enriched themselves at

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the expense not only of the French crown, but also of all humbler folk who were capable of being subjected to "squeeze." Nowhere, probably, had the science of corruption been carried to a higher perfection than in the Canada of 1757. Not even the Chinese mandarin could boast a greater capacity for extorting the utmost from his office than the servants of King Louis, who, with a few exceptions, like Montcalm himself, looked upon an official appointment solely as a means of amassing a fortune in the shortest possible time.

Louis Bessière and his white comrades were quite aware that if they rejoined the army in open possession of their spoils, very little would be left to them after the higher officials had taken their toll. And they knew that their plunder would fetch many thousand good crowns if they could convey it to Montreal or Quebec, and bide their time. Their plan, then, as they had arranged it overnight, was to make the best of their way to Montreal by the hilly solitudes of the western shoulder of the Adirondacks, and there to dispose of, or safely bestow their booty, before the news of the raid reached official ears. It was these considerations that had led them to avoid the easiest road to their markets in the French settlements, which would have been by way of Lake Champlain and the St. Lawrence.

At the same time, the route chosen suited their Indian allies. The majority of these, having nothing to gain by rejoining the army, were eager to return as quickly as possible to their wigwams on the far shore of Lake Ontario, and the path they were now following was the quickest, though not, perhaps, the easiest.

Among this band of fighters, the single captive was very much alone. Will Somers sat his pony manfully as it trudged over the ground, never complaining, though he must have been stiff and sore from so many hours in

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the saddle. He was allowed to dismount when the party halted for rest or food, but the Indian appointed to guard him never let him go out of his sight: and, indeed, if he had been minded to attempt escape, it would have been sheer foolhardiness, now that he had been brought so far from home. But Will was a sensible boy; he employed the halts in stretching his limbs and eating hearty meals: and having already found that none of his captors—to all appearance—could speak English, he made no attempt to converse with them.

Will was ten years old, somewhat short for his age, but well-set, sturdy, and invincibly cheerful. He had a little snub nose, round, freckled cheeks, and merry blue eyes, that seemed made for smiling. He was a sociable little fellow, and being denied the exercise of his by no means idle tongue, he amused himself throughout the dreary march in inventing nicknames for his captors, which gave him much inward enjoyment. After the first few moments of fright, when he found himself in the hands of the Indians, he recovered his self-possession, and decided to make the best of a bad business, which after all was not so bad as it might have been, for his scalp was safe and it was apparently not the intention of his captors to harm him. He had so vast a belief in his father and brother, and Lone Pete, the companion of many delightful hours, that he never imagined he would long be left in unfriendly hands. Only at night, when the Indians, following their custom with prisoners, stretched him on his back and tied his hands and feet to saplings or tree stumps—only then did his fortitude give way, and in the lone hours of darkness he shed a few natural tears and wished that Rob was near.

The party camped early on the second night. Hitherto there had been no opportunity of dividing the spoil; but now that, as they imagined, they were safe from pursuit,

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and approaching the spot at which Frenchmen and Indians would part and go their several ways, they no longer postponed a matter that had already given some of their number no little concern.

It had been decided that the division should be made by a committee consisting of Le Loup and Sergeant Barbier, and the leaders of the Hurons and the Potta-wottomies. This decision had only been arrived at after some wrangling, for the Indian braves were accustomed to keep what they had individually won, and the idea of pooling the plunder did not commend itself to them. Especially did they resent Le Loup's allocation of three shares to himself, and two to each of his French or half-breed companions. But he had made that stipulation with the Huron chief at the outset, his zeal on behalf of his comrades being due not to any generosity of mind, but to the knowledge that, unless he did something for them it would be impossible for himself to lay hands on more than a single share.

The Indians laid down their burdens; the horses were unladen; and the spoils were placed in the center of the encampment. The four distributors sat cross-legged before the heap, and the rest of the Indians stood around, gravely smoking their pipes, and watching jealously to see that none was favored at another's expense.

It was long before the distribution was completed. Feeling sometimes ran high; once Le Loup and Barbier nearly came to blows; and the growls that broke now and again from the ring of Indians, warned the Frenchman that scrupulous fairness was expected. At length, when darkness shadowed the glade in which they were encamped, and only a sickle moon shed a faint light upon their business, the last of the plunder was apportioned.

"That's well done," said Barbier, stretching himself with a long sigh. "But what about the boy?"

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"He's mine," said Le Loup shortly.

"Ough!" grunted the Huron chief. Then, speaking in his strange mongrel French, he proceeded: "The pale-face cub was caught by one of my braves: he belongs to us; he shall go with us to our wigwams."

"A thousand thunders!" cried Le Loup, between his teeth. "The boy is mine! I will have him!"

"What's the good of the boy to you?" said Barbier, looking with amusement at the angry faces of the two claimants, who had risen and faced each other defiantly. "He'll only be in your way, and, my faith, I wondered why you troubled to bring him at all. He's no redcoat; he's useless as a prisoner; and unless you give play to the red half of you and lift his scalp, which will fetch a fair price, I suppose he'll cost you in food more than he's worth."

"I want him, that is enough," was the only reply the half-breed vouchsafed. Seeing that he was not likely to get his way without making some return to the Huron, he began to bargain. Barbier shrugged and moved away, leaving the two to haggle. An hour later, the Indian went off loaded with two-thirds of Le Loup's plunder, in exchange for which he had given up his claim upon the boy. And Barbier, noting the expression of the half-breed's face as he came up, saw that whatever the terms of the bargain may have been, Le Loup was well-content.

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CHAPTER VII

FOLLOWING UP THE RAIDERS

While the raiders had been occupied with the distribution of their spoils, Rob and Lone Pete lay snatching a short rest, ten miles back on the trail. Hour after hour they had reduced the day's lead with which the enemy had started. They knew well that a very few marches would bring the raiders so near to the French settlements, that to follow them without discovery would be all but impossible. The only prospect of success in their enterprise lay in closing with the party while it was still in the hilly district south of the St. Lawrence.

Even then it seemed to Pete a hopeless thing to expect that two men could bring off a prisoner from so large a band, consisting mainly of Indians and trained backwoodsmen. No one could have known better than he that to be discovered meant failure for their mission and death for themselves. There would be four more scalps to be paid for by the agents of King Louis—four, because the Indian allies of the French were accustomed to draw a double reward for each man killed by carefully dividing the scalp into two.

Long and anxiously the trapper discussed with Rob the chances of the chase. Even Rob, flushed with a boy's eagerness and confidence, could not but admit that it was at the best a forlorn hope. But neither to him nor to Pete did it occur as possible that they should abandon the pursuit. Rob's motive in pressing on was as strong as boy could have. Will was his brother. The

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trapper, though not impelled by kinship, was yet urged by scarcely less powerful impulse. In Pete's little cabin, within a hundred yards of the farm, the boy had always been a welcome guest, since the time when, as a toddling child in a soiled pinafore, he had watched the sinewy backwoodsman fell the logs for his home. There Lone Pete, during his short periods of leisure, when he had returned from expeditions to Oswego or from posts even farther afield, had spent many a happy hour with the two boys, delighting them with stories of his adventures in pursuit of bear or beaver, and drawing almost equal pleasure from the artless prattle of the younger. At these times Lone Pete was lone no longer. If the child had been his own son his affection could scarcely have been stronger, though none would have guessed that under his rugged exterior welled so deep a fount of tenderness.

So they labored on—Rob and Pete together. Speed! That was the prime necessity, and Rob chafed as he found that his strength was no match for his eagerness; still more when he had reason to suspect that Pete was sparing him. The trapper led the way; sometimes, owing to the nature of the ground, the trail became indistinct, but Pete's practised eye never failed to pick up the signs. At these moments he would glance round to note the condition of his companion; and then Rob, though numbed with fatigue, would pull himself together and feign a strength and freshness he was far from feeling. Pete said nothing to betray his anxiety on the lad's behalf; but he found occasion for resting more frequently than Rob confessed to be necessary, and took upon himself the task of preparing their meals, which were of the simplest. It was he, too, who had insisted on carrying the greater part of their provisions—only three full days' supply, for the lighter equipped the more quickly they

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would travel, and he trusted to his woodland skill to replenish the larder if need be.

Lone Pete and woodsmen like him were the freemen of the forests. To the uninitiated dark, impenetrable, filled with nameless terrors, these vast tracts of woodland were as familiar to the woodsmen as the streets of a city to a townsman. They knew where to look for the nuts and fruits; Rob would have told you that wild strawberries were to be found among the chestnuts; the sight of poplars warned them of swampy ground; a grove of red oak proclaimed a soil of loam and sand. When the sun was hidden from them they needed no compass through the pathless forest, for some previous pathfinder had blazed trees here and there, cutting strips of bark from different sides of the trunk; and the side where the covering moss grew the thickest was the north. They knew the haunts of the nimble squirrel, the savage racoon, the stately elk; if a rattlesnake bit them they knew the remedy nature had provided as an antidote—the leaf of the low-growing plantain; the scent of the musquash led them to fruit-bearing shrubs; and if, perchance, they were feverish after a night on swampy ground, there was the fever bush at hand, of whose buds a decoction would cool their blood.

As the first day was drawing to a close, the travelers came to the place where, though something had been done to obliterate the signs, it was evident that the raiders had encamped.

"The critters had the common sense to light no fires," said Pete, halting for a moment at the spot. "Now, if thar' warn't a need for hurry, we couldn't do much better nor camp here. Trust the Hurons for a likely camping-place."

He eyed Rob keenly as he spoke, and admired the lad's pluck when he rose to the occasion.

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"We'll go on a bit farther, Pete," he said, after a ruminating pause. "It'll seem as if we've gained on 'em, even if we haven't."

"That's jest my notion. Say a couple of miles, then, afore we make a halt."

Rob could hardly drag himself along, but he stumbled on after the trapper, and when Pete made the final halt, he flung himself down and fell instantly into the deep sleep of utter exhaustion.

"The makin' of a rare Ranger," said the old backwoodsman, looking at his prostrate form. "I reckon we're on a wild-goose chase, but it won't do the lad no harm."

Before daybreak they were up again, keeping their course by the stars.

"Thar's a risk of losing the trail, in course," said Pete as they started, "but we knows in a general way the p'int they varmints are makin' for, and if we're to make up on 'em we must take some chances."

They stumbled on as best they could till dawn; then, having already covered several miles, they began to hunt for the trail. They were now in a sparsely wooded region with undulating hills, browned with the summer heats and marked already with the first signs of winter. As soon as it was light enough to see the ground clearly, they separated and went off at an angle, so that one or other could hardly fail to hit the trail. The signal of its discovery by either was to be the melancholy cry of the whippoorwill, which was not likely to attract attention if any travelers were near.

Rob had gone, as he judged, fully a mile in his new direction, and was probably at least another mile from his companion, before he at last picked up the trail in a little copse. He gave the bird call as well as he was able, and sat down to await the arrival of Pete. To his surprise, only a few seconds had passed before the trap-

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per came round the shoulder of a hill less than a couple of hundred yards away.

"You look kind o' skeered, Rob," he said, "but thar' ain't no need."

"I thought you were far away, Pete, and doubted whether you'd hear my call."

"Never go farther'n you need, lad; 'tain't common sense," said Pete, with a kind intention of giving the boy helpful instruction. "Over yonder the ground is cut up bad—very rough and oneasy goin' for horses or men. It ain't in reason that any critter, varmint or not, should choose a rough road when thar's an easy one, leastways not unless a good deal harder driven than them in front of us; so when I found no signs afore I got to the oneven track I concluded they hadn't gone that way. Consequent, here I am. I see you've picked up the trail, so we may as well go for'ard perserverin'."

For a great part of that day their way led through gloomy and interminable forest, varied only by the different species of trees. Here it was a grove of chestnuts; then a wood of red oak; then maples or poplars; often all the kinds mingled. But for the horses of the raiding party it would sometimes have been difficult to find the trail, for the passage of men through the yielding undergrowth left few traces that could be discovered in the gloom. The two adventurers occasionally refreshed themselves with the nuts and wild fruits that grew in unpruned luxuriance, and Rob again guessed that these pauses for partial rest were more frequent than they would have been had not Pete wished to spare him.

Towards midday they climbed a somewhat steep hill, crowned with cedars. Behind them stretched almost unbroken forest; but the north side of the hill was almost bare, and half a mile below a stream crossed their path.

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At a spot where it widened into a still pool, Pete's keen eyes descried a deer drinking.

"That's our dinner," said the trapper quietly.

"But you won't fire at him? The Indians would hear a shot."

"I guess they're too far ahead, with the wind blowing in our faces, too. In course thar' is a chance of a gun bein' heard by stray reptiles as may be prowlin' round; but we didn't bring much vittles with us, and we'd better risk something now than wait till we come up with the varmints and then find our wallets are empty. We'll creep down as quiet as we can under cover of the bushes; he'll be a bit more tasty than b'ar-meat."

They made their way stealthily down the hill, but when they had reduced the gap between them and their quarry to about four hundred yards they found on emerging from a thick clump of evergreens that the animal had moved away from the bank of the stream. Signing to Rob to remain where he was, the trapper wormed his way forward for another hundred yards, stealing from bush to bush with the unfailing caution of an old hunter.

Suddenly Rob, who had been intently following his every movement, lost sight of him. He seemed to have vanished into the earth, so still was his form and so completely did his costume harmonize with the coloring of the low bushes around him. Casting his eye ahead, Rob espied the deer slowly browsing up-stream, the banks being covered apparently with a short coarse herbage. It was slowly approaching the direct line between Rob and the farther bank, and to his impatience it seemed hours before the animal perceptibly reduced the distance between itself and the spot where the hunter had disappeared.

At last there was a flash from the undergrowth, the

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deer pitched forward on to its knees, then fell sidewise and lay without movement. Pete rose from his place of concealment, wiped his gun, and beckoned Rob to join him.

"A fine beast," said the trapper, "and 'tis a rale pity we can't make the most of him. We'll cut enough to last us for two days without drawin' on what's left in our wallets, and I reckon we can venture to cook a couple of steaks for our dinner, the wind blowin' the smoke this way."

The meal was soon prepared; then, throwing the remains of the carcass into the stream, they once more pushed on. An hour or two later they came upon the traces of the second encampment of the party in front.

"We'll have to be smart," said Pete, after a close examination of the ground. "They've bin dividin' the spoil, which means that thar's goin' to be a split up afore long."

"How do you know?" asked Rob, looking in vain for any telltale marks.

"'Cos jest here in the middle, the grass is a different color from what it is around, and that means that something has been spread upon it. And it ain't their sleepin' blankets: you can trace them separate under the trees. They've laid your father's skins right here, sartin. Wal, we've got several hours before sundown, and if we go on the same pace we've bin goin' all day, I reckon we'll be within ten or maybe fifteen miles of the varmints by the time they camp."

They hurried along, Rob gaining new strength from the knowledge that the enemy's lead had been so materially diminished. In the course of the afternoon Pete was able to recognize certain features of the country which had become familiar to him during a somewhat trying experience ten years earlier.

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" 'Tain't the first time I've bin through this copse," he said, as they entered a maple grove. "See here; these are the very trees I blazed myself." He pointed to the moss-grown patches on the trees. "Ay, I remember that journey clear as clear, and jest haven't I reason to! 'Twas afore Oswego was captured by the Frenchers, and me and two chums—Caleb Blodget was one—got blowed ashore on the east side of Ontario. The gales come up without a moment's warnin' and thar' was me, stranded sixty mile above Oswego and well on the French side. Gosh! 'twas a ticklish concern, for when we tramped along the lake shore, durned if there wasn't a whole tribe of Hurons blockin' the way. We somehow got separated; I couldn't find t'other two, and they couldn't find me; and as I'd got mighty little powder, most of it havin' bin washed overboard, 'twas a case o' bein' scalped or starved if I didn't make tracks pretty smart. So I took the safe course and steered by the sun, when I could see him, blazin' the trees as I went along as a guide to my chums what way I'd gone if they chanced on the same tracks. That's just what they did; and they come into Fort Lynam—what's now William Henry—only half a day behind me, as near famished as I was. We're goin' the same way now, only back-'ards, and afore we've gone many miles farther we'll hit the Black River, as the Injuns call it."

When night fell they encamped in a narrow dingle, thoroughly screened from observation to the northward. After a little hesitation, Pete decided to build a small fire, taking the precaution to damp it carefully so that there should be no glow above the tree-tops. It was needed to cook their supper of venison; moreover, on the previous night they had been somewhat disturbed by the flies, while long-drawn howls proclaimed that wolves were not far off—unwelcome marauders which

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the flame and smoke would keep aloof. The incessant croak of frogs in a neighboring swamp provided a concert to which they were accustomed.

"Shall we march before sun-up again?" asked Rob, as they sat round the fire.

"I guess not," Pete answered. "I'm sartin the varmints ain't far off now, and we want as long a rest as we can get, for there's a long day's work afore us tomorrow. They won't go so fast, now they're nearing the St. Lawrence, and havin' divided the spoil among 'em, the men will carry more and the horses less. I reckon by the shapin' of the course that they're goin' to cross the Black River and make for the headwaters of the Oswegatchie, which'll take 'em into the St. Lawrence within easy reach of Montreal. If they mean to navigate the river in course they'll need canoes, but whether or no, it'll be an easy job to get to their journey's end by way of the valley. And we've got to catch 'em afore that, or we might as well not have come."

"Shall we do it?"

Pete looked at the lad searchingly. The two days' exertions had told upon him. His face was thin and drawn; he moved his limbs stiffly; his whole bearing bespoke utter weariness.

"I'm goin' to speak plain, Rob," said the trapper after his scrutiny. "You've done brave and well for a lad only jest off a sick-bed, as you may say. But the natur' of our bodies ain't to be trifled with, and one of the first things a backwoodsman has to learn is how far he can go without axin' too much of his physiology. My belief is—and I don't hide it from you—that we're two 'tarnal idjuts, lookin' at it in a common-sense way; and by the same token you can't stravage another day like these two without the risk of puttin' your works out of order."

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"I don't care. I'm going through with this if I die."

"Wal, thar's two kinds of sense, common and oncommon. I've told you plain the common-sense way of it, and that bein' not partickler to your likin', we've got to think of t'other. Common sense ain't plentiful; oncommon sense only comes to a few here and there, and they've mostly got oncommon grit, too. But the two kinds are most cur'ous mixed up. 'Tis oncommon sense, I guess, that'll bring us through this job if anything; but we ain't goin' to shut the door on common sense altogether, which is the reason why I'm jest a-goin' to give you a durned good rubbin' with this b'ar's grease I've got in my wallet. In that way one kind'll help the other."

Tired as he was, Rob could not help smiling at the trapper's quaint philosophy. Pete rubbed his joints thoroughly with the grease, keeping up a slow but steady flow of monologue; and when he had finished he wiped his hands on the grass, and remarked:

"Thar', now! The springs'll go easier to-morrow."

Whether it was due to the bear's grease, or to a longer sleep than usual, or to the substantial breakfast Pete's deft hands prepared, Rob trod the spongy ground with a freer, lighter gait when the journey was resumed next morning. The trail was still easy to follow, and in the course of an hour or two they came, as Pete had anticipated, upon the still warm ashes of the raiders' bivouac fires. The trapper examined the site of the encampment with even more care than usual.

"Afore I only suspected; now I'm sartin," he said to Rob, when the latter asked what he was looking for. "D'you see, Rob? Thar' ain't no saplings handy jest here, so the varmints stuck a few hooks into the ground and tied your brother to them. He's with 'em, and a

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livin' critter, thar's no manner of doubt, and we'll push on a bit faster accordin'."

They covered several miles at a more rapid pace than at any time since they began the chase, and by and by forded the Black River. Then the trapper slowed down, remarking that the raiders could not be far ahead, and it was necessary to keep out of sight. From that time they marched more cautiously, avoiding the risk of being seen above the sky-line or bare hill slopes, and carefully scanning the country in front before they crossed the open spaces in the woods.

"'Tis quite clear to me," said Pete, "that the boy's bin ridin' all the way. For why? 'Cos if he'd walked we'd have seen some signs of it. He's not above four foot high, and no boy as I ever knowed would have walked for miles and miles without givin' a tug here and there to a twig on one side or other of the path. I've kept an eye on the bushes, and never a spray has bin bent or broken, 'cept at a height too considerable for Will's arm to reach; and thar' wouldn't have bin none o' them broken at all if 'twas only Injuns in the party."

"They must be farther ahead than you supposed," said Rob, whose eagerness and impatience were increasing.

"Maybe, but I'm not so sure. You see, we've bin goin' slower, for reason why. They ain't far off, that's sartin. And I guess if we see 'em at all to-day, 'twill be from the top of yonder hill. It ain't in reason that they'll make the Oswegatchie afore sundown, which is jest as well for us, 'cos if the varmints have got canoes or batoos in hiding we'd stand a poor chance of overhaulin' 'em, once they get afloat."

Rob breasted the hill so ardently that he was out of breath before he was half way up, and was over-

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taken by the trapper, who had kept up the same steady pace.

"Common sense, my lad; don't you forget the mixture," he said.

Gaining the crest, they gazed over a wide extent of sparsely wooded country, gently sloping towards the northwest. Both stood still to recover their breath and scan the horizon. Pete was the first to break the silence.

"Thought as much. Thar' they are. You see them movin' specks over yonder, almost at the top of the slope?"

"No!—Yes! I see them! D'you think they're the Indians?"

"Sartin sure of it. That's them, hosses and all, marchin' Injun fashion, 'cept in one place, whar they're two or three abreast, and them's Frenchers."

"How far off?"

"Near three miles, I reckon."

"Then we'll come up with them in an hour or two?"

"That's accordin'. We'll have to go careful. Now's the time for oncommon sense. If we go round to the right, through that bit of wood, thar'll be no chance of any of the varmints spyin' us if they turn round, and for all we know they may have kept a man or two behind to look out for any sign of folks on their tracks, though they won't be much afeard of it, arter all this time."

Making the circuit Pete had suggested, they lost sight of the party, and did not again catch a glimpse of it until near sunset. They had reached a small clump of cedars on the summit of a low hill, when, to Rob's surprise, the trapper, speaking in a whisper, told him to look back. About three-quarters of a mile away, in a hollow which the rays of the sinking sun had already

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deserted, Rob saw the whole party halted, and preparing, as it appeared from their movements, to pitch their camp for the night. He felt his heart give a great leap; his young brother was there, almost within a stone's throw of him! But at the same moment he was conscious of a feeling of helplessness. His brother was there, indeed; but of what avail was his pursuit after all? The boy was a captive; he would soon be tied hand and foot in an encampment of more than fifty savage warriors; how could two men dare to hope to rescue him against such odds?

Meanwhile Pete was keenly glancing from right to left, as if to use every minute of the fading light. He followed with his eyes the line of march he presumed the raiders would take on the morrow.

"Thar's no camp-fire for us to-night," he said, lowering his voice so that not a whisper might be carried on the breeze. "We must eat our vittles cold; and if any of the varmints come a-prowlin' on our tracks, remember, Rob, it must be the knife; no shootin'; thar's jest a bare chance with the knife; but a single shot would bring the whole pack round us like prairie wolves. And in case our bein' here skeers some bird or beast and sets they varmints a-wonderin', we'll go a bit for'ard where thar' ain't no sich danger. Move quiet; they Hurons have got ears like a caribou."

Leaving the copse, they found, not far away, a well-screened hollow, in the midst of which three or four stunted bushes provided sufficient cover. It was more than a mile from the spot where the raiders were encamping. The Indians, after a long day's march, and with nothing to arouse their suspicion, would hardly range so far afield in search of possible enemies.

Seated in their hollow, making a cheerless meal of dried bear's meat, the two adventurers held a long whis-

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pered conversation. The despondency which had beset Rob as he looked down on the Indian encampment seemed now to have infected his comrade.

"To tell the truth, Rob," he said, "my spirits are uncommon low. Two lone critters didn't never ought to have started on sech a wild-goose chase. I ain't a-goin' to say die; in our line of life it won't do to go flop; but when you come to calkerlate it, what chance on earth have we got of bringin' the boy away from fifty red varmints up to every p'int of the stalkin' game, to say nothing of the Frenchers, or half-breeds, or whatever they are, that's with 'em? It don't nohow stand to reason. Thar' might have been a chance way back, I allow, if your dad had kept the kind of store at the farm that these varmints might have found at Sir William's, if they'd gone thar' instead. Long afore this they'd have had a feast and a drinkin' bout, and the whole crowd would have been non-compossers. But I don't s'pose they found enough in your cellars to make 'em more'n extra spiteful."

This echo of his own mood served Rob as a tonic. It was characteristic of him that if any one raised a difficulty, he instinctively combated it.

"I'm not going back," he said doggedly, "so we must do something."

"True, we must do something," was the placid reply, "though jest now I don't for the life of me see what the somethin's goin' to be, the reason bein' that the whole concern ain't founded on common sense."

"Oh! hang common sense!" said Rob impatiently.

"And if you speak so loud your scalp'll be hangin' to some Injun's belt afore to-morrow mornin'. Patience, Rob; I know your feelin's, lad; and I've come on this trail to do something, never fear. Only it won't do you nor me no good to think it's goin' to be as easy as

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snarin' a woodchuck. I'll tell you what I'm goin' to try. First thing is to creep down a bit nearer to the varmints' camp and smell out the situation. You stay here, and don't budge an inch till I come back, or 'tis sartin we'll miss each other in the dark. Unless, that is to say, I holler, in which case"—he turned abruptly and pointed almost due east—"that's your best track, and the quicker you make it the better, 'cos the whole pack'll be after you."

Rob made no reply, but if the trapper had read his expression he might have doubted whether his last instruction would be obeyed. Pete got up, and moved quickly away, coming back for a moment to whisper a parting injunction.

"Remember, if a redskin should come this way, it had better be the knife. You'll be sittin' still, and he'll be movin', so you oughter hear him and get in first. Anyways, a shot would most-like miss in this half-light, and for sartin in the dark, and the upshot would be to bring the whoopin' varmints on us, and if we managed to give 'em the slip to-night they'd track us down in the mornin'."

Then he went noiselessly away, leaving Rob to solitude and meditation.

The western glow was dimming moment by moment, and as the dusk deepened Rob shivered and caught his breath. His nerves were strung to so high a tension, his imagination was so much on the rack, that he started with a gasp when a moth came heavily against his brow. In action, meeting his own perils, Rob was fearless and indomitable; but the suspense of waiting, and the knowledge that a single false step or incautious move might endanger the life of the young brother captive in the Indian camp, had a withering effect to which he had as yet been a stranger. The howl of a distant wolf sent

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a cold thrill through him; the sudden *critch* of a woodpecker near at hand caused him to jump.

What was Pete doing, he wondered? In imagination he followed the trapper up the hill, down the slope on the other side, from bush to bush, creeping, crouching to listen, creeping on again, every stealthy step taking him nearer to the camp where half a hundred ruthless savages were ready to spring out at the slightest sound and use their fatal knives. Of their terrible deeds Rob knew as yet only by hearsay; but as he sat, darkness thickening around him, he felt an imaginary hand upon his scalp, heard an imaginary whoop, and waited, as if paralyzed, for the sting of the fiery blade.

The trees beyond were almost blotted from his sight; the bushes near at hand seemed to be growing, moving towards him; when suddenly his fancies were put to flight by a very real sound—a faint rustle almost at his ear. Quick as thought he seized his knife and sprang to his feet; with the demand for action he became on the instant a man of action. Standing with every sinew taut he peered into the bushes; and through the parted leaves, scarcely distinguishable in the gloom, he saw dimly a face—a painted face—the face of an Indian brave!

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CHAPTER VIII

"Brother!"

The word, softly spoken in the Mohawk tongue, was so unexpected that in his revulsion of feeling Rob almost laughed aloud.

"Hist! It is Redwing!" said the voice again, and from the midst of the bush the young Mohawk stepped to Rob's side.

"What does it mean?" said Rob, grasping his friend's hand, and looking curiously into his face, which he had never before seen daubed with war-paint.

"Speak low, brother," replied the Indian. "Words rustle in the night air. When my brother departed, Redwing's heart was sad. He thought of the little white brother with feet and hands tied among his enemies, and kept from his wigwam perhaps for many moons. It was not well. But Redwing could do nothing, and he sorrowed. In the morning came the big Yengeese with presents and fair words—"

"Sir William Johnson?"

"Even so, brother. He talked long with my father, and so great is his power, he turned my father's heart towards the palefaces, and my father agreed to take up the chain of friendship and to send his braves to help the Yengeese; and then I begged for a dozen men to follow the trail of my white brothers, and when I had put on the paint of a brave I met them in the woods, and

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led them over the trail, and now we are here to help our white brother."

"You are a true friend, brother," said Rob. "Where are the braves?"

"They hide not far away. Redwing came first alone, for he feared that if many men showed their faces at the same time the white brother might shoot, and then the Hurons would have known. The old hunter watches their camp three gunshots below; he does not know that Redwing is here."

"Go and bring your friends. He will be as glad to see you as I am."

The Indian disappeared. Rob waited, feeling almost as anxious as he had done before his friend's arrival, but now for a different reason. If the Mohawks should suddenly come upon Pete, in the surprise of the moment, the trapper might make some sound which would attract the attention of the party encamped below. But then he laughed at his fears. Pete was too old a woodsman to allow himself to be taken unawares.

An hour passed. Black darkness now brooded upon the country, but far over the hilltops the horn of the rising moon gave promise of a little light by and by. Rob walked up and down impatiently. When would Pete return? At length, apparently from the cedars, came the low call of a whippoorwill, so natural that the most expert woodsman might have been deceived. A few minutes later the trapper came round a bush into the hollow.

"I'm afeard we can't do nothing to-night," he said. "Thar's a Frencher on guard; they take turn about, I reckon. Thar's three camp-fires."

"Did you see Will?" asked Rob eagerly.

"Yes, right thar' in the middle of the camp, tied up firm. 'Tain't possible for any one to get into the camp

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'less he can burrow like a woodchuck, and as for gettin' out—"

"Did you see Redwing?" Rob interrupted.

"Who?"

"Redwing. I was sitting here when I heard a rustle, and there was Redwing. He has brought a dozen braves to help us."

"Wal, if that don't lick anything!" said the trapper, astonished for once in his life. "And if they'd been enemies instead o' friends we'd have lost our scalps for sartin. Thar's a dozen of 'em, eh? That bein' the case, it looks as if thar' might be jest a chance of gettin' something out of this business, arter all, 'cos it ain't quite so far off common sense. And here they are, as I'm a livin' critter."

One by one the Mohawks moved like dusky ghosts into the hollow. No greeting passed between them and the white men; they stood silently waiting.

"'Tis a cl'ar case for a council," said Pete. "Who's the chief of this party?" he asked Redwing, who, though the son of a chief, was too young to be accepted by the other Mohawks as other than a guide.

One of the Indians stepped forward, and whispered in the trapper's ear.

"The Injun says right," said Pete, turning to Rob. "He says we'd better move a bit farther off, 'cos these still nights you could hear the stink of a skunk. Right, Little Bear; lead the way, my friend, and when you come to a situation as seems safe, we'll talk this matter out."

The Indian marched noiselessly up the slope of the hill and through the cedar copse, till he had gone about half a mile down it on the side farthest from the enemy's camp. There, with a belt of trees and the contour of the hill between them and danger, the party squatted

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down within the selvage of the wood, three or four being left above to guard against a surprise on the part of the raiders.

The impromptu council was conducted with as much form as though it was an important meeting of the tribe. Little Bear invited the trapper to give his views on the situation, but Pete politely declined the honor of speaking first, remarking that his red friend knew the country better than he. The Mohawk gravely acknowledged the courtesy, and spent some time in explaining his motives in undertaking the expedition—the prospect of plunder and the assurance that his white brother would suitably reward him. He went on to say that if anything was to be done, it must be done soon, for they were approaching very near to the St. Lawrence, and might at any moment stumble upon hunting or trapping parties from Fort Frontenac or the scattered posts and settlements between that place and Montreal.

Having allowed a suitable interval for reflection, Pete replied that he agreed with his noble friend, but he did not see what twelve men could do against sixty. The attacking party would have a certain advantage if they could surprise the enemy; but he had no need to remind Little Bear that the red men, even in the most peaceful circumstances, were watchful and suspicious, and a band of Huron braves was not likely to be less on the alert when returning with valuable plunder from a raid.

This again having been duly weighed in silence, Little Bear pointed out that the Hurons before marching next morning would certainly send out a number of scouts to scour the neighborhood for possible enemies.

"Why did my white brother go so near the camp?" he asked. "Is he a spirit that he leaves no mark on

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the ground? Are the Hurons moles that they will fail to see that trail? What chance will there be then of hiding as in a cloud, and smiting them suddenly like the fire-flashes of the sky?"

"Durned if he ain't turnin' common sense agin' me!" said Pete in an aside to Rob. "You have the right of it, brother," he said to the Indian. "You can l'arn me something, even at my age."

And then again silence fell, the Indians remaining silent from force of habit, Pete because he was somewhat nettled at Little Bear's just rebuke, and unable to offer a practical suggestion.

Meanwhile Rob, sitting at the trapper's side, had not opened his mouth. In an Indian council the younger men were expected to listen and say nothing; for them to express an opinion unasked would have been deemed presumption. But Rob had been growing impatient of the slow speeches and solemn pauses of his friends; they seemed to him an unconscionable time coming to the point. Remembering his unlucky intervention in the council at the Mohawk chief's castle, he schooled himself to a humble and different manner, and ventured to address the leader.

"I am a boy," he said, "and have not learned the wisdom of my Mohawk brothers. But does not Little Bear think that, if the Hurons could be persuaded to leave their camp in haste, they would not search the country so carefully as he supposes, and so would not light upon the hunter's trail?"

"My white brother is a boy, it is true," replied Little Bear, "but he has learned to bend a bow and speak the truth. What he says is true. But does the bear leave his den and give his skin to the hunter? Will the Hurons make a hurry because the Mohawks wish it? Perhaps," he added, with a touch of irony—"perhaps my young

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white brother will say how this wonderful thing is to be done."

Muffled grunts from the other Indians approved the skeptic's question. Rob waited a few moments, then said:

"Suppose our enemies saw smoke far back on their trail, would they not think that pursuers were hastening after them? Would they know how many men were on their trail? In their ignorance, would they wait to fight? Would they not rather break up their camp and go forward with the speed of deers, lest the pursuers were too many for them, and took not only their scalps but their booty?"

The Indians appeared to be puzzled about Rob's object in putting these questions. After a pause, Little Bear said:

"The Hurons could not know what was hidden from them. If they saw the smoke, they would do these things, but what of the fire? Has my paleface brother called through the air and brought men out of the earth to pursue his enemies?"

"No, Little Bear," replied Rob gravely, "I am not a Manitou. The fire would not be kindled by a careless woodsman, but by one of my red friends—one whom yourself should choose. While the sun sleeps a man might run back half a day's march, and set fire to the forest. When the sun awakes the Hurons would see the smoke."

The suggestion was received with the same stolid unconcern that the Indians had shown all through the conference.

"Thar's the mixture—common and oncommon," whispered Pete in Rob's ear. "But we mustn't hurry 'em, my lad."

The long silence clearly indicated that the proposal was receiving serious consideration.

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"My white brother speaks wisely," said Little Bear at length. "Before many snows he will be a great chief."

"Ough! Ough!" grunted his comrades in chorus.

"It shall be done as he says. Turtle Heart shall kindle the fire, and the Hurons will fear even as the moose fears at the sight of the *carcajou*."

Without any formal command Turtle Heart, a lithe young brave, rose from his place and went silently into the night. His comrades knew that when the dawn flushed the sky, a dense cloud would be seen on the horizon far to the south, and the enemy's encampment would be hurriedly broken up. But that would be only the beginning of things, and Lone Pete knew, if Rob did not, that it would require careful diplomacy to prevent the expedition from ending in failure after all.

His own aim, and Rob's, was merely to secure the person of Will Somers; their Indian friends would not be satisfied to return without scalps or plunder. It was his policy to avoid a fight; theirs to provoke one. Rob hoped that in the confusion and haste of decamping the Hurons would give an opening for the rescue of the boy; Little Bear and his braves would regard it rather as an opportunity for a sudden attack, in which their inferiority in point of numbers would be balanced by the advantage of surprise. Lone Pete thought it was time for him to take up the running.

"What will my friend, Little Bear, do when the Hurons are hasting forward on the trail?" he asked.

"Listen, brother," replied the brave. "Within twenty gunshots of this place there is a spot where the hand of a giant has cut a passage in the rocks for the Oswegatchie. It is told by our grandfathers, in the evening of peace when the pipes are lit, how, many snows ago, a band of our tribe followed a long war-trail into

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the hunting grounds of the great White Father. They returned with many fine skins upon their backs, and many scalps hanging from their belts, and came to that narrow gorge of the river. There, as a tempest suddenly sweeps over the lake, making the still waters boil and rage, so a host of Hurons, ten times the number of the Mohawks, sprang up out of the earth; and of all the braves of my tribe only one escaped out of the snare. Is it not time the Mohawks paid back that long, old debt? While the sun still sleeps let us hasten on to the gorge and lie hid there, as the hunter hides while he waits for the moose. When the Hurons see the smoke far behind, will any of them think that those who pursue are already in front of them? They will come to the rift, even as our grandfathers came; and then will we do to them as they did to us."

Rob was beginning to protest that if this scheme was carried out his brother would run no little risk of falling to the bullets of his rescuers, but Pete interrupted him.

"Little Bear speaks like a warrior," he said, "and what he says deserves to be thought over. 'Tis the red man's way to think without speaking; the white man thinks better when he speaks; I will talk to our young brother in my own tongue."

"You see, Rob," he went on in English, " 'tis like this. The Hurons will know that gorge as well or better nor any Mohawk, and arter that ambush of generations ago they'll be skeery of dawdlin' thar'. When they see that smoke they'll think as we're a good ten mile behind, and as thar's plenty of time to get through and give us the slip, knowin' that every step they go brings 'em nearer to friends and us farther away. So if we let 'em get past thar's no earthly chance of catchin' 'em again. The redskin's idea is a good un. Not but what thar's

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considerable danger of some one's shootin' young Will in the scrimmage, but 'tis jest possible as we may be able to get hold of him afore the fight begins; and if not, we must take care to shoot wide of him, that's all."

"I don't like it, Pete. Wouldn't there be a better chance of saving Will in the confusion of the first alarm?"

"I calkerlate not. 'Cos why? They wouldn't have burdened theirselves with him if they didn't consider him a vallyble bit of property, 'specially when they've got a thousand pounds' worth of skins beside. Somebody among 'em must think as he's worth takin' care of, and 'tis my belief one of the varmints has took him as his share o' the plunder, and means to make a redskin brave of him. Maybe one of the Hurons has lost all his sons in some fight or other, and young Will wouldn't be the first white boy to be adopted. Wal, if that's the case, the varmint won't let the boy out of his sight, and thar' wouldn't be the ghost of a chance of our gettin' him without a stand-up fight, and whar'd be the common sense of that, a dozen against sixty?"

"Very well, then. Tell Little Bear we agree."

The Indians had shown no curiosity during this conversation, nor did they betray the slightest pleasure when Pete said that in such a case as this the best wisdom of a white man was folly compared to the deep thoughts of a red man. The conference over, the decision taken, the whole party snatched a few hours' rest; but long before daybreak they were gliding like shadows through the woods on the upper slopes of a long, low hill, guided by the sound—at first a scarcely audible rustle, then as they progressed a roar and crash—of a river swirling and tumbling over a rocky bed. A blue autumn haze lay over the whole country, and Pete, expert woodsman as he was, marveled at the readiness

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and certainty with which Little Bear guided them over a pathless region. With the precaution of a born strategist, the Indian did not make direct for the gorge; no trail should be left to put the enemy on their guard; he led the party far up the hill, then spun round sharply to the left and came down upon the river from the northwest. While still a hundred yards from his goal he stepped into the river where it ran shallow by the bank, and the last part of the march was performed in the trackless water, so that when the gorge was reached there was not a footprint for a full furlong round to betray their route.

"I guess this place was made special for the purpose," said Pete, as he looked around at the rocks strewn fantastically about the bed of the stream. "Two men here's worth a good twenty outside. Grandfather's tales is all very well; they have their uses, same as stories of *Bluebeard* and *Guy of Warwick* and other unbelievable tall uns; but if the truth was known I would lay my bottom dollar that terrible big lot o' Hurons what wiped out a few Mohawks was jest a handful and no more, and the manner was aggravated as the tale come down, 'cos the Mohawks couldn't a-bear to think as they'd been done and licked by a few."

At the point selected for the ambuscade, the river had in the course of ages scooped out a trough for itself through the soft earth, leaving a large number of weathered rocks standing in irregular groups in the bed of the stream, which in the rainy season was no doubt considerably wider than it was now, at the close of a dry autumn. Above the channel the hills sloped somewhat steeply on each side, becoming bleaker as they rose, the higher strata having evidently more granite in them than the lower. Here and there, in pockets of softer earth, trees had taken root, but for the most part the

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surrounding country was bare, giving to the scene an illusory appearance of openness.

The rocks were just sufficiently large to afford perfect cover to a lurking brave, and for a hundred yards there was a clear open space, through which a force marching by the easiest route in the now dry portions of the watercourse would be exposed within easy musket-shot to the converging fire of a party in ambush on both sides. Such a party, however, concealed at a distance of a hundred yards from the stream itself, and having the advantage of the best possible cover, might easily remain unnoticed by the leading files of the enemy, who could only discover their presence by climbing the hills above. The spot was so obviously suitable for an ambuscade that a marching force, if they had the least suspicion of the presence of a hostile band in the neighborhood, would certainly send forward scouts to make a thorough examination of the gorge before the main body came within gunshot. It occurred to Pete, indeed, that even without such a suspicion, warriors of a tribe in whose history or traditions a fight had actually taken place there, would not approach without taking such an elementary precaution.

But the trapper hoped that the ruse suggested by Rob might have the effect of concentrating all the attention of the enemy on what they would suppose to be happening in their rear. It was so foreign to the methods of Indian warfare for an enemy to give notice of his presence that the conflagration some miles behind would almost certainly be imputed to accident, and the raiders would scarcely suspect that they had any danger to fear except from that quarter. Their instinct would be to look for safety ahead, and with pursuers pressing upon their track they would be little inclined to waste time in scouting to right and left of their line of march.

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Still, it was Pete's habit to look at the possible worst in any situation, and he had to confess that if the Hurons should take the natural precautions, the position of the ambuscaders would be critical. Thanks to the cover of the rocks they could hope to hold their own for some time against attack, even from the hills above; but sooner or later the superior numbers of the enemy must tell, and the smaller band would have the option of running the gantlet in an attempt to break through or being starved into surrender.

Lone Pete felt the disadvantage suggested by his nickname. All his life he had been a lonely wanderer. His contests had been more with animals than with men. He had been in many a tight place, and had many a hair's-breadth escape from Indian hunters into whose grounds he had strayed; but only on rare occasions had he formed part of a band, and he had never had to act as leader in a fight. He felt himself a match, given favorable circumstances, for half a dozen Indians; but he knew that nothing in his experience qualified him to organize and direct the operations of a company.

In some respects the Indians were no better than he. Concerted action was barely to be expected of warriors who were accustomed to act individually, each shooting at the enemy he marked down for himself without relation to what his comrades were doing. Neither the French nor the English had been able to imbue their unruly allies with the spirit of discipline. But as the critical moment approached it seemed to Rob imperative that the ambuscaders should have some plan; otherwise their energies would be wasted, and the advantage of surprise might be discounted before the numerical superiority of the enemy.

"We can't simply blaze away anyhow," he said to Pete. "If we all fire together and don't manage to

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check them, they'll be able to rush us before we can reload."

"Just so," replied the trapper; "but we can't drill 'em as I've seen the sergeants drillin' the redcoats in Albany, and anyway the drillin' don't come to much, jedgin' by the 'tarnal mess General Braddock made of it."

"I'm afraid you're right," said Rob ruefully. "Still, we can do something. There's you and Redwing; why shouldn't we three hold our fire until the others have let fly their first volley? We could each mark his man, and our shots would not only account for three of the enemy, but might check 'em, because they wouldn't know how many more of us there might be in reserve."

"Thar's the mixture again!" cried Pete, slapping his thigh. "'Tis common sense, with jest that smack of something that makes it oncommon, too."

Rob called up the young Indian, who had hitherto, as a junior, held himself in the background; and told him what he had suggested. Meanwhile the whole party had taken post behind the boulders, careful, as only Indians could be, to prevent their tracks from showing in the soft soil around, and so disposing themselves that the enemy might pass their hiding-places without catching a glimpse of them, Rob got Little Bear to send two of his Mohawks up stream towards a thin copse that fringed the bank, to make sure that not a tuft, or a muzzle end, or an inch of red skin was visible to the Hurons as they approached. They would come through the copse, down the slope, before they found an easier path in the dry margin of the river. The preparations complete, they waited in perfect silence. Rob found the suspense very trying, and at the back of his mind was the dread possibility that a chance bullet might strike the young boy. Pete appeared to take things very coolly, whiling away the time by making a breakfast of bear's

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meat and beans. The Indians were stolid and inscrutable.

The mist of early morning gradually dispersed. Rob every now and then peeped out between a boulder and a fallen tree, that lay awaiting the winter floods to speed it on its voyage to the St. Lawrence. Many times he looked in vain, but at length, with quickened pulse, he saw in the distance up stream the tall sinewy form of a solitary Indian emerging cautiously from the copse. He had but just noticed the variegated plumes of the Huron's head-dress, and the black and vermilion daubs that made his face hideous, when a shorter man came into view behind the first. Each moved with the curious swaying snake-like gait characteristic of the scout, glancing alternately to right and left. They came at a rapid pace, between a walk and a run, slowing down as they drew nearer to the rock-strewn portion of the channel. Instinct told them that this was a dangerous spot.

Only a few seconds after the second man appeared, a different figure came into view. It was that of a Frenchman—a sturdy, thick-set man, riding an equally thick-set horse, which in a moment Rob recognized as his father's old gray mare. Then came more Indians in single file; by and by, another horseman, a gay and gallant youth who sat his steed with easy grace. But Rob gave him only a glance; as the column came through the copse he looked with ever-growing anxiety for the boy whom he had dared so much to rescue. Still more Indians: then—Rob almost exclaimed aloud as he saw, at last, his brother Will indeed, riding a pony, and beside him, on a horse, a figure that seemed familiar. But in the first flush of joy at seeing his brother safe, Rob gave no more heed to this fourth rider than to the preceding two. Holding their muskets at the trail, the two foremost Indians came down the slope, left the rough

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ground on the bank, and stepped into the dry bed of the river. There was a clear stretch of a hundred yards between them and the rocks. Across this they moved with quickened pace, listening intently, never relaxing their watchfulness. Not a sound broke the prevailing stillness save only the slight rustling of the breeze in the tree-tops, the musical gurgle of the stream washing the foundations of the rocks in its course, and the dull pad-pad of the horses among the marching column.

Nearer and nearer drew the two scouts. They passed the outlying rocks, not a sound or movement giving sign of the hidden enemy. Behind them the main body in its turn left the shelter of the copse and began to hasten downwards, four or five yards separating each man from the next. In another half minute the center of the column will come within range of the ambuscader's muskets, and behind the rocks the little band is waiting tensely for that fateful moment. Rob, with Pete and Redwing on each side of him, is wondering how long the patience of the Mohawks will hold out, and praying that his brother may escape the fusillade, when peeping round the edge of his boulder he sees the leading scout drop to his knees at the edge of the stream. Only for an instant; then he springs to his feet, and sounds a whoop of alarm that goes echoing over the hills. His keen eyes had detected footprints on the soft, moist earth. Such care had been taken to avoid leaving these telltale marks that the discovery astonished the ambushed party as much as the scout. But one of the Mohawks, in shifting a boulder for his better protection, had caused the stream to recede a little way in a shallow spot some distance down the bank, leaving bare the earth on which the imprint of his comrades' feet, as they walked through the water previously covering the spot, was clearly marked.

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None of the ambuscaders knew this; there was no time to wonder or speculate; for even as the scout gave the warning cry twelve muskets flashed a death-dealing volley into the column crossing the open space. Rob felt himself go pale; pray Heaven no shot would strike his brother! But no; there he was, safe on his pony, reining it up, his round, chubby face bright, as it seemed, with curiosity. Below him the muskets of the Mohawks had taken toll of their hereditary foes. Eight figures lay on the sward, among them the French sergeant, whose horse stood riderless.

Among the raiders there was a moment of confusion. Only the smoke rising above the volley indicated the position of their unseen enemies; how many they numbered it was impossible to tell. Then with one consent they obeyed their instinctive impulse to seek shelter, and began to scurry away in all directions, some up the hills on each side, some towards the copse. But the next moment a shout was heard; a horse galloped hard down the slope; and the young Frenchman, his face alight with the ardor of a true soldier, called on the fleeing Indians to follow him and attack the enemy behind the boulders. He had divined that they must be few, or they would have followed up their volley with a rush. Courage is always inspiring, and as the gallant youth rode forward several of the fugitives took fire from his example and, flinging down their burdens, sprang forward toward the rocks.

And now it was that Rob's foresight was justified. The Mohawks who had fired were still reloading; the Hurons who had rallied to the Frenchman's call outnumbered them by two to one; and but for the undischarged pieces of Rob and his two companions the ambuscaders must almost certainly have been overwhelmed. At a sign from Pete the three muskets flashed. With

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instinctive generosity towards a brave foe each man had aimed, not at the mounted leader, but at the Indians. Three of the latter fell; the rest halted, daunted by the sight of their comrades helpless on the ground. Then, glancing anxiously around in the hope of finding cover, they scattered and dashed helter-skelter in various directions. The Frenchman had ridden almost up to the boulder behind which Rob crouched before he discovered that he was unsupported. Then, bringing his horse round on its haunches, he spurred it back along the bed of the stream towards the copse, turning half-way to greet with a gay laugh the bullets that were sent after him by the Mohawks. In another moment he was safe among the trees.

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CHAPTER IX

ROB RESCUES AN ENEMY

The fight had lasted only a few minutes. So rapidly had everything happened that when the Mohawks dashed from their lurking-places in pursuit of the enemy, Rob was aware for the first time that his brother had disappeared, together with the man who had ridden by his side. The pony was gone, but not far away lay the dead body of a horse. Rob jumped to the inference that the man, when his steed was shot, had mounted the pony and galloped away with the boy in front of him. Thus burdened the little animal would soon tire; and might possibly be overtaken. Without heeding what Pete and the Indians were doing, Rob raced at the top of his speed towards the copse, with Redwing hard at his heels. For all he knew Hurons might be lurking among the trees, but in his desperate anxiety to wrest his brother from the clutches of his captors he gave never a thought to personal risks.

He had not run for a hundred yards through the copse when he saw, cropping the stunted grass some distance to the right, the old gray mare from which the Frenchman had been tumbled at the first volley. She had been a pet ever since he could remember; surely she would come to his call; and heavy as she was she might still run down the overtaxed pony. Hastening towards her he called her gently by the name given her by his father out of some old romance.

"Amanda!"

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The mare pricked her ears, but went on cropping.

"Amanda!" Rob called again. "Here, old girl!"

She now raised her head and looked at him. Reassured by the well-known voice and form, she came trotting forward as she had done hundreds of times before to receive a meed of sugar or corn-pone. In a trice Rob was in the saddle, and, fretting at the slight interruption to his pursuit, he set the mare's head in the direction the fugitives must, he thought, have taken. During these few seconds Redwing had gone ahead, but he allowed Rob to overtake him, and then ran nimbly beside the horse, easily keeping pace on the rough ground.

Before they reached the end of the copse Rob had bethought himself. He was riding in the direction from which the enemy had come; they would not wish to retrace their course, but would certainly wheel to the right, and, by making a circuit, seek to arrive at the destination which they would otherwise have reached by following the stream. As soon therefore as he reached the fringe of the copse he struck off to the right, hoping that he might be lucky enough to hit upon a short cut and so intercept the fugitives. The soil was so hard that it would have been difficult to discover traces of the pony, even if he had thought it worth while to search. Knowing that his general inference as to the direction of its flight must be correct, he did not care to spend even a minute on a scrutiny that might prove fruitless.

Soon he found that the ground swept downwards in a long slope, and he was urging Amanda to a gallop, when, forcing her through some low briers, he saw just in front a deep cleft, hitherto hidden by the vegetation. He had just time to pull the mare up and escape a fatal plunge. Hurriedly looking to right and left, he groaned almost with despair as he recognized that his short cut had saved him nothing. It was clear that to the right

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the cleft ran down towards the river. His only course was to turn to the left and seek for some spot where the sides of the chasm were less precipitous, so that he might cross, even at some hazard. He had to ride for half a mile before the opportunity offered; then, while Redwing leapt nimbly down one side and up the other, Rob had to ride with caution, fearing every moment lest the mare should stumble on the rocks.

When, having crossed, he was once more able to ride apace, he came to rising ground, and, at the top of a half-mile slope, saw some ten miles of country spread before him, for the most part thickly wooded, but with large clearings here and there, due perhaps to forest fires. One such clearing was a mile distant—a long, narrow strip stretching west-northwest. As his eye fell upon it, he instinctively turned his mare in that way. At the same moment it flashed upon him that if the rider he was pursuing had come in this direction, as it was natural for him to do, he would be tempted to leave the woods and take the easier course along this clear, flat expanse.

The thought had scarcely occurred to him when, to his surprise, three horses emerged from among the distant trees, and, one after the other, pounded at a hard trot towards the farther end of the clearing. Strain his eyes as he might, Rob could not make out the identity of the horses or their riders, yet he felt he must make sure before he galloped after them. He pulled up.

"Who are they, Redwing?" he asked.

The Mohawk, only his panting nostrils giving sign of his long run, looked steadily at the receding horsemen.

"Two red men, one white man," he said at length.

"But Will—my brother—is he there?"

"Redwing can not tell; their faces look to the Huron country, the boy may be before one of them."

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"Can you run again?"

The Indian gravely nodded. On they went, soon losing sight of the fugitives. A few minutes brought them to the woods, a few more to the long, straight clearing, and then they pounded on, following the track. As they went it became clear that the runaways had not struck the course haphazard, but with a full knowledge of the country. The track diverged, here to the right, there to the left, not aimlessly, but, as Rob soon saw, with intent to avoid steep hills or marshy places. He did not again attempt to seek a short cut, but held strictly to the trail, with only the vaguest notion of what his course of action should be if he overtook the enemy.

Hour after hour rider and runner pressed on, at varying speed. The fugitives were clean out of sight. After the fleeting glimpse obtained of them from the hilltop Rob saw them no more. His heart sank as he reflected that the three men, all mounted, were probably making better progress than himself. The old gray mare was long past her best, and even if she had had only one to carry, instead of one to carry and another every now and again to pull, she would not have kept pace with the younger horses in front. Even Will's pony could beat her. If his brother was indeed perched on the saddle before one of the men, he might be shifted from one horse to another, lessening the weight on each in turn. Miserably anxious as Rob was, there seemed nothing for it but to stick to the track, hoping for a lucky turn of events to bring the enemy within reach.

It was growing late in the afternoon when, entering a somewhat thicker stretch of woodland than they had hitherto encountered, Rob was startled to see Redwing suddenly flash forward, and, catching the near rein, bring the mare sharply round, almost throwing her to her haunches. At the same moment there was the crack of a

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musket a little way ahead. With a scream of pain the animal sprang from the track and plunged among the thicker trees, threatening at every instant to bring herself and her rider to grief.

Rob leaped from the saddle just in time to avoid being dashed against a trunk. Hitching the bridle to a sapling, he left the shuddering beast, and with his musket hurried after the Mohawk, who had darted forward on the trail. He was just in time to see the boy hurl himself upon a figure in front. For a moment the two swayed together, and Rob could not distinguish either the features or the dress of the man with whom the Indian was grappling. Redwing had drawn his knife, but the stranger, catching him by the wrist, succeeded by sheer muscular strength in arresting the weapon's downward plunge. They struggled a moment, then both fell, the stranger underneath, and as Rob came up to them, the Mohawk had just wrenched his hand free and was about to deliver a stab that must have ended his prostrate foe.

For a second, however, Redwing forbore to drive his blade home. Rob, now in front, saw the gleaming eyes and exultant look of a brave who knows that his enemy is helpless and at his mercy. The momentary hesitation proved the man's salvation. He was not a redskin: Rob, looking down, saw features, swarthy indeed, but of European cut, and eyes that looked fearlessly up into the face of the Indian about to kill him. Urged by he knew not what instinct, Rob threw himself forward, caught the uplifted arm, and hurriedly, but firmly, commanded Redwing to spare the man's life and rise.

For a moment a look of ferocious anger disfigured the Mohawk's face. What was this—that a Mohawk was commanded to hold his hand when his enemy lay helpless before him? But there was no brooking Rob's firmness.

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The boy rose slowly to his feet, then withdrew sullenly among the trees at some distance—as though to nurse his anger alone.

The stranger sat up and smiled.

"He! it is truly safe," he said in French, running his hand over his scalp. "I thank you, Monsieur—a compatriot surely?"

"No," said Rob, somewhat shortly. Then mustering his French, he went on: "Were you of the party that ran off with my brother?"

"Oh! then it is your brother, Monsieur? You are English! I was not aware. Believe me, it was no doing of mine. I saw no good in kidnapping the child, but Monsieur le Loup thought differently."

At the moment the name recalled nothing to Rob's memory.

"Where is he, Monsieur?" he asked. "What are you doing here?" A suspicion crossed his mind, and glancing around he clutched his musket and called to Redwing. "Are your friends at hand?"

"Indeed, no, Monsieur. If you will listen? Friends!" he shrugged. "I was with Monsieur de Montcalm's army. Our victory was somewhat easily won; it was a promenade, Monsieur; and by no means satisfied my thirst for adventure. Accordingly, when Monsieur le Loup, upon our return journey, proposed an excursion through English ground, with possibilities of hard fighting, the idea smiled to me; it was not so tame as walking into a fort and out again."

"Nor watching your painted devils butchering defenseless prisoners," said Rob bitterly.

"Ah! Believe me, that was horrible. I rejoice to know that I saved one or two Englishmen from death. A white man can not see such things—as you yourself have shown, Monsieur."

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His pleasant smile almost disarmed Rob's suspicion and dislike.

"Tell me, Monsieur," he said, "where are your companions, and what are they doing with my brother?"

"I give you the truth, Monsieur. They are riding towards Lake Ontario. By the shore they expect to find a party of Hurons who, instead of fighting under our flag, have been hunting. They will have canoes; with their aid my late comrades—companions of the road, rather; they are no friends of mine—will cross to Fort Frontenac."

"And my brother?"

"Ah! Monsieur, what can I say? He was bought by Le Loup, with what intent I know not."

"Le Loup!" exclaimed Rob, his recollection partly awaking. "I have heard that name."

"It befits him. He is a half-breed,—his father's name was Bessière—"

"The man we saved from the Abenakis!"

The young Frenchman stared.

"Indeed, Monsieur, I did not know it," he said. "He was saved by Englishmen, he told us; he boasted of having deceived you; but that the boy he stole was the brother of the Englishman who saved him from the Abenakis' knife, that he did not tell. Believe me, Monsieur, if I had known—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Rob. "Pardon me, Monsieur; I am impatient to be after the wretch. But you—how is it that you are left behind?"

"A trick of Le Loup's, Monsieur, for which he shall pay me. When we caught sight of you on the hill yonder, we thought you were the advance scout of a large force, and having already escaped an Indian ambush on the Oswegatchie, we were in no mind to court further danger. We pushed on at our utmost speed, and half

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an hour ago the pony that Le Loup was riding suddenly foundered. My faith! he has impudence, Le Loup. He proposed that we should change steeds. I replied that the idea was distinctly amusing. But with a sudden jerk he pulled me from my horse and vaulted into the saddle. My blood is hot, Monsieur. I sprang to the bridle and dragged upon it; whereupon my gentleman drew his knife, and I had but just time to edge away, escaping with a graze. Next moment I was on my back, and Le Loup galloping away."

"And where was the boy?"

"On the saddle before the other member of our party, the Huron chief."

"But I do not understand. When I saw him he was on the pony, and Le Loup on a horse by his side."

"When you saw him, Monsieur?"

"Yes—from behind the rocks."

The Frenchman looked amazed.

"The ambush was yours, then, Monsieur? We thought it was an Indian trick, though we wondered at meeting enemies in this region. Danger, we thought, was behind us, not before. Le Loup, like better men, has his moments of terror, Monsieur. When you fired upon us, he was struck with panic, and his horse being shot, he pulled your brother from the pony and fled, heeding nothing but the safety of his own skin. But the Huron chief, who was behind in the copse, seeing the boy coming towards him alone, caught him up on his own horse, and fled also. He had wished to have the boy when the plunder was divided. He overtook Le Loup, I overtook them both, and we rode on together, as you saw."

"And the shot we heard just now?"

"Would have killed you, Monsieur, but for the quickness of your Indian. Being deserted, what could I do but remain? I could at least account for the foremost

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pursuers I imagined behind us. I took cover behind a tree, and fired at you; the promptness of your Indian saved you. And then when the Indian threw himself upon me—you remember, Le Loup's knife has grazed me, Monsieur."

He smiled, but Rob noticed that he was very pale, and that he made no attempt to rise from his sitting posture.

"A graze!" said Rob. "Are you sure it is no worse?"

He stooped and looked at the Frenchman's shoulder. There was a two-inch gash in his tunic, and the blood was even yet oozing.

"Why, you are badly wounded, Monsieur," cried Rob.

"I can not see my back," replied the Frenchman simply, with a smile.

Rob was not a little perplexed. Short as the conversation had been, it had consumed several minutes and he was still more eager to continue his pursuit, now that he knew into whose hands Will had fallen. But if he left the Frenchman where he was the Mohawks, when they found the trail, as they assuredly would do, and came upon him, would certainly take his scalp.

"I see the dilemma," said the Frenchman, breaking in upon his thought. "I am your country's enemy, and therefore yours. Go after your brother—if you must—I warn you of the danger you run into—and leave me to do the best I can for myself. I can hide among the trees, and though, if your friends miss my trail, I shall perhaps have some difficulty in reaching Fort Frontenac, what matters it? I took part in Le Loup's adventure with my eyes open."

"The pony! what has become of it?" asked Rob, remembering the circumstances which had brought the Frenchman to this plight.

"It is somewhere among the trees."

"Redwing, find Solomon; he is among the trees. He

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is a sound and wise beast, Monsieur, and after this rest will be able to carry you slowly after us. I will get my Indian to give you something which you may show to the Mohawks, if they find you, or to a trapper friend of mine, as a sign that you are his prisoner. Now, while Redwing is finding the pony, let me see what I can do for your shoulder."

"You forget your brother, Monsieur."

"No, I don't, but I can't leave you like this, and it won't take a minute."

He gently removed the Frenchman's coat, and found that the wound of which he had made so light was really a deep gash. His woodland experience with Lone Pete had given him some knowledge of how to dress a wound, but he had nothing at hand except his shirt from which to form a bandage. Tearing a strip from this, he did his best for the wounded man, and had just bound up his shoulder when Redwing returned with the pony. It whinnied with pleasure on seeing its old master. Rob patted its neck and tethered it to a tree close by. Then, with a little difficulty, he persuaded Redwing to hand his bead necklace to the Frenchman as a token for any Mohawk who might discover him, and returned to the spot where he had left the mare.

Her wound proved to be rather more painful than serious, and was not likely to prevent her from carrying him for several hours. Mounting, he returned to the Frenchman.

"Do you know anything of forest-craft?" he asked—"enough to follow our track!"

"None, Monsieur; I am a soldier, with little knowledge of the woods."

"Well, keep a northeasterly course: that should lead you in the right direction. I hope you will get somewhere safely."

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"I thank you," said the young Frenchman, "and may I know the name of my good enemy?"

"Rob Somers. And yours?"

"Alphonse la Clavière. Farewell, Monsieur; I have a double debt to pay—to you, and to Sieur le Loup."

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CHAPTER X

AT FRONTENAC

The meeting with the Frenchman made Rob only the more eager to pursue his quest, even though he was conscious of a foreboding of failure. His brother, it was clear, was in the hands of a man entirely unscrupulous, wholly without compunction. Rob was past thinking of his own dangers—the perils of a lonely march through a hostile country, of falling himself into the power of a miscreant in whom the savagery of an Indian was mingled with the baser qualities of the white man. He felt a compelling force upon him, forbidding him to rest until he came at least within touch of the young boy thus cruelly snatched from home and friends.

He pushed on with Redwing until the gathering darkness completely hid the trail. Neither of them knew anything of the country, but from what Lone Pete had said Rob guessed that at sunset he would not be more than thirty miles from Lake Ontario. Precious time having been lost during the conversation with the Frenchman, he knew that his only chance of overtaking the party before they reached the Huron encampment was to continue his march in the dark, so, dismounting, he led the jaded mare, Redwing going a few yards ahead and taking upon himself the responsibility of choosing the course.

For hours they pressed on, until exhausted nature could hold out no longer. They halted in the middle of a wood, not daring to sleep lest an Indian or a cougar

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should attack them, starting at every sound made by bird or beast. Before sunrise they were again afoot, picking up the trail without difficulty when the dawn palely illumined their steps. The old mare gallantly responded to Rob's urging, but the constant marching was too much for her, and the effort of climbing a hill brought her almost to her last gasp. Rob was thinking of leaving her and finishing his journey on foot when, gaining the summit, he saw beneath him the blue expanse of Lake Ontario glistening in the sunlight.

He cast his eye over the country between him and the shore, but there was no sign of the fugitives. Had they already reached the Huron encampment, or had the Indians left the spot? Redwing, eagerly scanning the broken shore-line, pointed to a number of scattered specks on the farther side, which he declared to be tents. With vision less keen, Rob had just descried the objects indicated when, from the shelter of a wooded headland, a number of canoes, tiny in the distance, crept slowly northward along the shore. There was no smoke among the tents, no sign of life; it would seem that the encampment had been abandoned hurriedly, or the tents would not have been left thus standing.

Weary, utterly dejected, Rob leant gloomily on his musket, watching the small dark objects almost imperceptibly receding. The drooping head of the mare at his side seemed to show that the beast shared his hopelessness. But Redwing's attitude was no clue to his feelings. Erect, unmoved of countenance, only his fine-cut nostrils quivering, he stood keenly scrutinizing every object within view. Rob paid no heed to him. He felt that the game was up. A day's journey by canoe—cutting off, if the weather remained fine enough to risk the open, many indentations of the shore—would bring captors and captive to Fort Frontenac. By no possible

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exertions could the jaded pursuers hope to reach the same point before them; and even if a genii could have spirited them there, of what avail would it be? What chance was there of rescuing the boy? Did they but come within sight of the fort, a swarm of Indians would be launched in pursuit of them, and the end of it would be that two more prisoners would be added to the tale—perhaps two scalps would dangle from the girdle of some Huron Brave.

Bitter thoughts darkened Rob's mind as he stood watching. Why had he started on this foolish chase? Why, when the ambush had failed, did he rush away so impetuously, instead of waiting to take counsel with his wise, tried friend, Lone Pete? What had become of the trapper, and the Mohawks, and the Hurons who had fled? What would be the fate of the young boy now being carried, he did not doubt, a prisoner among the French?

He was disturbed in his reflection by a sudden movement of the mare. She had been cropping the short herbage on the hilltop. But now she stopped munching, lifted her head, pricked up her ears. Rob turned expectantly. There was a soft patter of many feet behind. Rob and Redwing swung round to meet the rush, but before they could even cock their muskets they were borne off their feet by a dozen painted Indians. Their firearms were wrenched from their grasp; guttural cries of satisfaction sounded in their ears; and in a twinkling they found themselves on the ground, tied hand and foot.

The suddenness of the onset bereft Rob for a few seconds of all power of thought. But a short excited dispute among the Indians—they were debating whether to scalp their prisoners at once or to reserve them for torture—gave him time to recover his wits and to use them with a rapidity that he recalled afterwards with

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amazement. It was not the last occasion when, under stress of a great peril, his brain worked by flashes of intuition. His captors were Hurons: that he saw. Were they some who had escaped the ambush, or did they belong to the party which had recently embarked? How much did they know? Had the chief who had accompanied Le Loup from the gorge gone with the canoes or remained in the encampment on the lake shore? These were questions the answers to which were all-important to the success of the ruse which had suggested itself to him. There was no time for the wise balancing of probabilities; at the critical moment he jumped the hazard. When the short discussion ended, apparently in favor of torture, Rob was cool, alert, in full possession of his faculties.

"Since when, brother," he said in French, addressing the leader of the Indians, "have the Hurons lifted the hatchet against their Great White Father?"

The Indian looked searchingly at his questioner. Rob met the gaze without quailing. He knew that the costumes of English backwoodsman and French *coureur du bois* were often hardly distinguishable.

"The Hurons have not lifted the hatchet against their Great White Father," replied the redskin slowly, in halting French.

"Your tongue and your hands belong to two different bodies, brother," returned Rob. "Your tongue says the hatchet is not lifted; your hands have dealt with me as an enemy, not a friend. Is it thus that you treat the sons of the Great White Father? Will he not be a fire and a smoke when he hears of this affront?"

Rob was careful to speak with the deliberation that an Indian loved, and his heart gave a leap when he saw, from the impression he had made, that his captors knew nothing about him. The first move in the game was in

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his favor. The Huron's next words raised a difficulty that Rob had foreseen. Glancing at Redwing, whose face expressed no concern, he asked:

"When did the Mohawks take a link in the chain of friendship with the children of the Great White Father? The Hurons, the Miamis, the Abenakis, and many more, are his sons, but the Mohawks—no!"

"Has my brother not met Le Loup?" exclaimed Rob, in well-feigned surprise.

The Hurons exchanged glances. If this stranger knew Le Loup he must indeed be a friend.

"We saw Le Loup when the sun was waking," the leader replied, "and his feet were as swift as a roe's, and we had no speech with him."

"Then my brothers are ignorant. They do not know that Le Loup has followed a trace into the Mohawk country, and with a few braves and two or three sons of the White Father has dealt a great blow at the Yengeese. True, the Mohawks were once friends of the Yengeese; but the Yengeese broke the chain of friendship: they closed their hands, and though their lips smiled their hearts were hard. Therefore the Mohawks folded their arms when the Hurons came into their grounds, and shut their eyes when Le Loup and their friends took the pelts of the Yengeese and burned their tents. And if the feet of Le Loup had not been so swift he would have told you that as he came back over the trace the Tuscaroras sprang on him and his friends as the cougar leaps on the elk, and my brother, the young Mohawk here, with his eyes fixed on the trail, was caught with us in a snare, and only Le Loup and a handful of others escaped. We were scattered like leaves in the wind. Some are still wandering in the woods, but the enemy are many; they are hot on the trail. Is it not hard when my young Mohawk brother and I, after doub-

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ling like hares, and loping from sunrise to sunset, like the red fox when the hunter pursues, should be caught and bound by our Huron brothers? If my brother wishes his White Father to speak words of peace, he will loose these bonds and take us to his tents."

A pause followed this speech. Rob narrowly watched the Indians, but could discover nothing from their faces. At length the leader made a sign; the bonds were cut; and when the prisoners stood up on their feet, several of the Hurons disappeared silently among the trees. Rob guessed that they had gone to scout for the hostile tribes who he had said were hunting the survivors of the ambush, and he fervently hoped that they would not fall in with any of that party and bring him in to disprove his story.

The rest set off towards the lake, taking Rob and Redwing with them. They talked among themselves, and Rob wished he could make out what they were saying, but the Huron dialect was foreign both to him and to the Mohawk. He could see that the leader was but half-convinced, keeping a watchful eye on his prisoners, with a glance from which, schooled as he was in the concealment of feeling, he could not banish a touch of suspicion.

As they came nearer to the shore, Rob saw a number of canoes lying under the bank, previously hidden from him by the contours of the ground. There were a few Indians in the encampment, and Rob felt a tremor of anxiety when he saw the leader giving them, as he guessed, an explanation of what had happened. If one of them had chanced to be with the raiding party, he would tell at once that the supposed Frenchman had not been among them, and then there would come a lamentable end to the ruse which had hitherto succeeded so well. But the men looked at him with pure curiosity

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and without a sign of disbelief, and he felt that for the time being he was safe. Exposure must come sooner or later, but even a single hour's reprieve left a loophole.

Two of the Indians were told off to guard him and Redwing while the others proceeded with the work, interrupted by his arrival, of loading the canoes with skins and other trophies of the chase. When Rob got an opportunity he asked the leader where the greater part of his band had gone, and learned, as he expected, that they had set out earlier in the day for Fort Frontenac. He did not doubt that Le Loup had been among them, and presumably Will also, but he forebore to mention the boy.

The sun set not long after they reached the encampment, and the departure of the party was deferred till the next day. Rob was not sorry, for after his exertions he needed a long rest, and he nourished a vain hope that during the night Lone Pete and others of his late comrades might find him and turn the tables on his captors. But the hours of darkness were undisturbed.

Morning came. The last canoe was loaded up, and the chief Huron leader only awaited the return of the two scouts who had gone out over night. Just before noon they were seen on the sky-line, and Rob's heart gave a jump when he saw among them the figure of a white man on horseback. He could not doubt that it was the young Frenchman, Alphonse la Clavière, whom he had left on the previous afternoon. Discovery was truly certain now, he thought. His story might lull the suspicions of the Hurons in the absence of a real Frenchman, but La Clavière would have no interest in maintaining the fiction. In their rage at being duped, the Indians would give him short shrift, Rob feared.

His anxiety was not diminished when he saw the Huron leader advance to meet the Frenchman, who

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smiled in recognition and shook hands. Rob watched them. The Indian was plainly giving an account of the event of the previous evening. As he walked beside the Frenchman's horse, he frequently pointed at Rob and at Redwing, squatting on the ground not far away. As they approached, Rob seemed to hear already the blood-curdling whoop of the Hurons when the ruse should be exposed, and to feel the ruthless hand already seizing him.

The smile on the Frenchman's face had given place to a grave and thoughtful look. He listened attentively to the Huron, and his eye met Rob's. The party was now within a few yards of the shore. La Clavière dismounted, seemed to hesitate for a moment; then, advancing towards Rob with outstretched hand, he turned to the Huron, and said, with a smile:

"Yes, brother. These are my friends."

Rob thanked the Frenchman with a glance. For the moment he had no opportunity of speaking with him. Wounded as he was, the effort of following up had broken down his little strength, and at the Huron leader's order he was at once carried to the nearest canoe. The preparations for departure were then completed. The party divided, one section being told off to convey the horses, with some portion of the stores, by land, the other embarking on the canoes. At La Clavière's request, Rob and Redwing were given places on the craft in which he lay, weak and pale.

"I owe you my life," said Rob in an undertone, as the canoe began to glide over the lake. "Believe me, I am grateful."

"Don't speak of it," returned the Frenchman. Then, with an eye on the Huron leader, who sat watching them gravely, he added. "Speak very low; our red friend, I fear, is but half convinced. I wish I could speak Eng-

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lish; these Indians are very quick, and understanding French, as some of them do, they will seize the least hint that all is not quite as we represent it."

"I will be careful. We are no doubt going to Fort Frontenac?"

"Yes; and I have been wondering how you can escape before we get there. I also owe you my life, Monsieur, and I would not wish to see you a prisoner among us. The lot of English prisoners is not one to be envied. If you could escape, perhaps, when we come to the Thousand Isles—"

"Monsieur, it is not to be thought of. There are two of us—Redwing and myself. The chances of both escaping are slight, and the Mohawk has done so much for me that I can not leave him, and I know he will not leave me. And supposing we did escape, what would become of you? The Hurons in their rage at being deceived would certainly wreak vengeance on you, and in these solitudes they could make away with you without any fear of the deed being discovered. Besides, Monsieur, you forget that I am seeking my brother. He is probably now in Fort Frontenac, and it will be at least something if I can see him once more and know that he is safe. It is indeed possible that we may be imprisoned together; then—"

He stopped. La Clavière looked at him and smiled.

"I see, Monsieur. Escape is deferred, is it not? Though a Frenchman, and an enemy, I will say, I wish you luck—you and your brother."

They were rounding a bend of the shore which would shut their place of embarkation from view. Suddenly there was a cry from one of the Indians, and all eyes were turned in the direction he indicated with outstretched finger. On the farther shore of the lake stood a group of Mohawks, amid whom Rob easily distin-

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guished the form of Lone Pete. He had arrived too late. There was a derisive shout from the Hurons; the canoes swept round the land; and the trapper and his Mohawk friends were lost to view.

As they glided down the lake, Rob and La Clavière talked together. The Frenchman spoke of his boyhood in Quebec; of the death of his parents, and his brief military service; of his only sister, now temporarily sheltered in the Ursuline convent; of Monsieur de Vaudreuil, the governor, and his jealousy of Montcalm; of Monsieur Bigot, the intendant, a vicious and corrupt official who was enriching himself at the expense of the colony; of the Canadian seigniors who abhorred the war, and only wished to be left to cultivate their little domains in tranquillity. Among these was an uncle of his own, a Monsieur de Noillac, who had turned miserly since he had suffered from the official corruption. Rob on his side gave confidence for confidence, and by the time the canoes came to the landing-place, and the party disembarked, waiting to be joined by those who had marched round the shore, the two lads were as friendly as though they had known each other for years.

Outside Fort Frontenac there were two or three Indian encampments. The Hurons led their captives into one of these, and handed them over to the chief—the man who had accompanied Le Loup on the raid. When he heard the story of the capture, he looked suspiciously at Rob, and immediately ordered some of his braves to bring them after him into the fort. He said a few words to La Claviere, and Rob, watching the Frenchman's face, knew that the exposure of his ruse was at hand, and braced himself to meet whatever fate might be in store for him.

As they passed through the encampment on the way to the fort he looked anxiously around for any sign of his

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brother. There was none, nor did he see the sinister figure of the half-breed, to whom he felt his present predicament was due. But when they had entered the fort, and were being conducted to the quarters of the commandant, he heard a sudden boyish cry, repeated once and again, and mingled with the deeper protesting tones of a man. As he looked around, he saw a small boy rush from the doorway of one of the log cabins near the ramparts, and a man in backwoods costume hurrying in pursuit.

"Rob! Rob!"

It was his own name. The boy came speeding across the road, distancing his pursuer, his eyes shining with a great gladness. Rob took a step to meet him, but the Huron chief interposed, a scowl upon his face. Will Somers sprang into the midst of the party, wrenched himself free from the detaining hands of the Indians, and flung himself into his brother's arms, crying with a happy laugh:

"I knew you'd come, Rob, I knew you would!"

Meanwhile Le Loup had come up behind, and strode with blazing eyes into the group. He halted in surprise, and his fierce look quailed, when La Clavière, whom he had not before seen, moved towards him.

"Yes, it is I, in the flesh, Monsieur le Loup," said the Frenchman quietly. "You did not expect me so soon? I was fortunate—after you left."

The half-breed stood for a moment speechless; then, deceived apparently by La Clavière's manner, he said:

"That boy is mine, Monsieur, as you know."

"Precisely, Monsieur le Loup, the boy *was* yours. But it appears that he has relatives, and this gentleman, whom I believe you have met before—"

"Dog of an Englishman!" ejaculated Le Loup with a dark look.

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"Precisely. He, as I was about to say, has by right of blood a prior claim upon the boy to yours—"

"He is a prisoner," interrupted the half-breed. "He falls to the governor; the boy is mine."

"Precisely, again, Monsieur le Loup, and we are now going to the governor to have the matter settled, to the satisfaction, I hope, of all parties." La Clavière waved his hand with an air of having settled the matter.

Le Loup, eying the suave Frenchman somewhat suspiciously, fell in with the group as they resumed their march. The Indians had looked on at the scene stolidly, but while the half-breed was speaking they so placed themselves as to hem him in and prevent him from returning to his quarters.

They went on until they came to the house of the governor, Monsieur de Noyan. La Clavière sent up a message, and was invited with the rest of the party into a small open courtyard within the gates; the French were not fond of having their red allies within their rooms. Thither in a few minutes came the governor.

"My name is Alphonse la Clavière, Monsieur, and I am a soldier of Canada, as you see," said the young soldier, after the exchange of salutations. "I need not detain your Excellency by detailing the circumstances that account for my presence here. The immediate matter on which I have requested an interview with your Excellency concerns my Huron friend, who will place it before you in his own way."

The commandant smiled pleasantly.

"What, again, Tête de Boeuf?" he asked. "I have already heard one story from your Huron friend, Monsieur la Clavière; and I am probably not far from the mark if I assume that you were one of this famous raiding party that met with a mishap of late."

"Your Excellency is right."

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"Well, then, Tête de Boeuf, tell me what is your trouble now."

The chief turned to the Huron who had captured Rob and Redwing and bade him speak. Slowly and with many figures of speech the man told the whole story. He explained how his suspicions had been lulled by the declaration of Monsieur la Clavière that the captives were his friends, and he had brought them to the fort in the expectation of receiving a reward for assisting servants of the Great White Father, only to find, at the moment of entering, that the white captive was claimed as a brother by the young boy previously captured, and must therefore be, not a Frenchman, but one of the hated Yengeese.

The tale took some time in telling. The commandant heard it patiently; then, turning to the Frenchman, he said:

"What have you to say, Monsieur la Clavière?"

"Our friend's story is true, Monsieur. I did indeed acknowledge the stranger as my friend, and when your Excellency has heard the reason, you will not, I think, blame me."

He went on to relate how Rob had saved him from the Mohawk when he was incapable, by reason of his wound, of adequately defending himself. Le Loup in the background kept his eyes fixed on La Clavière, as if in apprehension that he might explain how he came by his wound. A gleam of satisfaction crossed his face when the story was ended without so much as his name being mentioned.

"And now what does my friend, Tête de Boeuf, ask of me?" demanded the commandant, turning to the chief.

"He asks his due, no more," replied the chief with dignity. "He demands that the young paleface brave," indicating La Clavière, "shall be punished for deceiving

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the sons of the Great White Chief, and that the two Yengeese brothers, and the young Mohawk, lawful prisoners of the Hurons, shall be given up to us."

"As to the first request, that is a matter for me. If Monsieur la Clavière deserves punishment, punished he shall be—as to the second—"

He paused, and the look of perplexity on his face did not escape the watchful Indians. The commandant was indeed on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand the friendship of the Indian tribes was all-important to the French cause, and the officials, from the governor and the commander-in-chief downwards, were ready to stretch a point to conciliate them. On the other hand, as a white man, Monsieur de Noyan could not bring himself easily to deliver over two of his own color, enemies though they were, to the tender mercies of the savages. The tale of what had happened at William Henry had struck a chill of horror into the hearts of many a gallant Frenchman.

His hesitation was not prolonged, for he knew that any sign of reluctance to do justice would tend to weaken the alliance between the Indians and the French.

"As to your second request," he said, "there is reason in it. The white man here," indicating Rob, "and the Mohawk are, as you say, your lawful prisoners."

"Ough! Ough!" grunted the Indians in chorus.

"But, for the boy, your claim, Tête de Boeuf, is not yet established. Louis Bessière declares that he is his, you know. Ah! I see him yonder. Come forward, Bessière!"

Le Loup, taking confidence from La Clavière's silence as to what had happened in the forest, came forward readily.

"Monsieur la Clavière will bear witness," he said eagerly, "when we divided the plunder, the boy became

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mine; Monsieur knows how many skins I gave up in exchange for him."

"That is true," said La Clavière at once. "The boy was certainly adjudged to Monsieur le Loup."

The half-breed scowled at the use of his nickname instead of the name by which the commandant had addressed him. La Clavière smiled so amicably, however, that the man's face cleared and he looked secure in the triumph of his cause. But the Huron chief began to protest vehemently.

"It is true, yes," he cried. "I wished to have the boy, and Le Loup gave me many skins to yield him up. But does Le Loup hide in a cloud what happened at the narrow road? Does his mind sleep that he sees no more the strewn rocks, and hears no more the thunder of the guns? Is it a dream in the night when Tête de Boeuf sees Le Loup, with fear on his face, tearing the boy from his pony, leaping on in his place, and riding away with the swiftness of a roe? Was it not Tête de Boeuf who, coming up and finding the boy standing alone, lifted him to his saddle and brought him safely out of the fray. If a dog leaves a bone and runs away in fear of a cougar, does not the bone belong to a bear that comes by and finds it a delicate morsel?"

Bessière's face went livid with rage when he heard the disparaging comparison with a dog. But an outburst was forestalled by La Clavière who, speaking in his customary level tones, said:

"There is one witness, Monsieur, whose evidence will be conclusive—the boy. He does not understand French, and therefore knows nothing of what we have said; let his brother question him, and tell us—for he does know French—what his answers are."

The invariable "Ough! Ough!" of the Indians showed their approval of the suggestion. To Le Loup's face the

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former look of anxiety returned; then he flashed a glance at young Will in which Rob read a menace.

"Be it so," said the commandant. "Monsieur l'Anglais, the word is to you."

Rob turned to his brother, who meanwhile had stood in the midst of the group, his face throwing back, as it were, reflections of the varying expressions on the countenances of the speakers.

"Will, I have to question you. The commandant wishes to know the truth. What happened when the men you were with were fired on from the rocks?"

"Why, this man here," said the boy, looking at Le Loup, and speaking with frankness, "was just skeered out of his wits. His horse was shot; down he jumps; pulls me off Solomon; jumps on him; and off he goes like the wind. Then the redskin came up; and while the Frencher was trying to lead the others on, the redskin slung me on to his horse—ours really, you know—and galloped into the wood."

"And what then?"

"Why, we caught up the man who ran away, and they then began to jabber in the redskin talk, and nearly had a fight; and then we came here, and I've been with the skunky one ever since, though the redskin wouldn't let me go till the Frencher," glancing at Monsieur de Noyan, "made him. I'd sooner be with the redskin, Rob; but I don't care about anything, now you've come."

Rob translated this into the politest French he could muster. Again the Indians grunted their approval, and Le Loup flung a malignant look at the boy.

"It is clear that Louis Bessière forfeited his right to the prisoner when he left him," said the commandant. "The brothers belong to the Hurons. But come, Tête de Boeuf, I will make a bargain with you. You take the Mohawk; leave the two palefaces with me, and I

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will give you silver, and beads—yes, and fire-water. Is not that a good price, my brother?"

"The paleface is brother to Le Loup if he speaks thus," said the Huron. "Already have I given the boy up for many skins, but the Manitou was displeased. For was it not the Manitou who sent fear into the heart of Le Loup, and caused him to leave the boy whom he had bought with skins? Let the paleface chief keep the Mohawk and the elder paleface; Tête de Boeuf will keep the boy."

"But why does my brother want the boy? Does not his heart warm at the thought of the silver and the other precious things I will give him—fire-water that will keep him and all his tribe happy from moon to moon?"

"My brother knows that the Hurons, in following the war-trail with the servants of the Great White Father, have lost many sons. Shall they vanish from the earth, like smoke from the cooking-pot, that rises in the sky and is seen no more? The Manitou has given this boy to Tête de Boeuf, that he may learn to speak truth and bend the bow and become a mighty hunter and a sachem in our tribe. My brother has said the boy is mine. If his mouth speaks justice but his hand does not, how can the red man trust the palefaces? How can they be any longer the sons of the Great White Father?"

Silence fell upon the group. The commandant looked uncertainly from the Indian to Will, from Rob to La Clavière. His position was one of no little difficulty. Many a letter from headquarters had impressed on him the importance of maintaining the Huron alliance, and hitherto Tête de Boeuf had been among the most loyal of the allies. Yet, looking at the boy's blue eyes and fair hair, marking the happy confidence with which he regarded his brother, he could not easily reconcile himself to handing him over, even though he knew that the

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Huron would treat him well, as they had treated many white boys before, and adopt him heartily into their tribe.

For a time he hovered between the two impulses. At last policy gained the ascendancy. With a shrug and a sigh, an air of mingled protest and acquiescence, he said:

"Leave me the elder boy; for him I will give you a handsome present. The younger boy—he is yours."

At this surrender the usual impassivity of the Indians gave way, and they shouted with satisfaction. But Rob caught Will's hand and started forward.

"Monsieur, you can not mean it," he said. "Surely the French do not make war on boys—or infants like this! Let them take me, Monsieur, if they will; but I ask, I beg you as white man pleading to white man, do not give up my brother."

The commandant was visibly touched, and his voice was uncertain as he replied:

"Monsieur, what can I do? If they take you—" he made an expressive gesture which implied that one more scalp would be added to the tale. "But they will cherish the boy, and who knows? Perhaps—I wish I could speak English, Monsieur; you understand what I mean?"

Rob guessed his meaning. There was a chance that even yet Will might escape from the Hurons before he had become one with them. And while he himself was alive, he might still hope to be reunited with his brother. He did not dare to look at Will, who stood in blissful unconsciousness of what was before him. Mastering his emotion with an effort, he turned once more to the commandant.

"The Mohawk, Monsieur—what of him? Will not they be satisfied with my brother? If they take Redwing you know what his fate will be. Can not he be bought off? I can promise that, when this war is over, what-

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ever is given to the Hurons in exchange for Redwing's freedom shall be amply repaid."

Monsieur de Noyan was a kind-hearted man. His feelings had already been sufficiently wrung by Rob's distress. So he put this new point earnestly to the Huron chief.

"No," replied Tête de Boeuf sternly. "The Hurons have lost too many braves. The Mohawk is their enemy; it is needful that he should suffer, to turn the frowns of the departed spirits to smiles, and bring sunshine upon the Huron's path. The Mohawk must die."

"A la guerre comme à la guerre!" said the commandant with a shrug. "It is the Indian custom. Even so would a Mohawk do to a Huron that fell into his power. The sitting is finished, Monsieur la Clavière?"

The young Frenchman, glancing at Rob's face, did not trust himself to speak.

"Take him to the guard-room," said the commandant, indicating Rob to two soldiers who had stood aloof during the scene. They came up; at the same moment the Indians closed about the boy. A shriek rent the air. Rob, in a cold sweat of agony, turned as if to dash among the savages and tear his brother from their grasp. But his exertions and the strain of the long interview had made large demands upon his strength. He reeled, and would have fallen but for the supporting arms of the soldiers. And as he was led away, the piercing cries of "Rob, Rob!" growing ever fainter as Will was dragged by the Indians towards the gate, shot like hot bullets through his brain.

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CHAPTER XI

A NIGHT RAID

"May I have a word with you, Monsieur?" said La Clavière, as the commandant turned and began to walk meditatively away.

"Eh?" ejaculated Monsieur de Noyan, glancing round. "Certainly. Follow me, Monsieur."

He led the way to his private apartment, offered the young Frenchman a chair, and having ordered a servant to set wine and glasses on the table, said:

"Tell me the story from the beginning, Monsieur. There are points in it I scarcely understand."

La Clavière related the incidents of the past few days from the setting out of the raiding party to the moment when he had been saved by Rob from the Mohawk's knife.

"You will not blame me, Monsieur," he concluded, "for saving the Englishman's life in return, especially when I tell you that he had himself helped to rescue Le Loup from a party of Abenakis in the neighborhood of Fort William Henry."

"Indeed! I had not heard of that. What were the circumstances?"

La Clavière repeated the story as Rob had told it to him. The commandant shrugged.

"Gratitude is a word unknown to the half-breeds," he said. "But how came it that Le Loup was attacked by Abenakis, who are allies of ours?"

"A question I myself put to Le Loup, Monsieur, and

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