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LONDON: 44 PATERNOSTER ROW.

# THE RIFLEMEN OF THE

# Miami.

BY EDWARD S. ELLIS

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## THE RIFLEMEN OF THE MIAMI.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE RESCUE.

If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
It were done quickly.—MACBETH.

"Quick, boys, and be careful that they don't see your heads."

Four men were moving along under the bank of the Miami, with their bodies bent, at a gait that was almost rapid enough to be called a run. They were constantly raising their heads and peering over the bank, as though watching something in the wood, which in this section was quite open. All four were attired in the garb of hunters, and were evidently men whose homes were in the great wilderness. They had embrowned faces, and sinewy limbs, and the *personnel* of the woodman—of the men who hovered only upon the confines of civilization, rarely, if ever, venturing within the crowded city or village. It is hardly necessary to say that each carried his rifle and his hunting-knife.

Between the three foremost was a striking resemblance; it appeared impossible that more than five years divided them in age. Two were brothers, George and Lewis Dernor, while the third answered to the *sobriquet* of Dick—his real name being Richard Allmat. The fourth—he who brought up the rear—possessed an individuality which must have marked him in any situation. Barely more than five feet in height, and with bowed legs, instead of owning a jovial temper, as one would have a right to expect from his jolly-looking face, he was, in reality, a most irascible fellow. Never known to express satisfaction at any occurrence, gift or suggestion, he was constantly finding fault, and threatening dire vengeance upon those who surrounded him. These threats never being carried out, attracted little attention. "Tom" (as he was called) was considered a privileged individual, and, in spite of his disposition, was a favorite with those who knew him. This may seem strange when we add that, in addition to his sour temper, the natural defect of his legs prevented him from placing any dependence upon them. At his best speed he was but an ordinary runner. A stranger well might wonder that he should adopt a life where fleetness of foot was so necessary—in fact, so almost indispensable. Tom O'Hara turned ranger from pure love for the wild, adventurous life; and, despite the natural defects to which we have referred, possessed accomplishments that rendered him a most valuable ally and companion. He never had met his superior with the rifle, and his knowledge of woodcraft was such that, although he had spent ten years on the border, his slowness of foot had never operated against him; nor once had he been outwitted by the red-men of the woods. Besides this, he had the enviable reputation of being a *lucky individual*—one whose rifle never missed fire, or sped wide

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of its mark—one to whom no unfortunate accident over occurred; so that, take him all in all, few hunters were safer in the wood than this same Tom O'Hara.

These four were known as the *Riflemen of the Miami*, of whom Lewis Dernor was the leader. Another member, then a long way off, will be referred to hereafter.

"Quick, boys, and be careful that they don't see your heads," admonished Lewis, ducking his own and gesticulating to those behind him. "*Sh!* look quick! there they go!"

The four stretched their necks, glancing over the bank, out into a small clearing in the wood.

"They'll cross that in a minute," whispered the first speaker. "Don't raise your heads too high or you'll be seen."

"You don't appear to think nobody knows nothing but you," growled Tom, with a savage look.

"*Quiet!* There they go!"

One Indian strode into the clearing, followed by another, then by two abreast, between whom a woman was walking, her head bent as if in despair, with steps painful and labored. Behind these came three other savages. They passed across the clearing—the whole seven, with their captive like the moving figures in a panorama, and entered the wood upon the opposite side. [7]

"Every mother's son of them is in his war-paint," said Lewis—who, by the way, divided his words with Tom, the other two rarely speaking except when directly appealed to.

"Who said they wasn't?" demanded Tom. "And what difference does it make? They've got somebody's gal there, hain't they? eh? Say. And what's the odds whether they've daubed themselves up with their stuff or not?"

"Well, what's the next move? To set up a yell and pitch after them?"

"None but a fool would want to do that."

"But don't you notice the bank gets so low down yonder that it won't hide us, and we'll have to show ourselves?"

"It'll hide us as long as we want to be hid. Come, don't squat here, or we'll let the rascals slip, after all."

Again the three moved down the bank, as rapidly, silently and cautiously as spirits, ever and anon raising their heads as they gained a glimpse of the Indians passing through the wood. The latter were following a course parallel with the Miami, so that the relative distance between the two parties remained nearly the same. It was manifest to the hunters that the Indians intended crossing the river with their captive at some point lower down, and were making toward that point. It was further evident from the deliberation in their movements, and from the fact that they were not proceeding in "Indian file," that as yet they had no suspicion of being pursued, although every one of their number knew of the existence of the Riflemen of the Miami—that formidable confederation whose very name was a word of terror even to their savage hearts. Entirely unsuspecting of the danger which menaced them, every thing was in favor of the hunters.

For several hundred yards further, the two parties maintained their relative distance, the Indians proceeding at a usual walk, and the whites at a very irregular one—now running rapidly a few steps, and then halting and gazing over the bank to ascertain the precise whereabouts of their enemies; then skulking a few yards further, and halting as before, remaining all the time nearly opposite the "braves." Suddenly the latter came to a stand.

"Now for a confab," said Lewis, as his companions gathered about him. "I wonder what they are going to jabber about?" [8]

"What do you want to know for, eh?" asked Tom.

"It's pretty plain they're going to cross the river, but, confound it, how can we tell where it's going to be done? I've told you that the bank gets so low, just yonder, that it won't hide us any longer."

"Who wants it to hide us? They intend to cross the river *here*, and in about ten minutes, too. Just watch their actions, if you can do it without showing your head."

The Indians stood together, conversing upon some point about which there seemed a variance of opinion. Their deep, guttural, ejaculatory words were plainly audible to the hunters, and their gleaming, bedaubed visages were seen in all their hideous repulsiveness. They gesticulated continually, pointing behind them in the direction of their trail, and across the river, over the heads of the crouching Riflemen, who were watching every motion. Nothing would have been easier for the latter than to have sent four of these savages into eternity without a moment's warning; yet, nothing was

further from their intentions, for, of all things, this would have been the surest to defeat their chief object. The captive would have been brained the instant the savages saw they could not hold her. The great point was to surprise them so suddenly and completely as to prevent this.

From the present appearance of matters, this seemed not very difficult of accomplishment, as it was a foregone conclusion upon the part of the hunters that the savages would endeavor to ford the river at the point where they lay in ambush for them. It only remained for the Riflemen to bide their time, and, at the proper moment, rush upon and scatter them, and rescue the captive from their hands.

"I wonder whether they're going to talk all day," remarked Tom, impatiently, after they had conversed some twenty or thirty minutes.

"They're in a dispute about something. It won't take them long to get through with it."

"How do you know that, I should like to know? Like enough they'll talk till dark, and keep us waiting. Confound 'em, what's the use?"

No one ventured to reply to Tom's sulky observation, and, after several impatient exclamations, he added:

"The longer they talk the louder they get, which is a sure sign the dispute is getting hotter, which is another sign it'll be considerable time before they get through."

"I am sure we can wait as long as they can," said Dick, mildly.

"My heavens! who said we couldn't? Just hear 'em jabber!"

The conversation of the Indians had now become so earnest, that every word spoken was distinctly heard by the Riflemen. The latter, from the dress and actions of the savages, understood they had no chief with them, but were merely seven warriors, who had been out on this barbarous expedition, and were returning to their town with the booty and the captive they had secured.

"They're talking in the Shawnee tongue," said Lewis. "Can't you understand what they're driving at?"

"If you only keep your jaws shut a minute or two, I could; but if you three fellers mean to talk all the time, I should like to know how I am going to understand any thing they say. See whether you can keep quiet a minute, just."

Tom's companions did as requested, while he bent his head forward, and seemed to concentrate all his faculties into the one of listening. Upon the part of the Riflemen all was still as death. After several minutes of the acutest attention, Tom raised his head, and said, with a glowing expression:

"They're talking about *us*."

"The deuce! what are they saying?"

"Don't you see they're pointing up the river and across it? Well, the meaning of all that is, that they're wondering which way we'll come from."

"What seems to be the general expectation?"

"The trouble is just there—the expectation is altogether too general. Some think we're on their trail, others that we're following the other side the river down, and waiting for the chance to let drive at 'em, while one, at least, feels certain we're *coming up* the stream to meet 'em."

"Is that their dispute?"

"A part of it, of course, but the trouble is—what to do. Some want to strike off in the woods and take a roundabout way to reach home; but the greatest number want to cross the stream at this point."

"They'll probably do it then."

"Of course they will—no; I'll be shot if they ain't going further into the woods!" suddenly exclaimed Tom.

"They're going to start in a minute, too. Get ready, boys, for a rush—it's all we can do."

"Hold still a minute," commanded Tom, excitedly.

Then dropping his rifle, he ran down to the river's edge, and picked up several large pebbles, one of which he placed in his right hand as if about to throw it.

"What are you going to do with that?" asked Dick.

"That's none of your business; you've only to wait and see. Just keep your heads down now, if you don't want them knocked off."

Tom, drawing his hand back, struck it quickly against his thigh, accomplishing what is

generally termed "jerking" the stone. The latter went circling high over the heads of the disputing Indians, and came down upon the other side of them, cutting its way through the dry leaves of the trees with a peculiar *zip-zip*, which was distinctly heard by the Riflemen themselves.

The unusual sound could not fail instantly to attract the attention of the Indians. They paused in their conversation, and turned their alarmed gaze toward it, as if in expectation of some danger. With their instinctive caution, they separated, and partially protecting themselves behind the trees, prepared to receive what they supposed to be their enemies. A noticeable fact did not escape the eyes of the Riflemen. The captive, a weak, defenseless girl, was not allowed to screen herself, as did her captors, but was compelled by them to stand out in full view, as an additional safeguard against their bullets.

It was at this moment that Tom hurled the second stone over the heads of the Indians, it descending with the same sharp, cutting sound, and resolving their suspicions into a certainty that their white enemies were indeed at hand. Lewis Dornor, now that the moment of action had arrived, was as shrewd and far-sighted as either Tom or any of the others. It was these very qualities, coolness and self-reliance in the crisis of danger, that made him nominally the leader of the Riflemen of the Miami. He saw the great advantage gained by O'Hara's artifice in attracting the attention of the Indians to the point opposite to that from which the peril threatened; but, at the same time, he well knew that those same Shawnees were too well skilled in woodcraft to suffer their gaze to be diverted for any length of time from the river-bank.

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As matters now stood, the captive herself was the only one who was looking in the direction of the latter, while her gaze was a mere mechanical one, wandering hither and thither without resting for a moment upon any particular object. Lewis felt that the all-important point was to make her aware of the vicinity of friends. She being a total stranger to them, and evidently with no hope of any immediate rescue, made this a matter of considerable difficulty; but, without hesitating a moment, Lewis suddenly arose to the upright position, thereby exposing his head and shoulders, and beckoned to the girl to approach him. The instant he had done this, he dropped on his face and disappeared.

The attempt was only a partial success. At the moment of rising, the gaze of the captive was toward a point further down-stream; but the figure of the hunter, as it rose and sunk from view, was in her field of vision and did not entirely escape her notice. The unusual occurrence drew her look thither, making it certain that a second attempt, could it be made, would succeed far better than the first. All this Lewis comprehended, and as quick as possible repeated his movement precisely as before.

This time the girl saw him and perfectly understood his meaning; but, with a precipitancy that filled the hunters with the greatest alarm, she started directly toward them, with outstretched arms, as if imploring assistance. It was at this instant that Lewis discovered a quickness of perception, coolness and promptness of action that was absolutely wonderful. Looking out upon the exciting drama being enacted before him, he saw with unerring certainty how far the girl could run before being fired at by the savages. Waiting until she had gone the distance, he raised his head and shoulders to view, and called out in a voice of thunder:

"I say, gal, drop flat on your face and stay there."

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The quickness with which this command was obeyed, and the almost simultaneous crack of two rifles, might well have caused the belief that she had fallen because shot through the heart; but such was not the case. The command of Lewis broke upon her like a thunder-peal, and as quick as a flash of lightning did she comprehend the fearfully imminent peril in which she was placed. So marvelously close had been the calculation of the hunter, that at the very instant she obeyed him, the rifle of the nearest Indian was pointed full at her. This did not escape the eagle eye of O'Hara, who, with the same coolness that characterized the action of his leader, discharged his piece at the bronzed head of the Shawnee, his aim scarcely occupying a second. The bullet sped sure, striking the savage at the very moment his own weapon was fired, and his death-yell mingled with the whistle of his own harmless rifle-ball.

Even in this moment of terrible danger, the manner in which the Indians shifted to the opposite side of the trees could but attract the notice of the hunters. It was simultaneous on the part of all, and resembled that of automata, moved by machinery. First, every copper-colored body was exposed to full view; and the next minute six gleaming rifle-barrels only showed where they had sheltered themselves from the fire of the whites. They no longer doubted the point from which their danger threatened, and a genuine strategic Indian fight now commenced.

Had the captive, who was now literally between two fires, done nothing but merely fall upon her face, her situation could not have been improved in the least thereby. But the nature of the ground near her was such that, by lying perfectly motionless, the bullets of the Shawnees could not strike her, unless they could gain a position nearer to the hunters. As matters stood, she was safe only so long as her captors could be kept from

changing their places.

This was manifest to both the whites and the Indians; and while the latter were now actuated by the desire to slay the girl, the efforts of the former were turned toward her salvation. It was further evident that the Shawnees were aware that they were now opposed to the Riflemen of the Miami, and were nothing loth for a trial of skill. The loss of one of their number was such a matter of course, that it operated only as an incentive for exertion and skill upon their part.

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A portion of the dress of the girl, as she lay upon the ground, could be seen by several of the Indians, and they fired numerous shots at it. Finding this accomplished nothing, they resorted to a far more dangerous expedient—that of shooting away enough earth in front of her to allow the free passage of one of their bullets to her body. It will be seen that great skill was required to do this, but the expertness of the Shawnee marksmen was equal to the task. They commenced their work by sending a ball so as to strike the earth immediately before her, and a few inches below the surface. The instant this was done, another fired his bullet directly after, with such skill that it varied but the fraction of an inch from following directly in its path. The force with which these balls were discharged was such that the twelfth one would most assuredly take the life of the girl.

None knew this better than Lewis Dernor, who, in the same trumpet-like tone that had characterized his former command, called out:

"Young gal, clean away the dirt in front of you and hide yourself better, or the imps will riddle you."

It required no more incentive to do this, and she used her hands with such vigor that a few moments accomplished all she could wish. The ground, being soft and moist, favored her, and when she dragged herself a few feet forward, all of her dress disappeared from the view of the Indians, and she was as safe from their bullets as if behind the river-bank itself.

A few more shots convinced the Shawnees of this, and they now sent several bullets whistling over the heads of the Riflemen as if to remind them that they were to receive attention. So long as the members of the two parties maintained their respective positions, this affray could amount to nothing; accordingly, several of the savages made an effort to change their posts in such a manner as to outflank the whites. Despite the admirable skill with which this attempt was made, the deadly rifle of George Dernor brought down a warrior as he flitted from tree to tree. This, for the present, put a stop to the movement and turned the efforts of the savages in another direction.

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Two brawny Shawnees, convinced that nothing could be done against the Riflemen, renewed their attempts to secure a shot at the girl, who all this time lay as motionless as if dead. They commenced working their way slowly but surely toward the river, while she, unconscious of the murderous stratagem, patiently awaited the turn of affairs which would free her from her terrible thralldom. Finally, an Indian, who was squatted behind a tree, gained a view of a tuft of her hair and brought his rifle to his shoulder. The sunlight that scintillated along the barrel of his weapon made it resemble a burnished spear, poised in his hand, while following it up to the stock, not only his crooked arm which supported the gun, but his entire profile was visible. Forgetting his own peril in his anxiety to slay the helpless girl, the Shawnee leaned several inches further forward, thereby discovering one-half of his shaven head. Ere he could draw it back, the whip-like crack of another rifle broke the stillness, and he fell forward on his face, pierced through and through the brain.

"I've a great notion to break your head for you!" exclaimed Tom, in an excited whisper to Dick, for it was the latter who had fired the fatal shot.

"Why, what's up now?"

"I'd just got that Shawnee sure when you picked him off. Don't you serve me that trick again."

With this ebullition, Tom subsided, and turned his attention once more toward their common enemy.

The shot of Dick really decided the affray. It convinced the Indians that not only were they unable to shoot the girl or avenge themselves upon the Riflemen, but the latter had so much the advantage of them, that to prolong the contest would only be to insure their own annihilation. Three of their number were already slain, and the remaining four, from their respective positions, had not the shadow of a chance to pick off any of the whites. What might naturally be expected under the circumstances occurred. The savages commenced a retreat, conducting it with such caution that the whites could not gain another shot. The last seen of them was a shadowy glimpse in a distant part of the wood, as the four fled, thereby doing only what the Riflemen of the Miami had before compelled many a body of Indians to do.

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A few minutes later, Lewis rose up and said:

"This way, gal; there's none of the imps left."

The girl, timidly raising her head, glanced about her, and then, Lewis' invitation being repeated, she arose and walked toward him, looking furtively backward as though still fearful of her late captors.

"Bless your dear soul," said Lewis, warmly welcoming her, "you've had a skeery time with them Shawnees, but you're safe for the present. You may set that down as a question that needn't be argued."

"Oh! how can I thank you for rescuing me! I can never, never repay you," said she, with streaming eyes.

"Who the deuce wants you to pay us?" asked Tom, gruffly.

"Come, come, Tom, see whether you can't be civil once, even if you've got to be sick for it. Don't mind him, little gal; he loves you all the more for what he said."

"I know he does, or he would never have risked his life to save a stranger as he has just done."

Tom, from some cause or other, was obliged to gouge his eye several times with his crooked finger. One might have suspected that they were more moist than usual, had he not looked particularly savage at that moment. Dick, who, by the merest accident, glanced in his face was nearly startled off his feet by the irascible fellow shouting:

"What you looking at? Say! Can't a chap rub his eyes without your gaping at him that way?"

Dick meekly removed his gaze, while Tom looked ferocious enough to annihilate the whole party.

The girl, just rescued from the Shawnees, was a comely maiden. Though attired in the homespun garb of the backwoods, she would have attracted attention in any society. If not beautiful, she certainly was handsome, being possessed of a countenance rich with expression, and a form of perfect grace. Blue eyes, golden hair, a well-turned head, small nose and a health-tinted complexion, were characteristics to arrest the eye of the most ordinary observer. Even under disadvantageous circumstances like the present, these were so striking that they could but make an impression, and a skillful reader of human nature would have seen that Lewis had been *touched*—that, in short, the leader of the Riflemen of the Miami had reached the incipient stages of the passion of passions, in the short interview to which we have referred. That he would rather have been scalped than have been suspected of it by his companions, was very true.

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Taking the small hands which were confidingly placed in his own, he said;

"Let us hear all about this scrape, my little one."

"My home is, or was until night before last, many miles from here. On that evening, I was left alone by my dearest friend, who little dreamed of the danger which hovered over our house. The Indians must have been aware of his absence, for, before it was fairly dark, three of them stalked in the door without saying a word, and led me away. They have traveled constantly ever since, and I was almost wearied to death, when you came up, and by the assistance of kind Heaven, saved me. How came you to be so interested in a stranger?"

"As for that matter," replied Lewis, "it ain't the first time, my little one, that *we've* been interested in strangers. I might say *we've* a particular interest in all the whites and reds of this region. The Riflemen of the Miami——"

"Are you the men who are known by that name?" asked the girl, with a glowing countenance.

"At your service," replied Lewis, with a modest blush.

"Indeed, I have heard of you, and have heard your name blessed again and again by the settlers further east."

"Which certainly is pleasant to us. As I was going to say, we were coming down the Miami, this morning, when we chanced to strike the trail of these identical Indians. It was easy enough to see that it was but a short time since they had gone along, and, as it was in our line, of course we jogged on after them. The red imps were taking it coolly, and in a couple of hours or so we got sight of them going down the river. Well, we followed on after them till they made their halt out here, when—well, you know the rest."

"Of course she does," said Tom, "so what's the use of talking? What's the gal want to do? Go back to her friends, I s'pose?"

"If you could take me there, I could not express my thankfulness."

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"Where is it you belong?"

The girl gave the name of a settlement nearly a hundred miles distant. Lewis bent his head a moment, as if deliberating something, and then said:

"We've got a job on our hands that *must be done* this very night, and it is going to be such a lively one that it won't do to have you in the vicinity. Consequently, although there isn't one of us but what would risk his life to take you back to your friends, it can't be done *just now*."

"You will not leave me?" plead the girl.

"Leave you? that's something the *Riflemen*, I make bold to say, never did yet. No; of course we'll not *leave* you. I'll tell you the plan. About five miles off from the river, lives old Caleb Smith and his two big sons, all as clever and kind as so many babies. We've got to be back at our rendezvous to-night, where the other member of our company is to meet us; and on our way there, we'll leave you at Old Smith's and return for you in a few days. Won't that be the best we can do, Tom?"

"S'pose so."

The girl herself expressed great satisfaction at this conclusion; and, as it was getting well along in the day, the Riflemen set out with their charge. In due time they reached "Old Smith's house," who was well known to them, and who received them with the most hearty cordiality. He gladly took charge of the rescued girl, promising that she should be guarded as much as if his own child. Just as the shadows of evening were closing over the wood, the Riflemen took their departure.

Three days later they returned to fulfill their promise to the girl, when old Smith told them that, fearing some unexpected occurrence had detained them, he had sent his two sons to conduct her to her home.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE SETTLERS.

We will rear new trees under homes that glow  
As if gems were the frontage of every bough;  
O'er our white walls we will train the vine,  
And sit in its shadow at day's decline,  
And watch our herds as they range at will  
Through the green savannas, all bright and still.

MRS. HEMANS.

The incident narrated in the preceding chapter occurred one autumn, many years ago. In the spring succeeding this autumn, a company of settlers, with their loaded teams, and unwieldy baggage, were making their slow way through the labyrinths of an Ohio forest to a sparse settlement buried many miles further in the wilderness.

At that day, so comparatively recent, such a sight was rarely witnessed in this section, as a deep-rooted hostility existed between the settlers and Indians, and an undertaking like the present was attended with too great danger for it to be often repeated. The rut of a single wagon, half obliterated by accumulated leaves and rankly-growing grass, showed that this route had been traveled over but once before, and that on the preceding season. At regular intervals, trees were passed with chips hacked from their sides, the track having first been "blazed" before being passed over.

Like the emigrant-party which had preceded it, the present one possessed but a single wagon, drawn by two pair of slow but powerful oxen. It had a substantial cover, beneath which were stowed an immense quantity of baggage and some six or eight children, including also four women, two of whom were married and two unmarried. At the side of the front oxen walked the driver, whose whole attention was devoted to their direction. Several yards in advance rode two horsemen, and beside them three men plodded forward on foot. In the rear, scarcely a yard behind the lumbering wagon, walked "old Caleb Smith," and his two overgrown sons, as proud of them as was any monarch of his favorite generals. In addition to the men enumerated, there were three more—who may properly be called the scouts of the party. One of these was a couple of hundred yards in advance, stealing his way along, as carefully as if pursued by an unrelenting foe, his whole soul occupied in watching for signs of the dusky red-men of the woods. At a somewhat less distance on either side of the road, and in such a position as to be opposite the wagon, was one of the remaining scouts, as watchful, vigilant and skillful as the one referred to. Thus the party progressed, neglecting no precaution that could make their safety more secure, and although numerically small, still far more powerful than were many emigrant-parties who had preceded them in

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penetrating other portions of the Great West.

One of the young women, that we have mentioned as being in the wagon, was Edith Sudbury, the heroine of the preceding chapter. She had not a single relation among all those around her, and it was certainly singular that she should have united her destinies with those who, several months before, were entirely unknown to her. But, though not related, every one was her friend. Her amiable disposition, her grace and beauty of manners, her own prepossessing appearance, and above all, her unremitting kindness to every one with whom she came in contact, had won upon the hearts of all. Old Smith's two sons, Jim and Harry, one eighteen the other twenty, both over six feet in height, looked upon "little Edith" as nothing more than a baby, and woe betide the one who dared to offer her harm or insult in their presence!

"I say, father, how much further ahead is that creek we've got to cross?" asked Jim, in a free and easy manner, as he would have spoken to an equal.

"Well, sonny, it must be nigh on to ten mile."

"Won't get over afore morning then?"

"Don't expect to, as you see it's well along in the after noon."

"Let's see—we've come over forty mile, hain't we?"

"Yes, Jim, nearer fifty."

"Well, we're that much nearer the settlement, *that's* certain. If we get over the creek without much trouble with the oxen, we may fetch up there by sundown, eh?"

"That's the expectation, I believe."

"Provided, of course, *the Injins don't make trouble.*"

"Sh! not so loud, Jim," continued Harry. "They might hear us in the wagon, and I don't s'pose you'd want to scare Edith, when there's no need of it." [20]

"I should like to see any one try that same thing on 'em. They'd be somebody else scared, I reckon. But, father," asked Jim, in an earnest whisper, "how is it about the Injins? We haven't seen a sign of one yet, and that's what gets me."

The parent and his children fell a few yards further behind, and commenced conversing together in suppressed voices.

"I tell you what, boys," said the father, "it won't do to expect to get through without hot work. I've been talking with the scouts, and they think the same. I believe a number are following us, and waiting only for the proper place to come in upon us."

"Where do you suppose that will be?"

"*The creek!*"

"Shouldn't wonder if 'twas," said Harry, in a matter-of-fact tone; "if we only had the women-folks out the way, we might count on some tall fun. I wish Edith was taken care of."

"That's the deuce of it. I should think she got enough of the imps last autumn, when the Riflemen left her at our house; but that's the *Injin*, especially the Shawnee part of it. If there's any chance to get scalps with long hair, they're bound to do it. However, boys, it won't do to lose heart."

"That's the fact, father, and I reckon none of this crowd intend to do that thing just now. Sam, in front, isn't likely to get asleep, is he?"

"No danger of him. They say he never shuts both eyes at the same time."

"I'll answer for them on the sides of the road," added Harry. "If there's a greasy Shawnee in a mile, Jake Laughlin will scent him. You mind the time, Jim, when he went with us over into Kentucky, and he saved us from running into that ambush?"

"Tain't likely I'll ever forget it, being I got my arm bored with some of their lead."

"Well, that affair satisfied me that Jake Laughlin understands as much as it is worth while to understand about Injin deviltries, and that he ain't likely to be blind when there's so much to practice eyesight on." [21]

"I'd give our yoke of oxen this minute, if I could only set eyes on Lew Dernor and his boys, the Riflemen of the Miami," said the parent. "They've been long together, as I s'pose, and have been in more Injin fights and scrimmages than any men living, and yet not one of them has been grazed by a bullet. There's Tom O'Hara, whose legs are so short that he's about as tall when he sits down as he is when he stands up, and yet, I'll be hanged if he isn't the luckiest one of the lot. They're a wonderful set of boys, are those Riflemen."

"Father," said son Jim, with a meaning smile, "you remember the night that Lew

brought Edith to our house?"

"Of course I do."

"Didn't it strike you that he acted queerly then?"

"What do you mean? I don't understand you. I noticed nothing."

"I did. I saw how he watched Edith, and I made up my mind that he was in *love with her!* Since then I've found out it *was* so!"

"Why, Jim, I never dreamed of such a thing. He hasn't been to our house since to see her."

"Just because he *is* in love! I've met him in the woods a dozen times since, and by the way in which he questioned me, I'd been a downright fool if I hadn't understood him."

This avowal seemed to trouble the father, as he bent his head; and, for a while, nothing further was said. But Jim, who had little reverence for sentiment or romance, added, in a meaning voice:

"That isn't all, father."

"What else have you to tell?"

"That Edith loves him!"

"Thunder! I don't believe it."

"Well, I can't say *positively* that she does; but I know she *likes* him, and if Lew Dernor has a mind he can get her. You don't appear to like it, father."

"I don't care much, but the gal seems so like my own da'ter, being I never had any, that I should hate despritle to lose her."

"Fudge! it's got to come to that sooner or later, and who could she get better than Lew Dernor, the leader of the Miami Riflemen?"

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"None, that's the fact, but——"

A footstep attracted their attention, and looking up, they saw Jake Laughlin step into view. He raised his hand, as if to command silence, jerking his thumb at the same time significantly toward the wagon and the rest of the settlers. He stepped carefully into the wagon-track, and the father and sons halted.

"It's so," said he, nodding his head several times.

"Are you sure?"

"I've seen sign a half-dozen times since noon."

"Shawnees, I s'pose?"

"Yes. There are plenty of them in the woods."

"What are they waiting for?"

"The chance. There ain't enough, and we're too wide awake to allow them to attack us at present. They're waiting to take us off our guard or to get us at disadvantage. I've an idee where that'll be."

"The creek?"

"Most certainly. There's where the tug of war will come, and I think if we should encamp to-night without a guard there would be no danger of attack from the Shawnees."

"Are you going to warn others?"

"Not until night, I think, as there is no necessity for it."

"Well, we don't need to tell you to be on the look-out. You know we've got a lot of women-folks to take care of."

"Never fear."

With this, Laughlin stole back into the wood, as cautiously as he had emerged from it, and the father and his sons quickened their pace in order to gain the ground they had lost. As they resumed their places in the rear of the wagon, no one would have suspected from their actions and appearance, that they had been conversing upon a subject so important to all.

It was about the middle of the afternoon, and the emigrant-party plodded patiently forward, chatting and conversing upon ordinary topics with such pleasantries and zest that no one would have suspected the least thought of danger had entered their heads. So long as the silence of the scouts continued, the emigrants knew there was no cause

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for alarm. Should danger threaten, they would be warned in time.

An hour later, as they were proceeding quietly along, the near report of a rifle broke upon their ears. Every face blanched, and every heart beat faster at the startling signal of danger. This it meant, and nothing else; and the members of the company instinctively halted, and made a partial preparation for an attack. They had scarcely done so, when Laughlin, with his cat-like tread, stepped in among them.

"What made you fire, Jake?" asked Dravoond, one of the leaders of the party.

"Me fire? I haven't pulled trigger since I shot the wild turkey yesterday. It must have been Sam or Myrick."

As he spoke, the latter two, who were the other scouts, also made their appearance, when, to the surprise of all, it was discovered that neither of them had fired the alarming shot. Consequently, it must have been done by a stranger. The moment this fact became known, the scouts separated and resumed their duties, while the emigrants, after a short consultation, moved on again, more slowly and carefully than before.

On the whole, although the report of the rifle could not be explained by any of the emigrants, the majority were disposed to take it rather as a favorable sign than otherwise. If made by an Indian, it could not have been done accidentally, for such a thing rarely if ever was known among them; and, as it could not have been fired by an enemy, with the full knowledge of the vicinity of the emigrants, the savages, if savages they were, must either be unaware of the latter fact, or else the strange shot came from a white man.

If there were lurking Indians in the wood, ignorant of the presence of the whites, they were soon apprised, for both of the leading oxen, who had not done such a thing for days, now paused and bellowed terrifically for several moments. The driver endeavored to check their dreadful noise by whacking them over the heads, but it availed nothing. They were determined, and continued the clamor, pausing now and then, as though pleased with the echo, which could be heard rolling through the woods for over a mile distant. Having finished, they resumed their progress, as if satisfied with what they had done.

"Father, them's our oxen," said Jim, "and, by thunder, if they bawl out that way agin I'll shoot 'em both. How far did you say the settlement is off?"

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"Forty or fifty miles. Why do you ask again?"

"Nothin', only if they've put any of their babies asleep to-day, them oxen have set them all to squalling agin."

The sun was getting well down toward the horizon, and the dim twilight was wrapping the woods in its mantle, when the teamster halted the oxen, and the emigrants commenced their preparations for the encampment. The wagon was left standing in its tracks, the oxen simply unfastened, and with their yokes on, led to where some bundles of hay were spread upon the ground. A large fire was soon blazing and crackling a short distance away, around which the women were engaged in preparing the evening meal, while the men, who wandered hither and thither apparently without any definite object, neglected no precaution which could insure them against attack through the night. The three scouts had extended their beats several hundred yards, and completely reconnoitered the ground intervening between them and the camp-fire, so that they felt some assurance of safety as they joined their friends in the evening meal.

Just as they all had finished partaking of this, a second rifle report, as near to them as was the first, broke the stillness. The men started to their feet and grasped their weapons. They gazed all around them, as if expecting the appearance of some one, but failing to see any thing, commenced speculating upon the cause of this singular repetition of what had puzzled them so at first.

"It beats my larning to explain it," said old Smith.

"I tell you what it is," said son Harry, "that ain't an Injin's piece, nohow you can fix it."

"How do you know that?" queried brother Jim.

"It's the same gun we heard this afternoon, and when you see a Shawnee do that I'll believe our oxen don't know how to beller."

"We must be ready, my friends, for the worst," said one of the emigrants, who, up to this time, had not referred to the danger at all.

Another reconnoissance was made by the scouts, but with no better success than before. The darkness of the wood was such that they labored at great disadvantage, and it would have been no difficult matter for a single person to have remained concealed within a short distance of the whites.

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As the night progressed, the females and children retired to the wagon, and the men

chose their stations around it. The oxen, one by one, sunk heavily to the earth, contentedly chewing their cuds, and a stillness as profound as that of the tomb settled upon the forest. The fire had smouldered to a few embers, which glowed with a dim redness through the ashes, and occasionally disclosed a shadowy form as it hurried by.

Several of the men were sleeping soundly, for enough were on duty as sentinels to make them feel as much ease as it was possible to feel where they could never be assured of perfect safety. Two of the most faithful sentinels were Jim and Harry Smith, who were stationed within a few feet of each other. Now and then they exchanged a word or two, but the risk was too great to attempt any thing like a continued conversation.

Three separate times Jim was sure he heard a footstep near him, and as often did he turn his head and fail to discover the meaning of it. Finally, he caught a glimpse of some one as he brushed hurriedly by and disappeared in the darkness. He raised his gun, and was on the point of firing, when he lowered it again. The thought that probably it was a white man, and a dislike to give the camp a groundless alarm, was the cause of this failure to fire.

Several times again through the night did he detect a foot-fall, but he was not able to catch sight of the stranger. Shortly after midnight the evidences of his visit ceased, and Jim concluded that he had withdrawn so as to be beyond sight when daylight broke.

What was his surprise, therefore, when he saw, as the gray light of morning stole through the wood, the form of a man seated on the ground, with his head reclining against a tree and sound asleep. If this surprise was great, it became absolute amazement when he examined his features, and saw that the man was no other than Lewis Dernor, the leader of the Riflemen of the Miami! Jim could scarce believe his senses as he walked forward and shook the sleeper by the shoulder.

"I should as soon have expected to see Mad Anthony himself as to see you, Lew Dernor, sitting here sound asleep," said he, as the Rifleman opened his eyes and looked about him. A smile crossed his handsome countenance as he replied:

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"I believe I have been sleeping."

"I believe you have, too. Have you been hanging around here all night?"

"Yes, and all day, too."

"And was it you who fired those shots?"

"I fired my rifle once or twice, I believe."

"Good! Well, Lew, we're glad to see you, and we would be a deuced sight gladder if we could see the rest of the Riflemen. Where are they?"

"Up the Miami, I suppose. At any rate, that's where I left them."

"Well, I'm afraid we're getting into hot water here, Lew, to tell the truth, and there's no one whose face would be more welcome just now than yours. I see they are beginning to wake up and show themselves. Gavoon has started the fire, so s'pose we go in and you make yourself known."

The hunter followed young Smith to the camp, where, in a short time, he met and shook hands with most of the settlers, who were indeed glad enough to see him; and this gladness was increased to delight when he expressed his willingness to accompany them across the dreaded creek. In the course of a half-hour the females began to make their appearance. Near by was a small stream where they performed their ablutions, which finished, they gathered around the camp-fire, and busied themselves with preparing the breakfast of the party.

Dernor, the Rifleman, was conversing with one of the settlers, when some one touched him on the shoulder. Looking around, he encountered his friend, Jim Smith.

"Here's a person I s'pose you've no objection to see," said he, with a light laugh.

The bronzed face of the hunter deepened its hue as he saw Edith Sudbury approaching, and although gifted with a natural grace of manner, he displayed some embarrassment as he advanced to greet her. Her conduct, too, was not without its suspicious air. Rosy and fresh as the flowers of the green woods around, perhaps the carnation of her cheeks was caused only by the morning exercise. Jim noticed these manifestations, and quietly smiled, but said nothing.

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In regard to the Rifleman, at least, he was right. As that brave and gallant-hearted ranger wandered through the grand old forests of Ohio, and the cane-brakes of the "Dark and Bloody Ground," a fair face had haunted his waking and dreaming hours. As he knelt beside the sparkling brook to slake his thirst, he beheld the same features reflected beside his own in its mirror-like surface. As alone he threaded his way through the labyrinths of those dim solitudes, he had a fairy companion as faithful to him as his own shadow. And when with his tried and faithful followers, it was the same.

Only in the excitement of the fight, or the moments when his strategic skill was in rivalry with that of his dusky enemies, did this shadowy being cease to haunt him. Night and day, it was the same—and now he had met the *reality*, and was conversing with her.

The conversation lasted but a few minutes. The services of Edith were needed, and she tripped away to assist the others at their duties. As she disappeared, Jim came up and laughingly remarked to the Rifleman:

"A fine girl that, Lewis."

"Indeed she is. I never have heard her name—that is, nothing more than Edith. What is the rest?"

"Sudbury—Edith Sudbury."

The hunter started, as if bitten by a rattlesnake, and turned as pale as death. Young Smith noticed his emotion, and asked, with some alarm:

"What's the matter, Lew? What is there about that name that so troubles you?"

"Never mind, Jim. I did not think it was *her*!"

Smith had too much natural kindness of heart to refer to a subject so painful to the hunter, although his curiosity was great to know what could possibly have affected him so strangely. As nothing further was said by Dernor, this curiosity remained unsatisfied for a long time.

The emigrant-party shortly after was under way. When within a mile or so of the creek to which we have referred, one of the scouts reconnoitered it, and came in with the report that quite a body of Shawnees were on its banks, and beyond a doubt were waiting for the company to come up. Dernor coincided in this opinion, and held a consultation with the male members of the party. The result of this consultation was a determination on his part to make all haste to the rendezvous of the Riflemen of the Miami, and bring them hither, the settlers agreeing to halt and await their arrival. The danger that menaced them was certainly great to make this step necessary.

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## CHAPTER III.

### THE RIFLEMEN OF THE MIAMI.

There they sat and chatted gayly, while the flickering of the blaze  
Led the shadows on their faces in a wild and devious maze;  
And among them, one I noted, unto whom the rest gave place,  
Which was token he was foremost in the fight or in the chase.

DR. ENGLISH.

One cold, drizzly, sleety day, in a winter toward the latter part of the last century, a party of Shawnee Indians crossed from the Kentucky cane-brakes into Ohio. Penetrating its deep, labyrinthine forests, they came upon a double cabin, where dwelt two widows, with several children. These they inhumanly massacred, and burnt their dwellings to the ground. Then, laden with their plunder, they set out on their return to Kentucky.

It so happened that two brothers, George and Lewis Dernor, who were upon a hunting expedition in this section, came upon the burning cabin within an hour after the savages had left it. They saw by the numerous tracks that the party was too large for them to think of attacking; nevertheless, they took the trail with the resolution of ascertaining to what tribe the savages belonged; and, if possible, to pick off one or two, as a slight payment for the outrage they had committed. Following on for several miles, they gained a glimpse of them, as they crossed a ridge, and discovered, as they had suspected all along, that they were a party of Shawnees returning to Kentucky, although the majority of this tribe of Indians at this time had their towns in Ohio. A half-hour later, by signs known only to experienced woodmen, they became convinced that some one else was also upon the trail of the Indians. After a great amount of maneuvering and stratagetic reconnoitering, they learned that it was a hunter like themselves, and no other but their old friend Dick Allmat. Accompanied by him, they continued the pursuit, and a mile further on, discovered that still another person was dogging the Shawnees. Pretty certain that this must also be a friend, they managed to make themselves known to him without the tedious ceremony which had characterized their introduction to Allmat. He proved to be Tom O'Hara, whose utmost exertions were necessary to keep pace with the retreating savages. He was in a perfect fury that they should proceed so fast, when he could see no necessity for it, and was half tempted to

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expend some of his wrath upon those of his friends who laughed at his discomfiture.

The party, now numbering four experienced hunters, felt considerable confidence in their strength, and the proposition was made to attack the Shawnees. The latter numbered seven or eight, and from their deliberate and incautious movements, it was manifest, had not learned that they were pursued. Perhaps they believed no white man could brave the blinding, seething storm then raging, for they neglected those precautions which seem to be second nature with the North American Indian.

The proposition made by Lewis Dernor was agreed to, and the plan matured. The conflict took place in a sort of open hollow, and probably was one of the most sanguinary personal conflicts that ever occurred on the frontier. The hunters came out of it with no wounds worth mentioning, while only two of the savages escaped. These plunged into the woods, and disappeared with the speed of the wind, and the whites were left undisputed masters of the field.

This was by no means the first outrage which had been committed by similar bands of Indians, and just at this particular time the arm of the General Government was so weakened from the repeated disastrous campaigns against them, that they insulted the whites with impunity, and entertained, in reality, no fear at all of punishment or retribution. This was the subject of conversation with the hunters, and so impressed them, that Lewis Dernor proposed that they should bind themselves together for an indefinite period, (which was not intended to be over a couple of years or so at the most,) to do their utmost to check the monstrous outrages which were becoming so common along the border. The four hunters mentioned were well known to each other, and had the reputation of being the best riflemen and woodmen of any then known. In addition to this, they were all unmarried, and without any prospects of changing their condition; consequently they were at perfect liberty to wander whither they pleased.

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The proposition was considered, and received a unanimous and enthusiastic response from all. The brothers Dernor, in their hunting expeditions, had spent several nights in a cave along the Miami, which they had discovered by accident, and which afforded them not only a comfortable, but also a perfect concealment. It was agreed that this should be their rendezvous, and in order that all might learn its locality, and the manner of approach to it, the following night was spent within it.

Now commences the history of the Riflemen of the Miami, as they were christened by the settlers, to whom their exploits soon became known, and as they were proud to acknowledge themselves. Instead of disbanding at the end of two years, as was originally contemplated, this confederation had an existence for over a dozen years. They participated in Anthony Wayne's great battle with the Indians, in 1794, where two of the members fell, and which concluded their history, as the surviving members retired to private life, and were too old to participate in the Tecumseh's war of 1812.

It would require a volume to detail the exploits of these Riflemen. Unlike many other confederations that were formed about this period, their only object was that of self-defense, and of offering protection to the settlers who were constantly penetrating the Great West. No innocent Indians ever suffered at their hands, and many was the one they befriended and assisted in his extremity. But woe betide the offender that fell into their hands. To the cruel they were unsparing; to the merciless they showed no mercy. While their name was loved and revered by the whites, it was feared and execrated by the savages. The Shawnees were unusually active and vindictive at this time, and it was with them that the most frequent encounters took place. The incident detailed in the first chapter was but one among many that were constantly occurring, and it scarcely equaled in importance numerous exploits that they had before performed.

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There was a fifth member, who joined the Riflemen only a year or two previous to the period in which we design to notice their actions more particularly. He was known as Ferdinand Sego, and became a member from a part which he performed one night on the Ohio, when the Riflemen were attacked by three times their number. He displayed such activity, skill and courage, that he was importuned to unite with them, although, up to this time, they had refused to receive any accessions to their number. He consented, and from that time forward the Riflemen of the Miami numbered five hunters.

Sego joined them, however, with the understanding that he should be obliged to absent himself from time to time. At regular intervals he left them, and was gone sometimes for over a week. As he had no rifle, the cause of these excursions remained a mystery to his friends until he chose to reveal it himself. It then turned out that it was nothing less than a female that exercised such a potent influence upon him. Sego, as he became intimately acquainted with his friends, often spoke of this girl, and of the great affection he bore her. One day he gave her name—Edith Sudbury. This excited no unusual interest, until Lewis Dernor learned, on the day that he encountered the emigrants, that he and Sego loved the same girl!

This was the cause of his unusual agitation, and the pain he felt at hearing her name pronounced. He entertained the strongest friendship for Sego, but, until he had met Edith, he had never known any thing, by experience, of the divine power of our nature.

When he did love, therefore, it was with his whole soul and being. His companions, less sagacious in sentimental affairs than worldly, failed to divine the cause of the singular actions of their leader, who did his utmost to conceal it from them. Little did he dream, as he listened to the enthusiastic praises of Edith by Segó, that it was the being who constantly occupied his thoughts. But the truth had broken upon him like a peal of thunder at midday.

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On the day succeeding Lewis' departure from the settlers, three of his men, O'Hara, Dernor and Allmat, stood on the banks of the Miami, several hundred yards above their rendezvous. The sky was clear and sunshiny, and they were making ready for a trial of skill with their rifles. From where they stood, the most practiced eye would have failed to discover any spot which could possibly afford shelter for one of their number, much less for them all. But beneath a cluster of bushes, projecting from the upper edge of the bank, was an orifice, barely sufficient to admit the passage of a man's body. Entering this, on his hands and knees, he was ushered into a subterranean cave, dark, but of ample dimensions to accommodate a dozen men. It was furnished with blankets and the skins of different animals, and each of the Riflemen took especial pride in decorating and fixing it up for their convenience.

Dick paced off two hundred yards, and then chipped a small piece from the trunk of a beech tree along the river-bank, as a target for their weapons. As he stepped one side, O'Hara raised his piece, and scarcely pausing to take aim, fired. Instead of striking the mark, he missed it by fully two inches. When this was announced, he turned round, and with an impatient exclamation, demanded:

"Who fired that gun last?"

"I believe I did," replied Dernor.

"You just touch it again, and you'll never touch another rifle. Do you know what you have done?"

"Know what I've done? Of course I do. I've fired it."

"*You've put a spell on it.*"

"The deuce! Try it again!"

O'Hara shook his head.

"It would never miss such a mark as that unless it was bewitched. I've got to melt up that money of mine, or the thing will never be worth a half-penny again."

When a Kentuckian's gun is bewitched, or has a "spell upon it," the only way in which he can free it of its enchantment, is by firing a silver bullet from it. Unless this is done, they steadfastly believe it can never be relied upon afterward.

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O'Hara, accordingly, produced his bullet-mould, kindled a fire, which required much more blowing and care to fuse the metal than it did to melt lead or pewter. But he succeeded at last, melting down all his spare change to make the small, shining bullet. This was rammed down his gun, a deliberate aim taken, and Dick announced that it had struck the mark plumb in the center. The charm was gone!

It would be uninteresting to narrate the different methods by which each of the three men demonstrated his remarkable skill with his favorite weapon. They fired at different distances, at objects in the air, and in each others' hands, and then discharged their pieces on a run, wheeling as quick as thought. Although the weapon used was the old flint-lock rifle, the dexterity exhibited by each could scarcely be excelled by that of the most famous sharp-shooters of the present day, with their improved guns. The exercise was continued for over two hours, when, as O'Hara was reloading his piece, the report of a rifle was heard upon the opposite side of the Miami, and the bullet whizzed within an inch of O'Hara's face. As all three looked across the river, they saw a faint, bluish wreath rising from the shrubbery, but no signs of the one who had fired the shot.

"I guess his gun has had a spell put on it," said O'Hara, sneeringly.

"And I guess you'll get a spell put on you, if he tries that again," remarked Dick, carefully scrutinizing the opposite bank.

"Why doesn't he show himself, the coward? Like enough there is a whole party of Shawnees——"

"Sh! Something moved over there."

"He's going to cross, I'll be shot if he isn't."

A splash was now heard, as though something had been cast upon the surface of the water, and a moment later, a small Indian canoe, in which was seated a single person, shot from beneath the shrubbery, skimming over the river like a swallow, and headed directly toward the spot where the Riflemen were standing. Dick raised his rifle, but instantly lowered it with a laugh.

"It's nobody but Lew himself. He just fired to scare us."

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Propelled by a single paddle, the frail boat sped onward with great celerity, and its prow, in a few moments, grated lightly against the shingle at the feet of the hunters, and their leader stepped forth.

"Been practicing, I see," he remarked.

"A little; *you* tried your hand, also."

Lewis smiled, as he replied:

"A little fun, of course; but we've got better business on hand."

"Let's hear it, for we are ready for any thing."

"A lot of settlers are going through the woods, down below, and they need company, for the Shawnees have scented them as sure as the world. I've promised them that we will see them through—where's Sego?" suddenly asked the leader, looking around, as if searching for the one mentioned.

"He went off yesterday."

"That's unlucky, for we shall need him, too. Will he be back to-day?"

"He said he expected to return this afternoon."

"We will wait for him, then, though they need us, most certainly."

"It's the first time Sego has been off in a good while," said Dick, "and I don't know what started him this time."

Lewis thought that he would give a good deal if he knew, although he chose to say nothing about it. An hour or more was spent in conversation, when the four sauntered carelessly toward the cave, the canoe first having been pulled high enough upon the bank to make it secure against being washed away by the current. They did not enter the cave, but passed it, and returned after it was fairly dark, when they were certain that no prying eyes had seen them.

When morning dawned, Sego had not returned, and Lewis was undetermined whether to wait longer for him, or to go on at once. The case was urgent, but the need of Sego's arm was also urgent, and he concluded to wait still further. The forenoon, the afternoon, and finally the night came and went, without bringing any signs of the absentee, and at daylight on this day, Lewis and his men made ready to start, resolved not to lose another moment. As they passed down to the river's edge, the delinquent made his appearance and joined them. They crossed the Miami in the canoe—its lightness rendering it necessary to make the passage twice—and plunging in the forest, made all haste toward the settlers.

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Meanwhile, the prolonged absence of the Riflemen, was the occasion of much speculation and anxiety upon the part of the emigrants. When Lewis had named the period at which he expected to join them with his men, they all knew he had allowed himself the widest limit, and fully intended to return within the time specified.

When, therefore, this hour passed, they certainly had sufficient grounds for their anxiety and uneasiness, and some of the men did not hesitate to express their conviction that the Riflemen would not come at all. Not that they would willingly fail to keep their appointment, but it was more than probable that circumstances had arisen which prevented it.

The settlers remained encamped until thirty hours beyond the time of the expected arrival of the Riflemen, when every one had given up all hope of seeing them, and it was agreed to move on to the banks of the creek. The scouts, who had been constantly busy, reported that no signs of Indians were visible in the vicinity, and strong hopes were entertained that they would be able to cross without disturbance.

"Before venturing into that same piece of water," said Smith, "I propose that another examination of the woods be made, and that some of us wade over first to see how deep the stream is."

The latter suggestion had already been acted upon by the scouts several times, but, as all shared the feeling of Smith, the scouts, joined this time by the old man's two sons, set out to act upon his proposal. After examining the bank upon which they stood, with the greatest care, for several hundred yards both above and below, they returned with the report that no signs of danger had been discovered.

Two of them now entered the creek in front of the oxen, and commenced wading across. It would be impossible to depict the anxiety, intense apprehension, and almost terror with which they were regarded by their friends upon the shore. One was Laughlin and the other Harry Smith, and mixed with the parents' natural uneasiness, was a pride which glowed upon his face at seeing his son so unhesitatingly facing danger. Had he known that the most imminent peril threatened him, the wealth of the

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Indians would not have tempted him to call him back.

Step by step the two men advanced across the creek, the water in no place being above their knees, until they stepped upon dry land once more. This was the culminating point of anxiety with their friends. This apprehension now became so intense as to be painful and almost unbearable. Some ten or fifteen minutes (which seemed hours to the waiting friends) was spent in reconnoitering the shore, after which the two stepped into the station and set out on their return. They had taken but a step or two, when they suddenly drew back, and Laughlin made a signal of danger to the settlers, the cause of which was instantly seen by all.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PASSAGE OF THE CREEK.

Be set forever in disgrace  
The glory of the red-man's race,  
If from the foe we turn our face,  
Or safety seek in flight!—G. P. MORRIS.

Laughlin's signal of danger was accompanied by a meaning motion up the creek, intended to direct the attention of the settlers to that point. Looking in the direction indicated, they saw what at first appeared nothing but a mere log or stump floating on the water, but what, upon a closer inspection, it was evident, had a deeper significance than that. It was near the center of the current, drifting slowly downward, impelled certainly by nothing more than the force of the stream itself. As it came nearer, it proved to be three trees, partly trimmed of their branches, and secured together, a contrivance in the formation of which the hand of man most surely must have been concerned.

"Some Injin deviltry!" muttered the older Smith, as he lay on his face with the other settlers. "It'll be dangerous to be too curious. Jest keep an eye on the concern, from where you lie, and if you see a top-knot, blaze away." [37]

At this moment, a low whistle from the scouts on the opposite bank warned all that this was no time for carelessness; and ceasing their whispered remarks, the men turned their whole attention toward the object in question. The children were all lying down in the wagon, and the women crouched so low that no stray shot could reach them. The greatest worryment was over the oxen. As they stood, lazily chewing their cuds, their horns and eyes could be plainly seen from the creek, so that any foes concealed in the raft could shoot one or all of them, and thus inflict an irreparable injury upon the whites. Although it was possible that such an occurrence might take place, yet it was hardly probable the shots would be expended upon such "small" game.

When directly opposite the settlers, the logs in question underwent a most searching scrutiny from both shores, the result of which was the conviction that no human being was nearer the suspicious object than those engaged in scrutinizing it. Whatever had been the intention of the Indians—for Indians undoubtedly they were who had formed the raft—they had declined to risk their own persons upon it, as it drifted down the current. This was so plain, that Laughlin called out:

"You needn't be skeart, boys, there's no Injin *thar*; so jest drive in and cross."

"Take another look first," cried out one of the settlers. "There are Indians *somewhere* in these parts, for those trees never grew together like that."

The advice of the settler was so sensible and timely, that Laughlin and Smith acted upon it at once, withdrawing some yards from the stream and proceeding some distance up it, with the same caution that had characterized all their movements. The result of this reconnoissance was the same as the other. If there were any savages at all in the vicinity, they were so carefully concealed that the skill of the two whites could avail nothing in discovering them. This being reported, preparations were resumed for crossing.

It should be remarked, that the creek, a short distance above the fording-place, made a bend, thus limiting the view of the whites considerably. This being the case, the other son of Smith stationed himself at this curve, to give notice of the approach of any danger. Every thing being in readiness, the oxen were driven into the water, which was accomplished very easily, as all four were thirsty. [38]

The progress was necessarily slow, the wheels of the wagon sinking so deep in the muddy bottom that the united efforts of the four powerful oxen were barely able to

move it. The deepest portion was passed ere one-third of the stream was crossed, the men being compelled to place their hands to the wheels to keep them moving.

It was at this moment, and just as the wagon-body raised several inches from the water, that an exclamation from young Smith startled all. Looking toward him, they saw him raise his rifle and fire at something in the creek, and then fall flat on his face. The next moment a raft, precisely similar to the first, came in view, floating somewhat nearer the left bank, so that it would pass between the shore and the wagon, provided the latter remained stationary.

"There are Injins on that," called out Smith from his hiding-place. "I seen their top-knots."

The whites understood their peril at once. The oxen were lashed and goaded, until they slipped on their faces in their efforts to pull the wagon forward, while the men caught the wheels and turned them round and round without moving the wagon a particle. All depended upon reaching the shore before the Indians could come upon them, for, beyond a doubt, there were Indians concealed upon the raft which was so rapidly nearing them. For a dozen feet or so the wagon moved readily; but at this point it sunk below the hubs, and the united strength of men and oxen utterly failed to move it—this, too, occurring when the position was such that the approaching raft must pass so close as almost to touch it!

"No use, boys," called out Mr. Smith. "Get your rifles ready for the imps."

Most of the men had placed their guns in the wagon while toiling at the wheels, and they now caught them and stood on the defensive. As yet, nothing could be seen of the savages who were concealed upon the raft, but a moment later, the logs swerved over toward the shore which the settlers had just left. Thus it was plain that the Indians, seeing the true state of affairs, were as anxious to avoid the collision as the whites had been. The water being shallow, they were able to place their feet upon the bottom, and thus move the raft readily. As is generally the case, the courage of the whites increased in proportion as they discovered that of the Indians diminishing, and the proposal was made by one to wade over to the contrivance and demolish it. The better sense of the others, however, prevailed, and they maintained the defensive only.

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As the raft came down-stream, it continued veering over to the shore so much, that if it passed the wagon at all, it would do so by a safe distance. All at once, as the expectant settlers were looking at it with the most acute attention, some one called out:

"Look *under* the concern."

All, of course, did so, and all distinctly saw in the clear water, directly under the raft, some ten or twelve human feet walking along on the bottom. Not only the feet themselves, but the legs, as far up as the knees, could be seen, and they formed a most curious sight mixing promiscuously together, as it seemed, while moving forward. The raft thus had the appearance of some great aquatic monster, whose ridged back floated on the surface, while his feet traversed the bottom. The bodies of the Indians, of course, were above the current; but being prone, the logs being arranged for that especial purpose, they were effectually concealed from view.

In a moment, the raft floated over that portion of the river which had been muddied by the passage of the wagon, and the feet of the Indians became invisible. When they had crossed it, they were too far down to be seen, and thus the logs went onward, moving so much faster than the current that they left a wake behind them.

"All together now—once more!" said the older Smith, catching hold of one of the wheels. The others did the same, and the oxen having had sufficient rest the combined strength of all started the wagon, and a few moments later it went up the bank on dry land and entered the woods.

With a want of foresight that was unaccountable, the settlers had failed to pay any further attention to the raft after it was fairly below them. Perhaps it was the recollection of this that led the elder Smith and one of his friends to walk down to the bank and look for it. They descried it, lying against their own side of the creek, not more than two hundred yards distant, and, at the very moment their eyes rested upon it, they caught a shadowy glimpse of an Indian, as he flitted noiselessly from it into the wood. As they waited and saw no more, they rightly judged that he was the last one, the others having landed entirely unobserved.

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"That looks bad," said Smith, "we are not done with the rascals yet."

At this moment son Jim, who was still on the other side of the creek, called out that eight Indians had landed, and were stealing up the river bank to attack the party. His words were heard, and every man dropped on his face in the wood, and with loaded rifles waited the assault. They had scarcely done so when the sharp explosion of several guns broke the stillness, and the two foremost oxen, with a wild bellow of agony, sunk to the ground and died. The brutes behind them imitated their motion, although operated upon solely by their own sense of weariness. They thus unconsciously did the

wisest thing possible under the circumstances, as the shots that were afterward fired passed harmlessly over them.

For the space of twenty minutes after this incident, a perfect silence reigned in the wood. These twenty minutes were occupied by the Shawnees in getting in a position to pick off the settlers. The latter could see them dodging from tree to tree, and coming closer and closer every moment. Emboldened by their immunity thus far, they became more incautious, until several exposed themselves so plainly that the elder Smith and one of the settlers fired precisely at the same moment, each one shooting a savage dead. A whole volley was returned, several bullets cutting the shrubbery and bushes over the heads of the settlers, while others passed through the wagon-covering, evidently fired with intent against the women and children in it. These shots accomplished nothing, as the latter kept their heads below the top of the heavy oaken sides, which were proof against the best rifle ever discharged.

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The two shots of the settlers for a time created a sort of panic with the Indians. They retreated far more rapidly than they had come up, and in a few moments were invisible. The whites were too well versed in Indian ways and strategy to take this as a genuine retreat, knowing that in a few moments they would return more furious than ever.

There was an advantage in favor of the settlers of which, up to this moment, they had not been aware. Some fifty yards below them was an open space over forty feet in width, across which the Shawnees hurried pell mell into the cover beyond. Here they were reinforced by some half-dozen Indians of their own tribe, who had been in the vicinity and had been attracted by the sound of firing. The assailants now numbered about a dozen, and confident in their strength, made ready for the final attack.

All this time young Smith, upon the opposite side of the creek, was engaged in watching the Shawnees as well as he could from his covert. He now called out to the whites that they were about to advance again, and that he would pick off one at least as they passed across the open space referred to. A moment later, the crack of his rifle showed that he had kept his word and that the crisis of the contest was upon them.

Young Smith had fired just at the moment the foremost Indian came in view. The other had advanced to a point about half way across the opening, when five spouts of flame burst from the thick shrubbery upon the opposite side of the creek; there was the simultaneous report of as many rifles, and five messengers of death went tearing among the Shawnees, mangling, killing and scattering them like chaff in the whirlwind.

"*The Riflemen of the Miami!*" shouted Laughlin, in a delirium of joy, springing to his feet and swinging his cap over his head. All eyes, in a transport of pleasure, were turned toward the spot where the thin, blueish smoke of their rifles was rising, but for a few moments nothing was seen. At the expiration of that time, the manly form of Lewis Dernor rose to view, and, with a nod of recognition, he stepped into the stream and commenced wading across, closely followed by young Smith, who, up to the moment of the discharge of the rifles, had no more suspicion the hunters were in the vicinity than had the Shawnees themselves.

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It scarcely need be said that the welcome which the settlers extended to the hunter was of the most hearty and genuine kind. Through his instrumentality they felt they all had been saved from massacre at the hands of the Shawnees.

"But where are your men?" asked several.

"Upon the opposite side. They will cross over shortly."

"And will they accompany us?"

"They will not leave you until you have reached your destination."

"The Indians will not trouble us again?"

"No, I think not; but the boys can go with you as well as not, and I make this arrangement as a sort of compensation for my failure to keep my appointment."

"Your absence did excite much wonder, but you came up in the nick of time, most certainly."

"Sego, unconsciously, was the cause of our delay. He was absent at the time I reached the Miami. We could have come on without him, of course; but, as I was pretty sure a large body of Indians were going to attack you, I thought it best not to come until we were all together."

The Rifleman spoke with such sadness that all noticed it and felt great curiosity to know the cause. There was but one who dared to question him, the elder Smith, and he at once called him aside.

"What's the matter, Lew?" he asked. "I never saw you act so odd. Come, out with it."

"Oh, there's nothing the matter with me," replied Dernor, his very manner showing an increase of his embarrassment.

"Yes, now, I know there is. Let's hear it."

The bronzed face of the hunter took a deeper hue as he asked:

"Is she—Edith with you?"

"Of course she is," laughed Smith, a dim, vague idea of his meaning beginning to make its way through his brain.

"To tell the truth, then, Smith, there is one man of ours that I *must* prevent from seeing her."

Smith looked up in amazement. Lewis proceeded:

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"The distance from here to the settlement toward which you are journeying is not more than forty miles. Let me take Edith and make that journey alone. I have traveled the ground often enough, and I will lead her through the woods safely and much sooner than you can perform the same journey. This is the only favor I have ever asked or expect to ask of you. Don't refuse it.

"Why, my heavens! who intended to refuse it? Take her? Of course you may, provided she is willing, for where could she be safer than in the charge of Lew Dernor? Nowhere, I cac'late."

"You please tell her that it is *necessary*, then, will you?"

Old Smith hastened away, and told Edith Sudbury that her own safety demanded that she should place herself under the care of the hunter, who would conduct her safely to the settlement. She exhibited some natural hesitation at first, but having perfect confidence both in Smith, who so long had acted the part of father toward her, and in Dernor, who had manifested such interest in her welfare, she made her preparations. Smith simply stated to the others that this singular proceeding was imperatively necessary, and requested them not to refer to it in the presence of the other hunters.

A few minutes later, the four remaining Riflemen stepped into the stream, and commenced wading across. As they did so, Edith Sudbury and the hunter plunged into the forest, and commenced their eventful journey to the settlement.

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## CHAPTER V.

### APPREHENSION.

They're gone—again the red-men rally  
With dance and song the woods resound;  
The hatchet's buried in the valley;  
No foe profanes our hunting-ground!  
The green leaves on the blithe boughs quiver,  
The verdant hills with song-birds ring,  
While our bark canoes, the river  
Skim, like swallows on the wing.—G. P. MORRIS.

As the Riflemen reached the spot where the settlers were awaiting them, the preparations for resuming the journey were instantly made. The dead oxen were rolled to one side, and on the hardened ground the wagon was easily dragged by the remaining yoke. The hunters and experienced men of the party were certain that the Shawnees had fled, and that, for the present at least, there was no further danger from them; but, in order to quiet the fears of the women, a thorough examination of the surrounding woods was made. This search resulted only in the discovery of the dead bodies of the Indians. As the Riflemen never scalped a savage, the bodies were left undisturbed.

"Where the deuce has Lew gone to?" demanded O'Hara, after several times looking around him.

Those who were acquainted with the facts of the case looked in each other's face, as if in doubt what to reply.

"Don't anybody know? eh? Say!" he repeated, in an angry voice.

"He's taken a near cut to the settlement," replied the elder Smith.

"*Anybody go with him?*"

"He took a female, believing that her safety demanded such a course."

"Lew never had more sense than he needed, and it's all gone now. Cutting across

through the woods with a gal," repeated O'Hara, in a contemptuous tone. "Just as though she'd be safer with him than with us. I hope the Shawnees will get on his trail and catch both."

"What do you want the gal caught for?" demanded Harry Smith, blustering up.

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"She'd no business to be such a fool as to go with him."

"I never allow any one to say any thing against her," added young Smith, growing red in the face.

"If you want your head broke, just say so," said O'Hara, savagely.

"Come, come," interrupted the elder Smith, "boys should be careful not to get mad. Shut up, each of you, or I'll whip both of you."

This ended the high words between the two parties, and five minutes later they were conversing together on as friendly and good terms as it can be possible between two mortals.

All things being in readiness, the party resumed their journey, using the same caution that had characterized their march previous to the attack of the Indians. The Riflemen themselves performed the part of scouts, and the progress was uninterrupted by any incident worth mentioning until late in the afternoon.

The sky, which had been of a threatening character for several hours, now became overcast, and it was evident that a violent storm was about to break upon them. This being the case, there was nothing to be gained by pressing onward, and the settlers accordingly halted for the night. A sort of barricade was made around the wagon, so that, in case of attack, a good resistance could be made, and the oxen were secured fast to the wagon. Stakes were cut and driven into the ground, and a strong piece of canvas, which had been brought for the purpose, stretched across them in such a manner that a comfortable shelter was afforded those whose duty did not compel them to brave the storm.

These arrangements were hardly completed, when a dull, roaring sound, like that of the ocean, was heard in the woods. It came rapidly nearer, and in a few moments the swaying trees showed that it was passing onward over the camp. The frightened and bewildered birds circled screaming overhead, the rotten limbs and twigs went flying through the air, and thick darkness gathered at once over the forest. A moment later, several big drops of water pattered through the leaves like so many bullets and immediately the rain came down in torrents. The thunder booming in the distance, then sharply exploding like a piece of ordnance directly overhead, the crack of the solid oak as the thunderbolt tore it to splinters, the incessant streaming of the lightning across the sky, the sougning of the wind—all these made a scene terrifically grand, and would have induced almost any one to have sought the shelter offered him, convinced that the only danger at such a time was from the elements themselves.

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But with the Riflemen the case was far different. They well knew that it was just at such times that the wily Indian prowled through the woods in quest of his victims, and that at no other period was his watchfulness so great as at one like the present. Thus it was that three of the Miami Riflemen braved the terrors of the storm on that night, and thus it was that all three were witnesses of the occurrences we are about to narrate.

The storm continued without intermission almost the entire night. The only change perceptible was in the thunder and lightning. The flashes of the latter grew less and less, until several minutes frequently elapsed between them; but the rain came down as if the "windows of heaven were opened," and a minute's exposure was sufficient to drench one to the skin, while the wind, sougning through the trees, made the hours as dismal and dreary as it was possible for them to be.

The three Riflemen who stood as sentinels, were Dick, George Dernor and O'Hara. No changes were made during the night, as the men would have looked upon such a proceeding as childish and foolish. O'Hara was leaning against a tree, some ten or fifteen yards from the camp, watching that portion of the wood which immediately surrounded him, as well as the occasional gleams of lightning would permit. While doing this, his gaze fell upon a stump, about twenty feet distant. As the lightning flamed out, he saw distinctly a bareheaded man seated upon it!

At first sight of this singular apparition, O'Hara started, rubbed his eyes, fixed his gaze upon the spot, believing that he had been deceived. A moment later, as another flash illuminated the wood, he saw the man again. He was seated on the edge of the stump, his feet and arms hanging down, and, as stated before, without any covering for his head. The latter was bullet-shaped, and the view which was afforded of him was so perfect, that the hunter saw he had short, curly hair, of a reddish color. His eyes were small, but sparkling like an Indian's, and, when they could be seen, were fixed with frightful intensity upon the Rifleman. The whole expression of his face was forbidding and repulsive.

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At the first distinct view of this man, came the conviction to O'Hara that he had seen

him before, and he spent a few minutes in endeavoring to remember where and when it was. He was unable to do so, however, although he was positive that he was an enemy to him.

"I don't care who he is," muttered O'Hara; "he ought to know better than to squat out there when he knows I have seen him. I say, old chap," he called, in a louder tone, "come down off that stump, or I'll fetch you."

Whoever the person addressed might be, it was evident he cared nothing for the command of the hunter, for the latter, the next moment, saw him, not only seated as immobile as ever, but with a sneer of contempt upon his face. This so exasperated O'Hara that he instantly called out: "I'll give you two seconds to get off of that, and if you don't do it in that time, I'll tumble you off."

He brought his rifle to his shoulder, so as to be ready to fire if the man remained. He held it thus full a minute, at the end of which he discerned the foolhardy being who had not changed his position in the least. Hesitating no longer, he pointed his piece directly at his heart, and discharged it.

"It's your own fault," mused the hunter. "I gave you fair warning and plenty time to get out the way, and in such places as we're in just now, we can't afford to stand on ceremony. You must be careful——"

Again the red lightning flamed out, and revealed the man, seated as before, the sneer on his face having increased, and his eyes flaming with more dreadful intensity than ever!

"Man or spirit," said O'Hara, now thoroughly startled, "I'll give you another shot at any rate."

He reloaded, and, awaiting his opportunity, fired again full at the man's breast. O'Hara's hair nearly lifted the cap from his head, when he saw his foe sitting unharmed, and as scornful as though no bullet could wound him. The bravest man has his weakness, and the greatest weakness of such characters as the man we are dealing with is their superstition. O'Hara verily believed the man at whom he had fired possessed more than mortal attributes, and, far more frightened than he would have been had a score of Shawnees sounded their war-whoop in his ears, he made a low whistle as a signal for Dick and Dernor to come up. In a moment they were beside him, curious to know the cause of his firing.

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The next flash of lightning showed three hunters intently staring toward a man who was sitting composedly on a stump, and staring back at them with equal intensity.

"You all seen him, didn't you?" asked Tom, in a whisper. Receiving an affirmative answer, he added:

"Let's all aim square at his breast, and then we'll be sure that one of us at least will hit him. If that doesn't finish him, there's no use of trying."

For the third time, the mysterious being braved the deadly bullets, this time from three separate rifles, and for the third time he was seen sitting, unharmed and contemptuous, upon the stump.

"It's all a waste of powder," said O'Hara. "We might pour a broadside from a brigade into him without making him wink."

"Let's go up and take him," said Dick.

"He'll take *us*," said O'Hara, who was not ashamed of his fright in such a case as this.

"Fudge! don't be frightened; come along. I'll lead."

Thus strengthened, O'Hara moved on behind the two others. Most assuredly the mysterious personage would have been captured, had not the lightning, which continued to act the part of illuminator, discovered their approach to him. His feet were instantly seen to twinkle in the air, and he whisked off the stump as quick as thought, and disappeared. To make sure, however, the Riflemen passed their hands over the stump, but of course found nothing. The booming of the thunder had been so continuous, that the reports of the rifles had not awakened the settlers, and the three hunters conversed together without fear of disturbance.

"I don't care what he is," said O'Hara, "I'm sure I've seen him before."

"Just what I am sure of," added Dick. "The very second I laid my eyes on him, his face seemed familiar. But it must have been several years ago."

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"It's queer I can't remember," repeated O'Hara, as if talking with himself.

"I remember having seen him, too, I'll be hanged if I don't," added George Dernor, with a dogged decision.

O'Hara made a leap fully six feet from the ground, and uttered a half-whistle, indicative

of some great discovery.

"What's up? what's the matter?" asked Dick, considerably surprised.

"Just one of you break my head, will you, for I'm the greatest fool that ever lived. I remember now who that man is."

"Who?"

O'Hara repeated a name that fairly took the breath away from the others. They had let one of the most inhuman villains of the day escape, and one for whose life either of the Riflemen would have undergone any sacrifice. The mention of his name, too, revealed to them the reason why he had been unharmed by their shots.

"We fired at his *breast* every time," said O'Hara. "If we had only fired at some other part of his body, he would have been riddled. What a precious set of fools we are!"

As no one disputed this exclamation, it may be supposed that all agreed to it. At any rate, their vexation was extreme for having failed to remember the man who, at that particular time, was probably more notorious than any other living being in the West.

"What's done can't be helped," remarked Dick. "If we ever have the chance to draw bead on him again, we'll *know where to aim*."

Nothing further was seen of the man who had braved their utmost through the night. He had taken his departure, and was fated to play an important *rôle* with a couple of our other friends.

The storm abated toward morning, and the settlers were once more under way. Their destination, a small frontier settlement, was reached late in the day, without any further incident, and their dangers for the present were ended. To the unbounded surprise of all, they learned that Lewis Dornor and Edith had not arrived, and there had been nothing heard of them. [50]

This caused the most painful apprehension with all, for they knew well enough that they would have been in several hours ahead of them, had not something unusual prevented. They could imagine but one cause—Indians!

The settlers commenced their labors at once. Trees were felled, and the foundations of strong, substantial cabins laid, ground was cleared and prepared to receive the seed, while the garrison of the block-house was strengthened, and the condition of the settlement improved by every means at their command.

Lewis had left a request with the emigrants, upon taking Edith from them, that the Riflemen should await his return at this settlement, and they accordingly remained. Two days passed without his coming in, when the anxiety of Edith's friends became so great, that it was determined to form a party to go in quest of her; but, upon mentioning the resolve to O'Hara, he strenuously opposed it, affirming that a large party could accomplish nothing at all, save to get themselves in trouble. In this opinion he was joined by several of the more experienced, and as a consequence, the scheme was abandoned. O'Hara then expressed the intention of taking a companion and going in search of them himself. The companion he chose was Dick Allmat.

Sego took an active interest in these proceedings, but as yet had not heard the name of Edith Sudbury mentioned. Indeed, none knew that name except her immediate friends, who heeded the request which Lewis had made, that it should be kept a secret. Thus it happened that he entertained not the slightest suspicion of the true state of the case. Had he known it, nothing could have hindered him from hurrying forth at once to the rescue.

O'Hara and Dick left the settlement one day about noon, and struck off in the woods toward the creek where the affray with the Shawnees had occurred. It was their design to take the trail, if possible, and follow it up until they discovered a clue to the unaccountable state of affairs. On reaching the creek, however, they were chagrined to find their fears realized. The storm which we have mentioned as succeeding the departure of Lewis and Edith, had completely obliterated all traces of their footsteps, and the Riflemen were left with no dependence except their wood-craft. [51]

This, in the end, answered their purpose. Examining the woods with the eye of a true hunter, O'Hara satisfied himself of the course his leader would take, and this he pursued with the dogged persistency of the Indian himself. He was confident that the trail which he and the girl had made subsequent to the storm could be followed without difficulty, if he could only strike it. But just here lay the trouble.

"It looks likely," said O'Hara, as he and Dick stood deliberating upon the proper course to pursue, "that he would take the nearest cut to the settlement, and then again it doesn't look so likely. Lew is such a fool, there's no telling what he'd do."

"Why do you think he wouldn't take the shortest way home?"

"Cause he wouldn't, that's why. You see, Dick," added Tom, in a more pleasant voice,

"Shawnees are in the woods, and it's no ways impossible that they haven't learned that them two fools are tramping through the country. If they do it, why it looks nateral that they'd s'pose they'd try to reach home just as soon as they could, and would try to head 'em off. Now, if the red-skins know this, Lew knows also that they know it, and I hope, for our own credit, he's got too much sense to walk into any of their traps. That's the reason why I think he may have took a longer way home."

"Just exactly what he has done," said Dick in a glow of admiration.

"How do you know it is, eh?"

"I mean I think so, of course."

"Well, say what you mean, next time. And that is what makes all the difficulty. How are we to know where to look for his trail?"

"It's pretty certain we won't find it by standing here all day."

"You go west and I will follow the creek, and when you stumble on any thing worth looking at, just give the whistle."

The two did as proposed. Dick ranged backward and forward until nightfall, while O'Hara examined the banks of the creek, until the gathering darkness made it a hopeless task. Upon coming together, they had nothing favorable to report, and thus ended the first day's search.

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"You know what I'm certain of?" asked O'Hara, as they were ready to resume the hunt upon the next morning.

"No, of course not."

"I'm sure that that red-headed villain that we fired at on the stump is mixed up in this affair."

Dick opened his eyes at this startling thought, and replied, in a few moments:

"I shouldn't wonder at all if he really was. Hang him! it's just the business that suits him. But Lew ought to know enough for him."

"Every man is a fool when he is in love," said O'Hara, contemptuously, "and that's the reason why I'm pretty certain both of 'em are in trouble. If he wasn't in love with the gal, he might know what to do; but—oh! heavens," he added, unable to find words to express his disgust at his leader betraying such a weakness.

"I s'pose we'll hunt as we did yesterday?"

"Of course. Let's go at it at once."

O'Hara returned to the creek and resumed his search along the banks, while Dick took to the woods as before. A half-hour later, a whistle from the former called him to the stream, where he found his friend bending over some "sign" that he had discovered in the soft earth of the shore.

"It's his," said O'Hara, "as sure as you live. They spent the night on the other side of the creek, and he has carried her across the next morning, and taken to the woods at this point."

"We can easily tell the direction he has taken, then."

"Not so easy, either; for don't you see he has gone *up* the creek, which ain't toward home. I tell you what it is, Lew has smelled danger, and if the red-skins have caught him, there's been some splendid fun afore they done it. Lew ain't such a fool, after all."

"Do you think," asked Dick, in a low tone, for he entertained a strong affection for his leader, "Do you think it is *certain* Lew has been caught?"

"No SIR," replied O'Hara, in tones so loud that they woke an echo through the woods. "It ain't certain by no means. He may have thought it best to make a long circle before reaching home, and like enough he is in the settlement this minute, or very near there. But I guess not," he added, after a minute's pause, and in a different voice. "Things look dubious, and we may have a big job before us."

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"Let's go to work at once."

"The first sensible words you've spoken this morning, when it seems we're both doing more talking than is necessary. Come on."

The trail was followed with the greatest difficulty, for the time which had elapsed since it was made was almost sufficient to obliterate it entirely. Now and then, where the ground was more favorable, it was easily discernible. After progressing a mile or so, O'Hara exclaimed, with an air of perplexity:

"There is something here that I don't understand. I've seen only *the track of one person up to this time.*"



"She isn't with him, then?"

"Yes, but he *appears to be carrying her*; and what that means is more than I can tell. It can't be she's hurt."

"Maybe, Tom, we ain't on the track of Lew," said Dick, with a hopeful gleam.

"Yes, we are. I could tell his track among a thousand. The mistake isn't *there*. All we've got to do is to follow it."

The pursuit was renewed and kept up until the bank of a smaller stream was reached, where the trail was irrecoverably lost. After leading into the water, it failed to come out upon the opposite side, and the utmost skill of the hunters was unable to regain it. The entire day was consumed by them in the search, when it was given up as hopeless. It would have been hard to tell which feeling predominated in the breasts of the two Riflemen—an apprehensive anxiety for the fate of their leader, or a gratifying pride at this evidence which he had given of his consummate knowledge of woodcraft.

These two hunters continued their hunt for two days more, when they returned to the settlement and reported their failure to gain any definite knowledge of Dernor and Edith. Neither had the settlers gained any tidings of them.

Where were they?

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## CHAPTER VI.

### A HUNTER'S WOOING.

And we knew  
That this rare sternness had its softness too,  
That woman's charm and grace upon his being wrought;  
That underneath the armor of his breast  
Were springs of tenderness, all quick to flow  
In sympathy with childhood's joy or woe;  
That children climbed his knees, and made his arms their rest.

LONDON CHARIVARI.

It was with a heart beating with more than one excessive emotion, that Lewis Dernor, the Rifleman, plunged into the forest with Edith Sudbury. None knew better than he the perils that threatened them in those dim labyrinths, and none was better prepared to encounter them. Were they twice as many, he would rather have braved them than allowed Edith and Sego to meet before he had declared his love to her.

In taking this step, the Rifleman had more than one twinge of conscience, for he could but consider it of questionable propriety in acting his part. Beyond a doubt, Sego and Edith were accepted lovers, who had been separated for months, and it seemed cruel, to say the least, thus to take advantage of their separation. The more he reflected upon it, the more guilty did he feel, until he formed the resolution to acquaint his fair charge with the presence of her lover with the settlers, and then leave her own heart to decide the matter.

The instant this resolve was formed, the honest-hearted hunter felt better. What though the judgment should be against him, he had done his duty, and this very fact gave him a pleasure which nothing else could destroy. His great, all-absorbing love for Edith had led him to use the artifice mentioned, in order to defer the interview between her and Sego; but, great as was this master-passion, it could lead him no further in deception than it had already done. More than once he half determined to turn and make his way back to the settlement, and was only prevented by a dread of the speculation and remarks that such a proceeding would occasion upon their part.

It must not be supposed that Lewis doubted his ability to reach the settlement in safety, with Edith. Had he known what danger he was doomed to encounter, he would have retraced his steps instantly, although he had commenced them with such a strong determination to keep her and Sego separate for a time.

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For an hour or so the journey progressed in silence upon the part of the hunter and his charge. While, as might be expected, his passion often led his gaze from the path he was pursuing, still it made him doubly alive to the responsibilities resting upon him, and increased his vigilance and watchfulness to a degree that would have appeared absurd to an ordinary observer. Most of the time, he kept a step or two in advance of Edith, trailing his rifle in his left hand, while his form was half bent, and his head projected forward, giving him the attitude of constant and intense attention. His eyes were flitting constantly from tree-top to ground, from side to side, ahead and behind

him, kindling with admiration and fire as they rested upon the form of his companion. The latter was enveloped in a large shawl, a portion of which covered her head, while her arms gathered the rest around her person. Her face was inclined, so that she was not sensible of the many ardent glances to which she was subjected. She stepped lightly forward, her beautifully moccasined feet hardly disturbing the leaves, among which they twinkled like some forest-flower.

Lewis had proposed to himself, when starting, to take the nearest route to the settlement; but his apprehension for the safety of Edith led him to change his intention after going a few miles. The Indians which he had assisted so signally to repulse, he believed would hover around the settlers so long as there remained an opportunity to pick off any of them. They would not fail, too, to scour the woods in search of smaller parties, and knowing the destination of the emigrants, would select the very ground over which they too were journeying. The Rifleman took the best course to avoid them. Retracing his steps some distance, he turned off toward the creek, he having concluded to ascend this for several miles, and then take a circuitous route to the settlement, convinced that, in this case, the longest way was the surest.

"Why this change of direction?" asked Edith, looking up in alarm, as he turned and commenced retracing his steps. [56]

"I think it best," he replied, with a smile.

"Have you discovered danger? Are we pursued?"

"Not that I know of. But I have been thinking for some time that if there *are* any Injins in this wood, this is the very ground they will select to cut us off, because they know that it is the one which we would naturally take, in making such a journey as this."

"*I have full faith in you.*"

And the gallant Rifleman felt he would die before any act of his should cause her to lose this faith in him. As she turned her trusting blue eyes up to his, their heavenly light seemed to fill his whole being, and he scarcely was conscious of what he did when he reached out his hand, and said:

"Edith, let me take your hand."

"Why, what need is there of that?" she coyly asked, with a roguish look, as she half complied and half hesitated.

"I shall feel safer—that is, I shall feel more certain of your safety if I lead you."

"Oh! well, you may lead me then," and she slid her almost fairy hand into his hard, horny palm, with a charming simplicity, which made the hunter's heart leap with a painful pleasure. That little, white member, as the Rifleman grasped it, was like the poles of a battery. It sent a shock through every part of his system, and gave his arm precisely the same tremor that takes place when a person is charged through this limb with electricity. If Edith had only returned the pressure, Lewis Dornor most assuredly would never have been able to stand it, and, therefore, it was fortunate that she did not.

It was this pressure, and the looks accompanying it, that made Edith Sudbury conscious that the hunter loved her. She would have been an exception to her sex had she not suspected this before. The thousand and one acts, and little, airy nothings, had given her a suspicion of the truth long since, but she had never felt certain of it.

This knowledge, which must ever be pleasant and flattering to the maiden, caused no unpleasant feelings on her part. If she did not love him, she certainly respected and admired his noble qualities, and the difference between the emotions named and love itself is certainly too faint for recognition. Under almost any circumstances they will grow into the passion, and all be lost in blending. Respect is the scout and guide that leads love to the soul. [57]

The tell-tale blush stole on Edith's face, as a realizing sense of her situation came upon her, and, for a long time, she dared not look up, much less speak. Suddenly the Rifleman made a spring in the air, and drew a deep breath, as though seized with a mortal pain.

"What's the matter?" asked Edith, in a tremor of apprehension.

"Oh! it nearly killed me!" replied the hunter, in a faint voice.

"What? Do tell me. Are you hurt? What caused it?"

"Why, Edith, *didn't you squeeze my hand?*"

"If I did, it was *certainly unintentional.*"

"Never mind. I thought it was on purpose."

The merry, musical laugh of the maiden rung out through the forest-arches, and the

Rifleman, for the time, lost all thoughts of Indians and danger; but this delightful forgetfulness could not last long. As the faint rumble of thunder was heard in the distance, he started, as though awakened from a dream, and looked furtively around him, half expecting to see his dread foes start from behind the trees, and rush upon him.

"Are you frightened?" asked Edith.

"Only for you," he replied, with a natural gallantry.

"And why are you alarmed on my account? What has occurred that makes you walk faster, and look so constantly about you?"

"Edith," said the hunter, in a low voice of passionate tenderness, "you have lived on the frontier long enough to be familiar with its dangers. When I first saw you, it was in an awful situation for a gal like yourself, but you bore it like a man. I 'spose, therefore, that there's no use in keeping any thing back from you."

"Of course not. What good could that possibly do?"

"Well, then, it's my opinion that *some one is following us.*"

"What makes you think so?" asked Edith, in genuine alarm; for there is something startling in the sudden knowledge that a foe is pursuing us, when there is no shelter at hand which can secure us against him. [58]

"I can not give you the reason that makes me positive a foe is behind us; but I am so certain of it, that we must hurry forward and take measures to hide our trail."

"Why not rejoin our friends?"

"I do not think it can be done, as there are plenty Injin between us, and we could not avoid them."

"Do what you think best, for surely none can know better than you."

"Come on, then."

They ascended the creek until the darkening sky, booming thunder, and constant flashing of lightning warned them that the storm was at hand. The hunter then stooped, and, lifting his companion in his arms with the same ease that he would have picked up an infant, stepped into the stream, and waded nearly across, going several hundred yards further up before stepping upon the land. By this time, the swaying of the trees, and the pattering of several large drops of water, told them that they had but a few minutes to spare. The hunter was perfectly acquainted with this section, and made all haste toward a spot which, more than once, had served him as a shelter in such storms as this. It consisted of a number of fallen trees, evidently torn up by some tornado, whose branches were so interlocked and matted that a slight effort of the hand of man had turned into a comfortable security as one need wish who was storm-stayed in the forest.

As this was reached, the storm burst upon them in all its grand fury, but their refuge answered every purpose, and not a thread of Edith's clothes was wetted. Darkness came on prematurely, and, as the reader already knows, the storm continued nearly through the entire night. Fully, and almost morbidly alive to the danger that ever menaced them, Lewis kept his station at the mouth or entrance of their shelter until daylight, not willing that for a moment a free entrance to any foe should be offered.

When morning dawned, it was clear and beautiful, and the two set out immediately upon their journey. As they had partaken of no food for a considerable time, the Rifleman was on the alert to procure some. The forests of Kentucky and Ohio, at that day, literally swarmed with game, and, in less than a half-hour from starting, he had brought down a wild turkey, which was dressed and cooked with admirable skill, and which afforded them a nourishing and substantial meal. [59]

Lewis was fearful that the late storm would cause such a rise in the creek that he would be unable to cross if he waited any longer, and he, therefore, attempted it at once. He found it muddy and rapidly rising, but he carried Edith over without difficulty, and then resumed his journey, taking such a direction that he could only reach the settlement by a wide *détour* from directness.

"At any rate," said Dernor, "if any one attempted to follow us yesterday, he is thrown off the track, and has got to commence again."

"Should they accidentally come across our trail, it would be easy enough for them to follow it, would it not?"

"Yes, any one could do that, but you see we're so far up the stream that there is little likelihood of that."

"I *do* hope the Indians will not trouble us more," said Edith, in a low, earnest voice.

"And so do I," said the Rifleman, in a lower and more earnest voice, and venturing at the same time to press the hand that he held within his own.

There certainly was something in the situation of these two calculated to inspire mutual trust. Edith felt that, under the merciful Being who was ever watching her, there was no stronger or more faithful arm upon which she could rely than the one beside her—that there was no heart truer, and no devotion more trustworthy. Under these circumstances, her words were quite unembarrassed and familiar.

"Suppose we *are* overtaken?" she asked, looking up in his face.

"*You will never be captured while I have strength to defend you,*" was the fervent reply.

"You are too kind and noble."

This time Edith impulsively pressed his hand, and, to his dying day, Lewis Dernor affirmed that this was one of the happiest moments of his life. Deeply learned as he was in wood-lore, he was a perfect novice in the subtle mysteries of the tender passion, and the cause of his ecstasy on this occasion was the sudden certainty that his love was returned. Had he been less a novice in such matters, he would have reflected that this slight evidence of regard most probably was but a mere momentary emotion which any man in his situation might have inspired. But, "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise;" and the happy hunter was all unconscious of this disagreeable possibility.

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He felt an unutterable desire to say something—something grand and terrible—which would give Edith a faint idea of the strength of the passion burning in his breast. Inability to say this something kept him silent for a long period. Several times, indeed, he was on the point of speaking, but the words that came to him were too commonplace and weak to express his tumultuous thoughts. Just as he was on the point of deciding upon something, it came to him with startling suddenness that he was too careless with his charge. For the last hour he had hardly been conscious that he was traveling in the woods, much less that in these same woods lurked the deadly Indian, whose thoughts were constantly bent upon murder and outrage.

"Edith," said he, "I would do any thing if it would only place us where we could talk without fear of being disturbed. But it can't be done here. There's Injins in these woods, and I'd never forgive myself if I should forget it agin, and I've already done so several times. Just stop a minute."

He took her hand, and the two bent forward in the attitude of intense listening; and listening thus, they heard faintly in the distance the report of a rifle. It was several miles away, and evidently fired by some wandering Indian or hunter. Its only effect upon our friends was that peculiar one of making them more fully sensible that there were other beings in the woods besides themselves.

"It means nothing," said Dernor. "Let's go on, but more careful than before."

"Do you think there is any one following us?" asked Edith, for this constant renewal of her apprehension made her nervous and unnaturally suspicious.

"I have no reason to think so, and I haven't any suspicion that there is. So I guess there's no need of being scared."

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"I can not help feeling frightened," said Edith, clinging closer to him. "I do wish we were at the settlement. How much longer will it take us to reach it?"

"To-morrow, at the very furthest, I hope we shall be there, and perhaps to-night, if we keep up a brisk walk."

"I see no reason why we should not hurry."

"Nor I, either," laughed Dernor. "So come on."

He struck up a brisk walk as he spoke, and continued it for some twenty minutes, when a small creek was reached, the one where O'Hara and Allmat lost the trail. Before wading it, the Rifleman paused on its banks as if in deep thought. This was so marked that Edith questioned him.

"I'm thinking whether it wouldn't be best to put this brook to the same use that I did last summer. A half-dozen Miamis got rather closer to me than was pleasant, when I jumped in here and threw them off the scent."

"How?"

"I will show you."

He picked her up as he spoke, and stepped carefully into the water. The center of the stream was sufficiently deep to hide his trail, even had the bottom been less favorable than it was. But this was hard, gravelly and pebbly, and he walked close to the edge without fear of betraying himself.

Having gone a considerable distance, he approached the bank, and made a leap which

carried him several feet upon it. He alighted upon the face of a large, firmly-fixed stone, where, poising himself for a moment, he sprung to another; and then, making a fourth leap, came down upon the ground. By this artifice he avoided leaving any visible trail until so far from the creek that almost any pursuer would fail to discover it. This explains why his two pursuers did fail in pursuing him.

"We're safe again for a while," said the Rifleman. "Any one who comes upon our track must do it between us and the creek."

"I feel greatly relieved," said Edith.

"And much more comfortable, I suppose?"

"Why, of course," she replied, half laughing, as she turned her gleaming, radiant face up to his. [62]

The Rifleman hardly knew what he did. A mist seemed to come before his eyes, and he felt as though floating in space, as, acting under an electrifying impulse, he stooped and kissed the warm lips of his fair companion. This transport of bliss was changed to the most utter misery when she answered, with every appearance of anger:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to take advantage of my helplessness."

"Are you offended?" he asked, his very voice showing his wretchedness of feeling.

Edith looked up with flashing eyes, crimsoned face, and silent voice, as if she would annihilate him by her very look. Gradually a change, like the sunlight breaking through the storm-clouds, overspread her features. The light of her eyes grew softer, and the expression of her face more merciful, until, as the hunter had paused and scarcely breathed for her reply, she said, with one of her most enchanting smiles:

"I am not offended. You may kiss me again if you wish to do so."

"If I wish to," said the Rifleman, drawing her to him. "If I wish to——"

Here his words became unintelligible. He continued kissing her until she checked him.

"Sh!"

The crackling of some bushes a few yards away showed that they were no longer alone. The whole aspect of the Rifleman changed. The lover became the ranger instantly. Cocking his rifle, he placed himself in front of Edith so as to confront this unexpected danger.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE COUNTRYMAN.

Nature hath framed strange fellows in her time.

SHAKSPEARE.

The crackling of the bushes continued, while the Rifleman compressed his lips and stood like a tiger at bay. In a moment he saw a man making his way through the tangled shrubbery, and almost immediately he lowered his rifle with an expression of disappointment. The individual before him was so different from what he expected, that a fuller notice of him is necessary, especially as he now takes his place as one of the *dramatis personæ* of this tale.

He appeared to be an awkward countryman, cowardly, ignorant of wood-craft, and completely bewildered by the dangers that beset him. His dress was half-savage and half-civilized, torn and disfigured, as if he had been running at the top of his speed through a thicket of briars and brambles. The only weapon he carried was a large knife firmly grasped in his hand. His face was blank and expressionless, save that it bore the impress of great animal fear, now mingled with surprise at confronting our two friends so unexpectedly. His head was round, bullet-like, with sandy hair, while the face seemed stained and begrimed with dirt and perspiration. He stood a moment with both hands stretched stiffly downward, his mouth wide open, apparently unable to find words to express his astonishment.

"Well, young man, good-day to you," said Dernor, advancing toward him.

"Good-day—good-day; fine weather for corn," he repeated, as if anxious to gain the good opinion of the hunter.

"How came you in these parts, my friend?"

"Heaven save you, I *run* here. The Injins have been after me."

"They didn't catch you?"

"No, sir," replied the young man, bursting into a loud guffaw. "I run too fast."

"What might be your name?"

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"Zeke Hunt, but I'm derved 'fraid it won't be any name at all if I stay in these parts much longer. Oh, dear," whined the young man, "I wish I was back in Pennsylvania, on the farm."

"What made you leave it?"

"The old man whipped me, and I run away."

"Why don't you go back?"

"I'd rather meet all the painted Injins in the woods than him. He'd whip me all through the town."

"No doubt you deserve it."

"Boo-hoo! you ain't going to lick me too, are you?" plead the man, gouging one eye with his finger.

"No, no; don't make a fool of yourself. What would I wish to hurt you for?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I'm 'fraid of everybody."

"See here, Zeke, was there any Injins chasing you, just now?"

"Yes—no. I've been clear of them a long time, I run so fast; but I'm just as afeard, as I s'pose the Injins are all over the woods."

"Not so bad as that, though we'd be willing to get along if there was a few less."

"Yes, that's so. Got any thing to eat?"

"No, but we'll soon have something."

"Can I go 'long with you?" asked the frightened fellow.

"If you wish to, provided you do what I want you to."

"Oh, I'll do any thing for you. Who's that with you?" he questioned, peering around the hunter, who, although he had advanced a few steps, still stood in front of Edith.

"A young friend, Miss Edith Sudbury."

"Glad to see you," said the young man, with an awkward bow.

"But see here," pursued the Rifleman, "how comes it you are in these woods at all? You didn't come all the way from Pennsylvania alone?"

"Oh, no—oh, no. I came down the Ohio in a flat-boat."

"How is it that you are here, then?"

"The other day we stopped along the shore a while, and I went off in the woods, and got lost. When I found my way back, the flat-boat had gone, and I was left alone. I've been wandering around ever since, and am nearly starved to death. Be you two hunting?"

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"No, we are making our way to a settlement some miles off. Do you wish to go with us?"

"Yes, anywhere to get out of these derved woods. Gracious! what a big job it'll be to cut all these trees down," said young Hunt, looking above and around him, as though absorbed with this new idea.

"A big job, certainly; but there'll be a big lot to do it when the time comes. There don't appear to be any reason why we should wait, and so we'll move ahead."

"Which way are you going?"

"Right ahead."

"Over the same ground that I come over?"

"I s'pose so."

"Oh, heavens! you are lost if you do. Don't do that."

"What's the matter? Any danger?"

"The woods are chuck full of Injins, I tell you. There must have somebody passed that way and they looking for them, there are so many."

Dernor turned and spoke to Edith:

"No doubt he is right. It is but what I suspected. What shall I do? Take a longer way home, and a safer one, or the short route?"

"Take the *safest*, whichever that may be."

"That is the longest. Come on, friend."

"I'm follerin'," replied that worthy, striding after him.

It was considerably past the hour of noon, and the brisk walk through the woods had given the Rifleman an appetite something akin to that of his new-found companion, so that he did not forget the expressed wish of the latter. He had no difficulty in bringing down another turkey and cooking it. There was one peculiarity which did not escape either Dernor or Edith. On the part of the latter it occasioned no concern, but it was the subject of considerable wonder and speculation with the former. Zeke Hunt, as he called himself, professed to be ravenously hungry; but when the tempting, juicy meat of the turkey was placed before him, he swallowed but a few mouthfuls. This was a small matter, it was true, and with any one except the Rifleman, would have escaped notice but this sagacious hunter considered it of so much importance as to ask an explanation.

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"You appeared to be dying with hunger, and now, when food is offered, you hardly touch it. What is the meaning of that?"

"I don't know," said Zeke, wiping his fingers on the hair of his head.

"Yes, you do know. Tell me the meaning of it."

"S'pose I ain't hungry."

"Isn't the bird cooked well enough?"

"Wouldn't hurt if 'twas cooked better."

The Rifleman at first was disposed to resent this insult, but, on second thought, he set the man down as a fool, and one unworthy of notice. There is no disguising the fact that his action had given the hunter an unpleasant suspicion, which, however, was dissipated by the perfect coolness with which he met his inquiry.

"I guess yer ain't used to cookin', be you?" he asked, perfectly unabashed by the frigid manner of the hunter.

"I've done considerable, sir, in the last few years."

"Don't say so. Shouldn't have thought it, from the way that thing looks."

"What is the matter with this cooking, I should like to know; eh?"

"Oh, nothin', as I knows on. The gal appears to like it well enough."

"Indeed I do," said Edith, unable to restrain a laugh at the manner of their new companion, who, seeing it, rolled his head back and gave an answering "horse-laugh" that could have been heard a half-mile distant.

"Don't let me hear that agin," said the Rifleman, rising to his feet.

"Why don't you want to hear it?" asked Zeke, in blank astonishment.

"It's no wonder the flat-boat left you, if you were in the habit of making such noises as that. It's enough to wake every sleeping Injin in these woods."

"It'll scare 'em, I guess, won't it?"

"I should think it would, so don't try it agin."

"Done eatin'?"

"Yes, of course."

"Thought it was about time."

"We will not reach home to-night," said the Rifleman, speaking to Edith. "I'm sorry, for they'll be worried about us."

"I am sorry, too, for I dislike to remain in the woods so long."

"This fellow will be of little use to us, as he doesn't appear to know any thing. I can't understand how he has come this far. He's been lucky, I s'pose, but whether we're going to be, with him along, is more than I can tell."

"Of course you won't turn him off. It would be cruel," said Edith, sincerely commiserating the helpless situation of the young man.

"As long as he behaves himself, and it doesn't make it any more dangerous for you, he can stay with us; but he mustn't open that big mouth of his as wide as he did just now."

"Hello! how long afore you're goin' to start?" called out Zeke, as our two friends stood

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talking together.

"Follow behind us, and make no noise, if you want to save your top-knot."

"Hope there ain't no danger of that happening, after I've come as far as this all right."

The three moved forward once again, the movements of the Rifleman characterized by his usual caution, while Zeke Hunt straddled along at a most awkward gait, kicking up the leaves, and breaking and bending the undergrowth in such a manner as to make the care of the hunter entirely useless. In this manner they traveled until nightfall, when they reached the banks of a small brook, beside which it was decided to encamp for the night. During the latter part of the day it had been steadily growing colder, so that, after some deliberation, Dernor concluded to start a fire.

"You don't s'pose the Injins will see it, do you?" asked Hunt.

"I'm sure I can't tell. Why do you ask?"

"'Cause, if *they* are goin' to see it, I want to get out the way. I don't s'pose you've traveled the woods much, have you?"

"Probably as much as you have."

"You have, eh?"

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There was something in the tone in which this was uttered that made the hunter turn and look at Zeke Hunt. As he did so, he saw an expression of his greenish, gray goggle-eyes that made him feel certain, for the minute, that he had seen him before. It may have been a fancy, for the expression was gone instantly, and succeeded by the same blank, half-idiotic look.

This was the second time the same unpleasant suspicion had entered the mind of the Rifleman, and he was resolved, at the least, to keep an eye upon Zeke Hunt. While it was not at all impossible that the story he had told was true in every particular, still there was an air of improbability about it, which could not escape the notice of so quick-sighted a man as Dernor, and, from this time forward, every action or word of the awkward countryman was watched with a jealous eye.

The fire which was kindled was carefully screened, so that it would not be apt to catch the eye of any one in the neighborhood. After some conversation between the hunter and Edith, the latter wrapped his blanket over her own, and, thus protected, lay down upon the ground. The weariness and fatigue brought on by the day's travel soon manifested itself in a deep, dreamless, refreshing sleep.

"Are you going to stay up all night?" asked Dernor of the countryman.

"I don't know whether I am or not."

"Ain't you sleepy?"

"Don't feel much so jest now; s'pose I mought after a while."

"You have traveled enough. Why don't you feel sleepy?"

"Haw! haw! haw! what a question. How do I know why I ain't sleepy? You don't appear so yourself."

"I ain't, either."

"You've done as much tramping as I have."

"That may be; but I'm used to it, and you ain't."

"Don't know 'bout that. Used to do good 'eal of it up on the farm. Say, you, did you ever hear of the Riflemen of the Miami?"

"Yes, very often. They are sometimes seen in these parts."

"I'd like to jine them 'ere fellers."

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"You jine 'em!" repeated Dernor, contemptuously. "You'd be a pretty chap to go with them. Them chaps, sir, is *hunters!*" he added, in a triumphant tone.

"Jest what I s'posed, and that's why I wanted to jine 'em."

"Can you shoot?"

"Ef you'll lend me your iron there a minute, I'll show you what I can do."

"It is dark now. There is no chance to show your skill. Wait till morning."

"Very well, don't forget. I've done some shootin', fur all I ain't used to Injins. But, I say, do you know the head feller of them Riflemen?"

"I'm very well acquainted with him."



"What sort of a chap is he?"

"Good deal such a man as I am."

"Haw! haw! great man to be the leader. Hope you're never taken for him, be you?"

"Very often—because *I am* the leader of the Riflemen myself."

"Get out," said the countryman, as if he expected to be bitten. "You can't make me believe that."

"It makes no difference to me whether you believe it or not. If you make much more noise, like enough you'll find out who I am."

"Be you really the leader of the Riflemen?" queried Zeke Hunt, not noticing the warning which had just been uttered.

"I've told you once, so let's hear no more about it."

"My gracious! you don't look much like one. 'Pears to me you and I look a good deal alike. Don't you think so?"

"Heaven save me, *I hope* not."

"Oh, I'm willing that it should be so. I ain't offended."

The impudence of the countryman was so consummate that Dernor could not restrain a laugh at it.

"They always considered me good-looking down hum," he added; "and there wasn't a gal I wasn't able to get if I wanted her."

"I should think you would be anxious to get back again."

"Would be, if it wasn't for the old man. He was *awful* on me. Didn't appear to be proud of me at all."

"Queer, sure. I don't see how he could help it."

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"Me neither. Dad was always mad, though, and used to aboose me shameful. The fust thing in my life that I can remember was of gettin' a lickin'."

"What was it for?"

"Nothin' worth tellin'. I was a little feller then, and one day heated the poker red-hot, and run it down grandmother's back. But there! didn't he lam me for that! Always was whippin' me. School-teacher was just as bad. Licked me like blazes the fust day."

"Did he lick you for nothin'?"

"Purty near. Didn't do any thing except to put a handful of gunpowder in a dry inkstand, and then touch it off under his chair. Haw! haw! haw! didn't he jump? and oh gracious!" he added, in a solemn tone, "didn't I jump, too, when he fell on me."

"You seem to have been about the biggest scamp in the country. Why did he whip you this last time when you run away?"

"Hadn't any more reason than he had at other times. I tried to take Ann Parsons home from singing-school, and she wouldn't let me. That was the reason."

"He couldn't have whipped you for that."

"Well, it all come from that. I followed her home, and jest give her my opinion of her, and when her old man undertook to say any thing, I jest pitched in and walloped him."

"You had a sensible father, and it's a pity he hasn't got you now, for I don't care any thing about your company."

"You going to turn me off? You said you wouldn't."

"And I shan't, I tell you agin, as long as you behave yourself. If you cac'late to go with me to the settlement, you must not have too much to say. Remember that we are still in dangerous territory, and a little foolishness by either of us may bring a pack of the red-skins upon us."

"Just what I thought. I'm sleepy."

And without further ceremony, he lolled over on the ground, and in a few minutes, to all appearances, was sound asleep. Intently watching his face for a time, the Rifleman now and then saw his eyelids partly unclose, as if he wished to ascertain whether any one was scrutinizing him. The somewhat lengthy conversation which we have taken the pains to record, had about disarmed the hunter of the suspicions which had been lingering with him for a long time. He believed Zeke Hunt an ignorant fellow, who had been left along the Ohio river, as he had related, and who had not yet learned that trait of civilized society, carefully to conceal his thoughts and feelings when in conversation.

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The impression which he first felt, of having met him before, might easily arise from his resemblance to some former acquaintance.

Still, the Rifleman was by no means so forgetful of his charge as to indulge in slumber, when there was the remotest probability of danger threatening her. Inured as he was to all manner of hardships and suffering, it was no difficult matter for him to spend several nights in succession without sleep. He therefore watched over her through the second night, never, for a single moment, allowing himself to become unconscious. Several times he saw the countryman raise his head and change his position, and when spoken to, heard him mutter something about it being "darned hard to sleep with his head on the soft side of a stone, and one side toasted and the other froze."

The hours wore away without any incident worth mentioning, and at the first appearance of day Edith was astir and ready to resume the journey. Enough of the turkey, slain on the day before, remained to give each a sufficient meal, and with cheerful spirits upon the part of all, the three again took up their march through the wilderness.

The route which the information of the countryman led the hunter to adopt was such that he expected to reach the settlement in the course of the afternoon. It will thus be seen that it was a very circuitous one—they, in fact, being already several miles north of their destination. As yet, the eagle eye of the hunter had discovered no danger, and their march was continued without interruption until noon, when they halted for a few minutes' rest.

"If you haint no 'bjection, I'll try a shot with your gun," said Zeke Hunt, "bein' as you thought I couldn't shoot any."

"I'd rather not have my rifle fired at present, youngster, as ears that we don't fancy might hear it."

"You're only afeard I might beat you, that's all."

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This remark so nettled the hunter that he resolved to gratify his disagreeable companion.

"Put up your mark, then," said he, "and as far off as you choose."

The countryman walked to a tree somewhat over a hundred yards distant, and with his knife clipped off a small piece of bark, leaving a gleaming spot, an inch or two in diameter.

"You fire first," said he, as he came back.

The hunter drew up his rifle, and pausing hardly a second to take aim, buried the bullet fairly in the center of the target.

"Whew! that's darned good; don't believe I can beat it much; but I'll try."

The gun was quickly reloaded, and, after taking aim and adjusting it nearly a dozen times, Zeke Hunt fired, missing the tree altogether. As he ran to ascertain the result of his shot, instead of handing the rifle to Dernor, he carried it, apparently without thinking, with him. When he had carefully examined the mark, he proceeded to reload it, before returning. This was so natural an occurrence, that the hunter received his weapon without noticing it.

"Want to fire again?" asked the countryman.

"No, it isn't worth while."

"I give in, but think I'll be up to you after a little practice."

About half an hour afterward, as they were walking along, Dernor, by a mere accident, happened to look at the pan of his rifle and saw that the priming had been removed. A moment's reflection convinced him that this had been done by Zeke Hunt, not accidentally, but on purpose. The hunter managed to reprimed without being noticed, and he made a vow that this apparent lubber should henceforth be watched with a lynx-eye.

They had gone scarcely a half-mile further, when the latter came up beside Edith, and remarked that he had been taken sick.

"Don't you feel able to walk?" she asked.

"I'm dreadful afeard I shall have to ax you to pause for a while," he said, manifesting that peculiar repugnance to receiving kindness, which, singularly enough is manifested more or less by every person in similar circumstances.

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"What's the matter?" gruffly asked Dernor, who was still meditating upon the incident we have mentioned above.

"Sick," groaned Zeke Hunt, apparently in great misery.

"What has made you sick?"

"I don't know; allers was considered delicate."

"How do you feel?"

"*Jest as though I wanted to whistle!*" was the curious reply and placing his finger in his mouth, the fellow gave a sound that would have done credit to an ordinary locomotive.

"If you make that noise again I'll shoot you," said the Rifleman, now fairly convinced that mischief was intended. Without heeding his threat, the sick man arose to the upright position, and with flashing eyes, repeated the sound.

"I gave you warning," said Dernor, raising his gun, pointing it at his breast, and pulling the trigger. It missed fire!

"I guess you'll have to fix up that load a little," said Zeke Hunt, "and afore you can do that, you're likely to have visitors."

The Rifleman clubbed his gun and advanced toward the man. The latter drew his knife, and said:

"Keep off, Lew Dernor; don't you know me?"

"I've been a fool," said the hunter. "Yes, I know you through your disguise, *Simon Girty*. I see what you have been trying to do, but you will never take one of us alive. I hear the tramp of the coming Indians that he has signaled," he added, addressing Edith, "and there is not a minute to lose."

So saying, he placed his arm around her waist, and started off at a rapid run.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE FLIGHT.

The pass was steep and rugged,  
The wolves they howled and whined;  
But he ran like a whirlwind up the pass,  
And left the wolves behind.—MACAULAY.

Moments like these,  
Rend men's lives into immortalities.—BYRON.

For a few minutes, the Rifleman ran "like a whirlwind," supporting entirely the weight of Edith, for none knew better than he the imminent peril that menaced both. The wood was quite open, so that his way was not much impeded, and he went at a terrific rate, well aware that all depended upon gaining an advantage over the Indians at the start.

He had gone but a short distance, when he became convinced that his only danger was from falling into the hands of his pursuers, as it was their sole object to make him and Edith prisoners; as a consequence, there was no danger from being fired at by them. When he deemed it prudent, he released his hold upon her, and she, half running and being half carried, flew over the ground at a rate as astonishing to herself as it was to her pursuers. The latter kept up a series of yells and outcries, amid which the discordant screeches of Zeke Hunt, now Simon Girty, the renegade, could be plainly distinguished. Several furtive glances over the shoulder gave him glimpses of some eight or ten savages in pursuit, the renegade being among the foremost.

As Dernor was thus hurrying forward, he recalled that, less than half a mile distant, the woods were broken and cut up by ravines and hills, as though an earthquake had passed through that section; and, believing that this would afford him a better opportunity of eluding his foes, he turned in that direction and strained every nerve to reach it. As for Edith herself, she seemed fired with supernatural strength, and sped with a swiftness of which she never dreamed herself capable. Seeing this, the Rifleman attempted to draw the charge out of his gun and reload it. It was a work of great difficulty to do this while running, but he succeeded in accomplishing it at last.

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Constantly glancing behind him, in order to see his chance, he suddenly whirled and fired with the rapidity of thought. Without pausing to reload, he again placed his arm around Edith, and dashed forward almost at the top of his speed.

Finding that the Indians, if gaining at all, were gaining very slowly upon him, he half concluded that it was their intention to run his companion down, well knowing that, although he was fully competent both in speed and in bottom to contest with them, it could not be expected that she could continue the rate at which she was going, for any

length of time.

"Ain't you tired?" he asked, hurriedly.

"Not much; I can run a great deal further," she replied, in the same hurried manner.

"Keep your spirits up; we'll soon have different ground to travel over."

Almost as he spoke, they came to the edge of a sort of ravine, too broad for either to leap, and too precipitous to admit of an immediate descent by either. Still retaining his hold upon her, Dernor ran rapidly along the edge, until reaching a favorable spot, he lifted her bodily from the ground, and bounded down to a rock over a dozen feet below, and then leaped from this to the bottom of the ravine, Edith sustaining no more of a shock than if she had been a feather.

Being now in the bottom of the ravine, where the ground was comparatively even, the hunter placed the girl once more upon her feet, and side by side they continued their flight from their merciless pursuers. Their loud, exultant yells continued reverberating through the woods, and glancing upward, Dernor saw the form of a huge Indian suddenly come to view, on the edge of the ravine, some distance ahead of him, and make some menacing motion toward him. As the ravine at this point was a sheer precipice, the hunter did not believe he would attempt to descend it, and feeling there was no danger of being fired upon, he kept steadily onward.

But he was mistaken. Before he was opposite the savage, he came sliding and tumbling down the ravine, as though some one had pushed him from behind. However that may have been, he alighted on his feet without injury, and made directly toward the fugitives, with the manifest intention of checking their flight. [76]

Lewis Dernor saw that a collision with the Indian was unavoidable, and without the least hesitation prepared himself for it. The savage was a Miami—a brawny, muscular warrior, fully six feet in height, of matchless symmetry and formidable strength. When the combatants were perhaps a dozen yards apart, he raised his tomahawk over his head, and poising it a moment, hurled it, with a most deadly force, full at the head of the hunter. The latter had not expected such a demonstration as this, but had detected it in time to avoid it. He dropped his head the instant the weapon left the savage's hand, and it whizzed over him, going end over end, until it struck the solid rock, where the terrible force of the concussion shivered it to atoms. Seeing this, the Miami whipped out his knife and stood on the defensive.

"Now, my good friend," muttered Dernor, between his clenched teeth, "it is *my* turn."

He handed his rifle to Edith—who had paused, now that they were so close to their enemy—and, drawing his own knife, made a sort of running bound, coming upon the Indian with a panther-like spring, that nearly drove him backward off his feet. There was a clashing of knives, the scintillation of steel against steel, the deadly embrace, and hand-to-hand struggle; and, as the Rifleman recoiled clear of his fallen adversary, he reached out to Edith for his rifle.

"Come on," said he, in his ordinary voice; "I guess the way is clear."

"I—I am afraid," faltered Edith, "that I can not run much further."

"There ain't any need of it," said the hunter. "Lean on me, and we'll walk awhile, if there's a thousand tearing Injins after us."

Edith panted and trembled violently from the exhausting efforts she had been compelled to make, while the mortal terror she felt at the Miamis, made her nearly wild with excitement. Their chilling yells, so different from any thing ever heard among civilized beings, would have crazed almost any person, but Dernor listened to them with as much composure as he would to the songs of so many birds. [77]

He became aware, shortly after, from the direction of these sounds, that the Indians had entered the ravine, and were now coming along again, at the top of their speed. He paused a moment, to determine precisely the distance of these, and then looked into the gloomy, terror-stricken face of Edith.

"I have rested," said he, "and if we don't get over ground faster than this, them red-skins will have us both, in less than ten minutes. Let me carry you."

She made no resistance, for she was barely able to stand, and supporting her in such a manner that her feet hardly touched ground, Dernor once more threw all of his astonishing energy into the flight. Fully a quarter of a mile he ran directly through the ravine, and then, reaching a point that would admit of it, he made a running leap, and came up out of it, like a diver emerging from the sea.

He was now in the woods again, after having gained a considerable advantage over his pursuers; but the Indians behind him were still uncomfortably close, and he could not hope that all would pass the point where he had left the ravine, without discovering the signs he had left there of his flight. Knowing this, he was aware that the golden moment was the present. The Miamis—to whom most of the pursuers belonged—were

"thrown off the scent" for the time. After having gone a considerable distance, and having satisfied himself that they had not yet regained it, Dernor determined to take advantage of this to give Edith a portion of the rest she needed so much.

"I am not used to running like this," said she, leaning heavily on him, "and I am afraid I can not bear it."

"I ought to be shot and scalped, for making you take this journey," said Dernor.

"Why, you did it for the best," she added, in surprise.

"Yes, I thought so—perhaps, the best for myself. I had no idea of being pursued in this manner. It seems I have been a fool. I let that Simon Girty make me believe he was an awkward countryman, and lead me into this muss."

"You think we can keep out of their hands?"

"I trust so; the night ain't many hours away, and if we can only keep clear till then, why, all right. I hain't seen the Injin yet, Miami or Shawnee, that could foller a track in the night-time."

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"They did not see us come out of the ravine. How will they know enough of our direction to keep up the pursuit?"

"Injin is Injin, and the dirt I made in scratching out of there will be seen by a dozen of their snaky eyes."

"How far, dear friend, did you say it is to the settlement?"

"Full twenty miles."

"We can reach it, then, by traveling all night?"

"Yes, very easy, if you can hold out till the darkness comes on."

"I hope I can, but I am so terribly worn out that I must go very slowly. You said it was the best for *you* that we should undertake this journey alone, through the woods. What did you mean by saying that?"

"I will tell you some other time," replied the hunter, in great embarrassment. "I done so that I might be *alone with you*."

Edith looked earnestly at him, as though she would read his very soul. She was about to speak, when the appalling yells of the human bloodhounds sounded so fearfully near, that her very blood seemed to curdle in her veins.

"Where shall we fly?" she asked, looking up imploringly in the face of the hunter.

"Come on as rapidly as you can," he replied, again supporting her.

Great as were the apprehension and terror of Edith, she could but notice the singular conduct of her companion. He kept constantly looking around, not as though he expected danger, but as if searching for something. The cause of this was soon manifest.

"Edith," said he, "it will be full two hours afore there'll be enough darkness to do us any good. Can you stand it till then?"

"I can *stand* it," she answered, with a sad laugh, "but I can not *run* it."

"We must either run or be took. Now, *my dearest one*, you've done enough to kill a dozen common women, and you shouldn't try to do more, and I don't intend to let you."

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"But how can— Oh, Heavenly Father! hear those shouts—but how can you prevent it?"

"I must leave you behind."

Edith's eyes dilated with horror, now doubly intensified.

"Don't think for a minute," the hunter hastened to say, "that I intend to desert you. No, no; may the lightning strike me down if I could ever do such a thing. What I mean is, that I must hide you till night, when I'll come back, and we'll go on, taking things comfortably."

"It must be done quickly. Don't wait a minute."

The Rifleman led the way to some thick, dense bushes and without approaching them very closely, signified her to enter them. She did so, with considerable difficulty, and when she had entered and covered away, he could see nothing of her.

"Stay there till I come," said he, "and be careful and not put your head out, if you hear any noise."

"How shall I know whether it is you or not?"

"I'll be around as soon as it is dark enough, and will speak. Don't forget what I said. Don't let any noise make you show yourself. Good-by."

"Good-by;" and the hunter turned to attend to his own safety.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE RIFLEMAN AND HURON ON THE TRAIL.

The woodcock, in his moist retreat,  
Heard not the falling of their feet;  
On his dark roost the gray owl slept,  
Time, with his drum the partridge kept;  
Nor left the deer his watering-place,  
So hushed, so noiseless was their pace.

W. H. C. HOSMER.

On a fine summer day, the one succeeding that upon which occurred the incident just related, one of the Riflemen of the Miami, was making his way through the dense forests that at that period nearly covered the entire portion of Ohio. His short stature, bowed legs, and round, shining visage, showed unmistakably that he was Tom O'Hara. His rifle was slung over his shoulder, and as he walked leisurely along, he had that easy, saucy air which showed him to be totally unmindful of the opinion of friend or foe. That he had no fears of disturbance was manifest from the carelessness with which he proceeded, constantly kicking the leaves before him, and when a limb brushed his face, suddenly stopping and spitefully wrenching it off with an expression of impatience. He was in a worse temper than usual, and incensed at something that continually occupied his mind.

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"What can have become of the fools?" he muttered. "He oughter been home two, three days ago, and we hain't seen a sign of him yet. Can't be Lew's such a dunce as to walk into the red-skins' hands. No, no, no."

He shook his head as if displeased, and for a time continued his solitary journey in silence. The great question which he was debating was regarding his leader's whereabouts, and his ill-temper arose principally from the fact that he was unable to offer a solution satisfactory to himself.

"Let me see," he added. "If Lew is took, why the gal's took, and if the gal's took, Lew must be too; so that p'int is settled. It *might* be some of the Injins *have* got him, but somehow or other I can't believe it. Don't look reasonable, although Dick 'peared to think so."

Again he bent his head as if in deep thought. Gradually his meditations brought him nearer the truth.

"He's found out that the shortest path was the safest one—something a man is pretty apt to think when he is with the gal he loves, and so he has took the roundabout way home. That's it, sure. But hold on a minute," said O'Hara, as a new thought struck him; "I'd like to know the route which it would take them so long to travel over. It's queer, I'll be hanged if it isn't. That gal will be the death of Lew yet. I'd like to see the gal that could pull the wool over *my* eyes."

And, as if alarmed at the thought, he strode rapidly forward, shaking his head, and muttering more savagely than ever to himself. Gradually he regained his natural state of semi-composure, and proceeded in his audible musings:

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"Whatever is up, I'm bound to find out afore I go back. Not that I care a cent for Lew—not a bit of it. If he don't know any better than to shut his eyes when Injins is about, he oughter suffer. But then I'd like to know *how things is*. Hello!"

The Rifleman stopped and commenced snuffing the air, like an animal when it scents danger.

"That's smoke, as sure as I live. Who's been kindling a fire at this time of day?"

Turning his head in every direction, he, at length, determined the one from which the vapor came. There being scarcely any wind at all, he rightly judged it must be close at hand. Stealing carefully along from tree to tree, he finally detected the faint blue rising through the wood, scarcely fifty yards away. Approaching still closer, he gained a full view of the fire, and also of him who had kindled it. The latter was an Indian warrior, who was seated on the ground with his legs gathered under him, and his head bowed forward as if sleeping. The hunter saw, from the nodding of his head, that such was the

case. Occasionally he would incline forward until ready to fall on his face, when he would start up with a jerk, rub his eyes, look about him, and then go to nodding again.

"It seems that everybody have lost their senses," muttered O'Hara. "Now just see that Injin wagging his head at the fire, tryin' to sleep here in broad daylight. How easy I could send a bullet through him! But there's no danger of that, as we Riflemen don't fight in that style. Be careful, my fellow."

Here the Indian fell over on his face and then scrambled to his feet, looked around, seeking to appear wondrously awake, and then sat down as before.

"A Huron, as I live," said O'Hara, in pleased astonishment. "What can *that* red-skin mean by being in these parts? All alone, too. If he was only Oonamoo, now, I'd feel glad to see him."

Oonamoo, to whom the hunter alluded, was a Huron scout, well known along the frontier as one of the best friends the whites possessed. He had the shrewdness, cunning and skill of his people in an astonishing degree, and had many times given evidence of his faithfulness to the settlers. He was well known to the Riflemen of the Miami, having guided them in several expeditions, and with O'Hara especially he was on good terms. The anxiety of the latter, therefore, to meet him can be well understood.

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"Oonamoo would unravel the whole thing afore noon," said he, "and I'd about as lief see him this minute as I would see Lew. Let me get a better glimpse of his face. I didn't suspect him being a Huron when he jumped up just now, or I'd noticed his features. It don't look like Oonamoo, to see him noddin' in that style."

He moved cautiously around, until fairly in front of the savage, when he uttered a low, peculiar whistle. The latter instantly raised his head, his black eyes open to their fullest extent, and gave a look that at once discovered his identity to O'Hara.

"Oonamoo, and no mistake," he muttered; and then repeating the whistle as a warning that he was about to approach, he stepped boldly forth and revealed himself. The Huron started with surprise, and then advanced with an expression of pleasure to greet his white brother.

"Glad to meet," he said, speaking brokenly.

"And I'm derved glad to see you, Oonamoo, for I need your help this minute. What are you doing? Out on a scout?"

The Huron shook his head.

"No scout—Oonamoo live in woods—like the deer—can't sleep near white men's houses."

"'Pears you can sleep here though, the way your head was bobbin' around. Been up late at night, I s'pose?"

"No sleep now—meet 'Hara, white brother," said he, with an expression of joy upon his swarthy countenance.

"Yes, I smelt the smoke of your fire, and follerin' it up I cone onto you. 'Pears to me it was rather careless kindling your fire here in broad daylight. Ain't there any Injins in the neighborhood?"

"Woods full of 'em—Shawnees, Miamis, Delawares, all over, like leaves of trees," replied the savage, sweeping his arm around him.

"Ain't you *afeard* they might come down on you?"

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The Rifleman indulged in an inward laugh, for he well knew the reply that would be made. The dark face of the Huron assumed an expression of withering scorn as he answered:

"Oonamoo don't know *fear*—spit on Shawnee and Miami—he sleeps in their hunting-grounds, and by their wigwams, but they don't touch him. He scalp their warriors—all he meets, but Oonamoo never lose scalp."

"Don't be too sure of that; that proud top-knot of yours may be yanked off yet, Mr. Oonamoo. Many a Shawnee would be proud to have that hanging in his lodge."

"He never get him though," replied the Huron, with great readiness.

"I hope not, for I'd feel sorry to see such a good warrior as you go under when he is needed so much. You ain't on a scout or hunt just now, then?"

The savage shook his head from side to side as quick as lightning.

"Then you'll take a tramp with me?"

It now went up and down with the same celerity.

"To sum up then, Oonamoo, Lew, our leader, is in a bad scrape."

"Shawnee got him? Miami got him?"

"That's what I want to find out. Shouldn't be s'prised if both have nabbed him."

"How get him?"

There was something curious in the eagerness with which the Huron asked the questions. It was more noticeable from the fact that O'Hara spoke slowly and deliberately, so that the short, broken sentences of the savage seemed all the more short and broken.

"That I can't tell, Oonamoo," repeated the hunter, who, it will be noticed, evinced the remarkable fact of being in a good temper with the Indian. "You see, him and the gal \_\_\_"

"Gal with him?" asked the savage, with amazing quickness.

"Yes; didn't I tell you that?"

"Bad—bad—gal make him blind—see notting, all time—she afore his face."

"You've got the idea this time, Oonamoo. Lew's in love, above his head and ears, and can't be to blame so much for what he's done," said O'Hara, a gleam of pity stealing through his rough nature, like a ray of sunshine entering a gloomy cave. "He's made a fool of himself, I'm afeard, 'cause there's a female on his hands."

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"What want to do? Foller him—catch him?"

"That's it. The first thing to be done is to find the trail."

"Where lost? Where see him last?"

O'Hara proceeded to relate as best he could what is already known to the reader, or more properly that portion of it which was known to him. He stated that he and Dick Allmat had lost the trail in a small brook, and that their most persistent efforts had failed to recover it. Upon speculating further, he learned from Oonamoo that they were in the vicinity of the ravine where Dernor and Edith had so narrowly escaped the Indians, the latter fact of course being unknown to them. The Huron added, that there was "much track" in the woods around them, and O'Hara, thinking that perhaps his leader's might be among them, proposed that they should make an examination of them. To this the savage readily agreed, and the two moved forward through the wood for that purpose.

In the course of a few minutes they reached the ravine, and the Indian, pointing down into it, as they stood upon its bank, said:

"Full of tracks—many Injin pass there."

"Let us go down and take a look at them."

A few minutes later, they were following up the ravine, on a sort of half-run, the Huron leading the way, and evincing, at nearly every step, that remarkable quickness of sight and comprehension so characteristic of his race. Suddenly he paused so abruptly that O'Hara ran against him.

"What the deuce is the matter?" he asked, rubbing his nose.

"Look!"

Several dark drops of blood were visible on the ground which was also torn up by the feet of the combatants. As the reader probably suspects, this was the scene of the conflict between Dernor and the Miami Indian.

"See," said Oonamoo, walking slowly around, and pointing to the ground. "Track of Injin—track of white man—tear up ground—fight—till Injin killed. White man then run—see him tracks there, there, there," he added, pointing further and further from him as he uttered each of the last three words.

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"But where's the gal?"

The Huron pointed to the spot where Edith had stood spell-bound while the contest was going on. O'Hara, although a skillful backwoodsman, was not equal to his savage companion; but he saw at once, from the dainty impress of the earth, that he was correct in supposing that Edith had stood there. They now resumed their pursuit, the hunter bringing all his wood-craft into play, in order to keep up with his companion.

"I can't see her tracks to save my life," said the former, after they had proceeded some distance.

"Him carry her," replied the savage, without the least hesitation.

"Hang me if you haven't got about as much brains as a person needs in these parts," muttered O'Hara, admiringly, as he imitated the monotonous trot of the savage. A moment later and he paused again.



"What's up now?" asked the hunter.

"Track gone."

"But I see plenty in front of us."

"White man's not there—gone."

A minute examination revealed the fact that most of the impressions were now made by persons passing *backward* as well as forward, as though confusion had arisen from some cause. O'Hara suspected the reason of this, but, without venturing an opinion, questioned his dusky friend:

"Huntin' for tracks," he answered. "White man gone."

The two now walked slowly backward, their gaze wandering along the sides of the ravine instead of the bottom. In a moment the quick eye of the Indian discerned the spot where he judged the exit had been made, and a short examination proved that he was right. The feet of Dernor had sunk deep in the soft earth as he made his Herculean efforts in the ascent, while those of his pursuers were so light that they hardly disturbed them.

Up out of the ravine came the Huron and hunter, and into the woods they plunged, following the trail now with the greatest readiness. A short distance further they reached the banks where Edith had concealed herself, and here, for a time, even the red-skin was at fault. He saw that the shrubbery had been passed by most of the pursuers without their having approached closely enough to make an examination. From the circuit which Dernor had made to reach these bushes, the quick-witted Huron rightly suspected that he had turned them to some account. Accordingly, he cautiously parted them and looked in. An immediate "Ugh!" showed O'Hara that he had made some discovery.

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"Hide gal there—then run on."

"Where is she?"

"Injin didn't git her in bushes," replied the savage, implying that if she was captured at all it was not done here.

"Go on, then," added O'Hara.

It was now noticed that the steps of the fugitive had shortened, it following, as a natural consequence, that he had slackened his speed at this point. Several hundred yards further on, another fact was observed. The pursuing Indians, instead of adhering to the trail, as they had done heretofore, separated and left it. This, to both Oonamoo and O'Hara was evidence that they had either come in sight of Dernor, or else were so certain of the direction he was taking that they did not deem it necessary to watch his footsteps. The Rifleman could not believe the former was the case, inasmuch as it was the very thing, above all others, which his leader would seek to avoid; for the most requisite condition to the success of his artifice, was that his pursuers should still think Edith was with him. Be that as it may, one thing was certain. The pursuer and pursued at this point were very close together—closer than the safety of the latter could admit for any length of time.

A few hundred yards further, the dark face of the Huron lit up with an expression of admiring pleasure.

"Him run agin," said he, glancing to O'Hara, who was now beside him.

The steps of the flying Rifleman now lengthened rapidly, as if he had traveled at superhuman speed. As O'Hara saw the remarkable leaps which he must have taken, he could not help exclaiming, in admiration: "Go it, Lew. I'd like to see the red-skin that could overhaul you, when you're a mind to bring your pegs down to it."

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"Run much—like scar't deer," added Oonamoo.

"Yes, *sir*; Lew has been letting out just along here, and I reckon them Injins never seen such steps as he took."

It was very evident that the hunter had "let out" to his utmost ability, and with the determination of leaving his pursuers far in the rear. Previous to this he had not called his formidable power into play; but so rapidly had his gait increased that in many places his footsteps were fully ten feet apart!

It had not escaped the notice of Oonamoo and O'Hara, that a white man was among the pursuers, and it occasioned considerable speculation upon the part of the latter. The trails of the two were distinguishable, Dernor having a small, well-shaped foot, inclining outward very slightly, while that of the other was large, heavy, turning outward at a very large angle.

"Who can this chap be?" asked O'Hara of his companion.

"Renegade—bad white man—Girty—white chief."

"Whew! I see how it is now. That's the dog that hung around the settlers on the night of the storm, and got fired at a dozen times."

"Why no killed—no hurt?"

"We didn't know who he was, and all shot at his breast."

"Ugh! no hurt him, then."

"No, for, they say, the dog often wears a bullet-proof plate over his breast, and his life has, more than once, been saved by it. He's a brave man, for all he's such an inhuman brute; for who would dare to sit and let us fire agin and agin at him, when it was just as likely we'd fire at his head as at his breast? It was more of an accident than any thing else that we didn't kill him."

"Bad man—kill women and children," said Oonamoo.

"No one disputes that. What a pity we didn't know him when we first set eyes on him. I shouldn't wonder now if he's been fooling Lew, as well as us. My gracious! hasn't the boy used his pegs along here?" exclaimed O'Hara, again looking at the ground.

"No catch him," said the Huron. "No Injun run like him. Tracks turn round pretty soon."

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"What makes you think so?"

"Gal bring him back—not leave *her!*"

"You're right. He won't forget she is behind him. But how is he going to throw the dogs off the scent?"

"How t'row white men off scent, eh?"

"I understand—by taking to the water."

"Take to water agin."

As the Huron spoke, they came upon the edge of a second brook—one, in fact, large enough to be called a creek. The trail led directly into this, it being manifest that Dernor had so shaped his flight as to reach it.

"I will cross over and examine the opposite side, while you do the same along this shore."

"No, won't," replied Oonamoo, with a decided shake of his head. "White man no cross—gal behind him—come out on this side agin."

The savage was so certain of this, that he refused even to allow O'Hara to enter the stream. A moment's reflection convinced him, also, that the supposition was correct, and they commenced their ascent of the bank. They had gone scarcely a dozen steps, when they came upon numerous moccasin-tracks, showing that, if the pursuers had crossed the creek, they had also returned. At this discovery, Oonamoo indulged in a characteristic exclamation:

"He hide trail—all safe—no cotch him."

"How are *we* going to find it?" asked O'Hara.

Marvelous as was the skill of the Huron, he doubted his own ability to regain the trail in the ordinary manner, and he accordingly had resort to the same means that he used in ascending the ravine. Without attempting to search for the trail itself, he carefully examined the shore in order to find the point at which the fugitive could safely leave the stream. Oonamoo, from his knowledge of the leader of the Riflemen, knew that he would walk for miles in the creek, before he would leave it without the certainty of deceiving his pursuers. The course which Dernor had taken being such that he had entered the water at a point considerably *above* where Edith had concealed herself, the savages, in case they were aware that the latter was somewhere on the back-trail, would naturally suppose that, if he came out of it on the same side in which he had entered, it would be *below* this point; which, all being comprehended by the Huron, satisfied him that the fugitive had disappointed these expectations, and gone *up* the stream.

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Two things, therefore, were determined with considerable certainty—Dernor had not *crossed* the creek, but had left at a point either near or above where Oonamoo and O'Hara were standing. Satisfied of this, the two moved along the bank, taking long, leaping steps, treading so lightly as barely to leave the impression of their feet, and scrutinizing each bank with the most jealous eye.

They had ascended fully a half-mile without discovering any thing upon which "to hang a suspicion," when O'Hara, who had contrived to get in advance of the Huron, uttered a suppressed exclamation of surprise.

"Here's where he could have come out," said he.

Oonamoo looked carefully before him, and shook his head. The object in question consisted of a fallen tree, the top of which lay in the edge of the stream, while the upturned roots were nearly a hundred feet distant. It will be seen at once, that the hunter could easily have walked along the trunk of this without leaving a visible footprint, and leaped off into the woods from the base and continued his flight as before. Plain as was this to the Huron, another fact was still plainer—the Rifleman had done no such thing.

"Why do you think he hasn't used this tree?" asked O'Hara.

"Too plain—*Injin sure to t'ink he do it.*"

Oonamoo had told the exact truth, for Dernor had really approached the branches of the tree with the intention of using them as we have hinted, when he had seen that his pursuers would be sure to suspect such an artifice, from the ready means afforded him; and he had, therefore, given over his first resolve, and continued his ascent of the creek.

All around the base were the imprints of moccasins, showing where the Shawnees and Miamis had searched and failed to find the trail. Oonamoo having noticed all this, in far less time than it has taken us to relate it, walked out on the tree-trunk as far as it would allow him without wetting his feet. Standing thus, he leaned over and peered out into the water. [90]

"Look dere—knowed it," said he, pointing out a few feet from the shore. The water was semi-translucent, so that it required a keen view to discover the object of the Huron's gaze; but, following the direction of his finger, O'Hara made out to discover on the bottom of the creek the *sign* left by the passage of a human foot. They were not *impressions*, because there was not a dent visible, the ground being entirely free from any thing like it; but there were two delicate, yet perfect *outlines* of a moccasin. The hunter had stood a few moments on this spot, and then stepped into deeper water. The tracks thus left by his feet had gradually filled with the muddy sediment composing the bottom of the creek, until, as we have said, there were no *impressions* left; but, completely around where they had once been, ran a dark line, as if traced by the hand of an artist, a complete outline of the hunter's foot. This faint, almost invisible, evidence of his passage had entirely escaped the eyes of his pursuers.

"What I t'ought," said Oonamoo; "knowed dey'd t'ink he'd come out dere—go in water agin—come out furdur up-stream."

"By thunder," said O'Hara, in amazement, "you make me ashamed of myself, Oonamoo. I believe you could track the gray eagle through air. Come, now, where is Lew? you can tell, if you're a mind to."

This extravagant compliment was entirely lost upon the stolid Huron. He appeared not to hear it. He merely repeated, "He come out furdur up," and, springing lightly from the tree, continued his cautious ascent of the creek, O'Hara following behind, and occasionally muttering his unbounded admiration of the Indian's astonishing skill.

The opposite side of the stream was overhung almost entirely with the heavy undergrowth so characteristic of the western forests. Beneath this it would have been an easy matter for a foe to have concealed himself and to fire upon the hunter and Indian; but the latter scarcely deigned to look across, well knowing that no such a danger threatened them. While the savages were searching for the trail of the fugitive, Oonamoo was certain that, as yet, no one knew that any one was upon theirs. Even had they known it, they would have cared but little, for they were too formidable a body to fear the two men who were following them. [91]

All along the shore were numerous moccasin-tracks, showing how persistently the Indians had kept up the pursuit. It struck O'Hara that his leader must have walked pretty rapidly through the creek to keep out of sight of the enemies, for they, being upon the land, had nothing to retard their progress. The causes of his success in this matter were twofold. In the first place, the extraordinary speed at which he had run had placed him far in advance of his pursuers, upon reaching the creek, so that he had ascended it a good distance before they reached it; and, unlike the shrewd Huron, they were deceived by the artifice he had practiced, believing that he had either crossed the stream, or gone down it. In this manner he gained a start sufficient to accomplish all he desired.

O'Hara was just on the point of framing his mouth to ask a suppressed question, when Oonamoo, who was several feet in advance, suddenly paused and raised his hand over his head, as a signal that silence and caution were now necessary.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE PURSUIT OF THE PURSUERS.

The red-breast, perched in arbor green,  
Sad minstrel of the quiet scene,  
While hymning, for the dying sun,  
Strains like a broken-hearted one,  
Raised not her mottled wings to fly,  
As swept those silent warriors by.—W. H. C. HOSMER.

The Huron stood a moment as motionless as a statue; then, bending slowly forward, still holding one hand partly raised as a signal for the hunter to retain his immobility, he took several steps forward, so lightly and cautiously that there was absolutely no sound at all produced. He then sunk slowly downward, and seemed to concentrate all his faculties into the single one of sight. This lasted but a moment, when he arose to the upright position, and, turning his head, signified to O'Hara that he might approach. The latter did so, and immediately saw the cause of his cautious movements. Drawn up on the bank, so as to be entirely free of the water, with the bottom turned upward, lay an Indian's canoe. It was made of bark, beautifully shaped, and it was evident had not been used for a considerable time.

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They silently surveyed this object for some time, when Oonamoo, who had also been examining the earth around it gave vent to a chuckling, guttural laugh—a sure sign that he had made some discovery which delighted him hugely. It would have been an amusing sight for any one to have seen this expression of pleasure upon the dark, stoical face of the Huron. There was scarcely a change of his features, but such as was perceptible would have been mistaken by an ordinary observer as an evidence that he was undergoing some physical pain.

"What is the matter? what is it that pleases you, Oonamoo?" asked O'Hara, considerably puzzled to understand the cause.

"Shawnee fool—Miami fool—don't know notting."

"What makes you think so?"

"*He come out dere!*" he replied, pointing at the end of the canoe which lay nearest the water, and then indulging his characteristic chuckle again.

As we have hinted in the preceding pages, O'Hara was a most skillful backwoodsman, having few superiors among those of his own color. When he chose to exercise his wood-craft, the true cause of his being termed a lucky hunter was apparent, it being nothing more than his wonderful skill and shrewdness. But, remarkable as were those qualities in him, he was by no means equal to the Huron. Those signs, invisible in the deep labyrinths of the woods to common eyes, were as plain to him as the printed pages of the book to the scholar. In the preceding chapter, we have endeavored to give some idea of the skill he displayed when these qualities were called into requisition. O'Hara, understanding perfectly the superior ability of his dusky friend, relied upon him to solve all difficulties that might arise, scarcely making any effort himself to do so. This will account for his apparent ignorance of the secrets of the forest, which, perhaps has been noticed by the reader.

"Shawnee fool—Miami fool—don't know notting," repeated the Huron.

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"They don't know as much as you, that's sartin; but I've found more than once they knowed enough to satisfy me."

"*He come out dere,*" said Oonamoo, again.

Finding there was little chance of gaining what information he wished from the Indian, O'Hara set about solving the difficulty himself. The former having announced that Dernor had left the creek at this point, it now remained for him to determine by what means he had thrown his pursuers off the scent, as it was very manifest he had done. The ground around the canoe was quite wet and spongy, showing the numerous footprints with considerable distinctness. Among these, it was very easy to distinguish that of the leader of the Riflemen. The instant O'Hara saw this, he became aware of the curious fact that it was more *recent than those of the Indian*, proving that Dernor had *followed them*, instead of they having followed him! How this was accomplished, the hunter was at a loss to determine, although, from the expression of the Indian's face, he knew it was all plain to him.

"Lew has gone over this ground last," said O'Hara, "but how he has done it, I can't see just now. How was it?"

"*Look under canoe,*" said Oonamoo.

O'Hara's eyes opened, as he began to comprehend matters. He carefully raised one end of the canoe, and saw at once that his leader had lain beneath it, while his enemies

were searching for him. A few words more from the Huron, and every thing was explained. Believing the reader will be interested in the description of the ingenious artifice adopted by the hunter, we here give it as briefly as possible.

It may seem incredible that Lewis Dernor should have been concealed beneath this Indian canoe, when fully a dozen savages were thirsting for his scalp, and when it would have appeared the height of absurdity to think that they would fail to look beneath it. Nevertheless, such was really the case. It happened in the following manner:

When the Rifleman discovered the canoe lying against the bank, he sprung from the water, coming upon the frail barken structure with such force that he perceptibly started the bottom. It thus appeared to have been deserted for its uselessness. Stepping off of this upon the swampy ground, he walked about twenty yards up the bank, when he turned to the left, and approached the water again. The trail which he left was so distinct that no one could fail to see, he having purposely made it thus. Instead of taking to the water again, as it would appear he had done, he merely entered its margin, and then walked backward to the canoe again, stepping so exactly in his own footsteps, that the wily Shawnees and Miamis had no suspicion of the stratagem practiced. Reaching the canoe, he managed to lift it, without changing its position, when he lowered it again, without making any additional footprints. This done, he slipped beneath it, drew up his feet, and confidently awaited the approach of the savages.

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In about twenty minutes they came up. The foremost paused, upon seeing the canoe with its cracked bottom, and were about to overturn it, when their eyes rested upon the footprints of the fugitive. There was no need of looking beneath it, for they could see the direction he had taken. He was going at such speed that they had no time to pause, and they immediately dashed off in pursuit, the others following suit, like so many hounds. So soon as he was satisfied they were out of sight, the Rifleman came from beneath the canoe, carefully setting it back in its place again, and struck off in the woods at a more leisurely gait.

"All safe—nebber git on track agin," said Oonamoo.

"Don't believe they will. By gracious! but I should hate to try that trick of Lew's. Just s'pose they had looked under! it would have been all up with him. I daresn't use such means, 'cause I haven't got legs enough, for emergencies. Where does the trail lead to now, Oonamoo?"

"Where gal hid—go get her now—Injin know notting about it."

"I s'pose Lew will take his time now, as he knows he's got the dogs off his track."

"Go slow little ways—then run fast—want to see gal."

The Huron certainly displayed some knowledge of the workings of the heart when he remarked, in substance, that, although the lover might proceed at a moderate gait for some distance, it would not be long before the thoughts of Edith would urge him to as great exertions as he had displayed during the height of the chase. True to what he had said, O'Hara noticed that his footsteps gradually lengthened until it was manifest that he had been "letting himself out" again.

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It was now getting well along in the afternoon. The Huron struck into a sort of a compromise between a walk and a trot, he being anxious to make what progress he could before darkness set in. They had come too far to overtake Dernor and Edith the next day, and O'Hara began really to believe that the two had reached the settlement by this time. Upon mentioning this supposition to Oonamoo, the latter shook his head—meaning that all danger had not been overcome by the fugitives. The woods were too full of Indians, and the settlement was too far away for them to accomplish the rest of their journey without danger.

Objects were just growing indistinct, when O'Hara and the Huron came upon the bushes where Edith had been concealed. They saw that Dernor had approached on the opposite side from which he had left it, and that upon being rejoined by his charge, he had once more started northward, as if his desire was still to remain above his enemies, and avoid, as much as lay in his power, all probabilities of encountering them.

"I s'pose we've got to lay on our oars, as the sailors say, till daylight," said O'Hara.

The Huron looked at him, as if he failed to comprehend him, and he added, in explanation:

"There being no light, of course we can't see their tracks, and will have to wait till morning."

"No wait—go on all night."

"How will you do that?"

"Oonamoo know which way dey go."

"I don't deny that, but, smart as you are, I don't believe you can see a trail on such a night as this."

"Don't want to see trail—know which way go—go up, then go off toward settlement."

O'Hara understood that the Huron had formed his idea of the general direction which the Rifleman had taken, and intended to follow him in this manner. Being thoroughly well acquainted with the country, there was no difficulty in doing this; and, without pausing to think of drink or food, the two resumed their pursuit as hopefully and confidently as though the matter were already settled.

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To follow up thus persistently one of the most skillful border-men of the period, with the desire of assisting him in whatever strait he may have gotten himself, would have been the acme of absurdity upon the part of those undertaking it, and would have gained for them no thanks for attempting it, had the circumstances been difficult. But, incommoded as he was by the charge of Edith, and environed by enemies, it could hardly be expected that he would come through unscathed. His enemies, fully aware of the difficulties of his situation, undoubtedly were using every endeavor to thwart him, it being certain that they were aware of his identity. To have captured the leader of the Riflemen of the Miami would have been a feat of which even a war-party would have been proud, and the Huron well knew they would not give over their efforts until he was absolutely beyond their reach. This was the reason why he was so anxious to press forward as far as it would be prudent to venture during the darkness.

By midnight the two had reached a point above which the Huron believed the fugitives would not go; and being unable to determine the precise course which they had taken after this, they concluded to wait until daylight before going further. Accordingly they lay down on the ground, both dropping to sleep immediately, and both waking at precisely the same moment, just as the light of the day was appearing.

A half-hour's search discovered the trail of their friends within several hundred yards of where they had slept—thus close and exact had been the calculation of the sagacious Huron. He and O'Hara now began to entertain hopes that, after all, the fugitives had succeeded in reaching the settlement. The latter, at the most, was not more than twenty miles distant; and, had Dornor been allowed the entire night to travel, he could have safely reached it. A critical examination of his footprints, however, revealed the fact that they had not been made more than twenty hours before. If he had reached the settlement, therefore, he must have done it in the latter part of the preceding day.

The two now pressed on with all haste. They had gone scarcely a half-mile, when both made a startling discovery. Numerous moccasin-tracks became suddenly visible, and O'Hara needed no prompting to understand that the persistent Indians were again upon the trail of the fugitives. How they had succeeded in regaining it, after being so cleverly misled, was a mystery. The Huron accounted for it only upon the supposition that they had come upon it by accident. A slight comparison of the two trails by Oonamoo showed that the savages were close behind their friends—so close that they could overtake them ere they could reach their destination—the settlement.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### AT BAY.

Like lightning from storm-clouds on high,  
The hurtling, death-winged arrows fly,  
And windrows of pale warriors lie!  
Oh! never has the sun's bright eye  
Looked from his hill-top in the sky,  
Upon a field so glorious.—G. P. MORRIS.

As Oonamoo and O'Hara pressed forward, they found they were gaining very rapidly upon the pursuers and pursued. As for the Huron, he had an apprehension amounting almost to a certain conviction that the leader of the Riflemen, after all, had committed a sad mistake, in believing that he was safe from his enemies, after being rejoined by Edith. This belief had led him into some trap, and the faithful Indian felt that his services were sorely needed at that very moment.

It was yet early in the day, when he and the hunter ascended a sort of ridge, which afforded them quite an extensive view of the surrounding wilderness. Here, carefully protecting their persons from observation, they looked out over the forest in quest of signs of human beings. The unexperienced person might have looked for hours without discovering the slightest evidence of animal life in the vast expanse spread out before him. He would have seen the dark emerald of these western wilds cut by the gleaming

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silver of many a stream and river; the tree-tops gently bowed, like a field of grain, when the breeze rides over it; and overhead, perhaps, would have been noted the flocks of birds circling in curious figures; but all beneath would have been silent—silent, save in that deep, solemn murmur which comes up perpetually like the voice of the ocean.

But the Huron had scarcely glanced over the sylvan scene, when his dark eye rested upon what, to him, was a most palpable evidence of the presence of others in these woods. About a half-mile distant, on the edge of a small clearing, stood the remains of a log fort. This was subjected to a most searching scrutiny by both, but, for a time, O'Hara discovered nothing unusual in its appearance.

"He's dere—he and the gal," said Oonamoo, pointing toward the pile of logs.

"How do you know that? Have you seen him?"

"See now what he done—he's dere. Look agin."

"I've looked at them logs ever since we've been standing here, but hain't seen Lew or the gal yet."

"Eber seen logs afore?"

"Have I ever seen them logs before? Yes, often."

"How they look when last see him?"

"The same as they do now, I believe."

"Sure?" asked Oonamoo, in a tone that revealed all to O'Hara. He now looked again toward the remains of the log-fort, and understood at once the meaning of the Huron's question. He had passed by the spot during the preceding autumn, and noticed that the logs were scattered and thrown down, as if a tornado had passed over the spot. Now, however, there was system in their arrangement—proof sure that the hand of man had been employed upon them. The Huron had seen them scarcely a week before, and knew that all these changes had been made since—that, in fact, Lewis Dernor had made them, and at that moment was standing at bay behind them.

While yet they were looking, they saw something gleam for an instant in the sunlight, and then disappear as if drawn behind the logs.

"That was Lew's rifle," said O'Hara. "He always keeps the barrel polished up so that it nearly blinds a person to shoot." [99]

"Sh! look."

At the point where they had witnessed the movement of this bright object, they now saw a red jet of flame spout out, a wreath of blue smoke arise, and then came the report of a rifle.

"There's one red-skin the less," said O'Hara. "When Lew pulls trigger, *something* is sure to go under."

"Want us there," said Oonamoo, starting down the ridge on his peculiar trot, and moving off toward what may now properly be termed a fort. Upon coming in its vicinity, both exercised the greatest caution in their movements, knowing, as they did, that it was besieged by their deadly enemies. A half-hour's reconnoitering by both showed that there were ten Indians, exclusive of one dead one, collected at one end of the clearing, where each, safely ensconced behind a tree, was patiently waiting for a shot at the Rifleman, whom they now at last believed they had fairly cornered.

Upon witnessing this condition of affairs, Oonamoo and O'Hara debated a proposition proposed by the latter. It was that the Huron, who was very fleet of foot, should instantly make all haste to the settlement, and return with the Riflemen and a sufficient force to scatter the besieging Indians to the four winds. This undertaking would require more than five hours at the utmost to fulfill it, but those five hours were so precious, that Oonamoo decided not to make the attempt. He felt sure that unless Dernor surrendered, the party of savages would attack the place in a body before two hours elapsed; and, brave and determined as he knew the Rifleman to be, he could see that a resistance upon his part would be useless. He, therefore, acted with his usual wisdom, in deciding to remain upon the ground to render assistance when it would be needed.

The first plan adopted by O'Hara and the Huron was to keep their position, remaining carefully concealed, until the savages should move forward to the assault, when, as the former expressed it, they would "wade in promiscuously." This project offered to its originators the great point of excitement and desperate fighting, but was finally rejected by the Huron for the last reason. [100]

It is a very pleasant thing for a nation to think itself invincible and able to conquer all others with which it may come in collision. The same sensations, in a smaller degree, no doubt are experienced by two persons when, in the flush of the moment, they feel able to combat with five times their numbers; but, if time be allowed, the "sober second thought" will prevail, and action will be guided more by prudence than madness. The

Huron was as brave a man as ever breathed, but he was also as shrewd and cunning. He knew well enough that should he and O'Hara rush in upon ten desperate, well-armed warriors, no matter how fiercely they might fight, the result would be that both would be killed and no one benefited. He, therefore, determined to resort once more to his powers of stratagem.

The great point now was to make Dernor aware of the vicinity of his two friends. Without this Oonamoo would be more likely to be shot by him than by the savages. This part of the stratagem was the most difficult to accomplish. The Shawnees and Miamis being collected at one end of the clearing, it could not be expected that any signal, however skillfully or guardedly made, would attract the notice of Dernor. It might possibly be seen by Edith, but would not be understood. This means, therefore, was not even attempted.

The besieged Rifleman of course kept himself invisible. He had become aware, when within a mile or so of the present spot, that he was again pursued by his unrelenting enemies, and making all haste thither, had thrown the logs together as compactly and securely as the time allowed him would permit. He had brought down one of his assailants, and they in turn had buried some twenty balls in the logs around him, without inflicting injury upon either Edith or himself.

In the hope of giving his leader an inkling of the condition of affairs, O'Hara uttered a whistle, so perfect an imitation of the call of a certain bird, that the suspicious Shawnees and Miamis failed to notice it. Pausing a few moments, he repeated it, and then awaited the action of Oonamoo. Whether Dernor had caught the signal or not, of course his friends had no means of judging; but the Huron, knowing that if he had not his own death was certain, now coolly made the desperate attempt he had decided upon.

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Securely sheltered behind his log-fort, Dernor stood with cocked rifle awaiting his chance to pick off one of his enemies. Every faculty was absorbed in this, and he scarcely removed his eye once from the spot where he knew they were collected. He was aware of their exact number, as he was also of the fact that Girty, the renegade, was not among them. His lips were compressed, a dark scowl had settled upon his face, and it would have been easy for any one to have read the iron determination of his heart. He was at bay, it was true, and he was not ignorant of the desire of the savages to gain possession of him. He said nothing to Edith of the resolve he had made, but she needed no telling to understand it. So long as life remained, her defender would never desert her.

He was standing thus, gazing stealthily out through a loophole, when Edith, who was watching every portion of the clearing, placed her hand on his shoulder and told him that an Indian was stealing toward them from the side opposite to that on which their enemies were collected. As quick as thought Dernor wheeled around, pointed his rifle out and took aim at the approaching savage. The latter saw the movement, understood fully its cause, and yet made no attempt to escape, relying entirely upon the chances of the Rifleman discovering his identity before firing. His faith was rewarded, although Oonamoo came nigher death in that single moment than ever he imagined. Dernor's finger was already pressing the trigger, when he saw directly behind the approaching Indian the barrel of a rifle project from behind a tree and then disappear again. This served to arrest his attention, and before he renewed his aim the round face of O'Hara was thrust forth and disappeared again. This led him to examine the face of the venturesome Indian. A single glance and he recognized Oonamoo, the faithful Huron. He instantly drew his rifle in, and the latter, understanding the meaning of it, sprang nimbly forward, and with one bound cleared the opposing barricades and came down beside the besieged Rifleman. The latter grasped his hand and silently pressed it.

"Who is with you?" he asked, after relinquishing it.

"Hara—short feller—legs like bent Injin's bow."

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"Nobody else?"

"Nobody else," replied the Huron.

"You watch that side, then, Oonamoo, and I will attend to this."

"No watch this side—no Injin come here—all on toder side—me watch with you—come round this side bime-by."

"Do as you please; you're an Injin and ought to understand them."

Oonamoo had been seen by the besieging savages as he bounded over the logs, and, for a few minutes, they were puzzled to understand the meaning of so singular an occurrence. Their first impression was that one of their number, more daring than the others, had taken this desperate means of getting at the Rifleman, and they listened intently for sounds of combat and struggles between them; but, as moment after moment passed without the silence being disturbed, their eyes were opened to the fact that he had been reinforced by a formidable ally; and this, too, when a little foresight



on their part would have prevented it. Having felt certain, previous to this, that the white man had no friends in the vicinity, they had neglected to surround his fort, so as to prevent their approach. To prevent any thing further happening like this, a part of the band now proceeded to get on the opposite side of him.

There was but one way in which this could be done without being menaced by the rifles of the besieged party. Several of the Indians, being careful to keep the protecting trees before them, slowly retreated backward until they had gone far enough in the wood to be safe, when they passed around and approached the fort from the opposite side. It was not long before they became aware that the friend of the Rifleman was fully as sagacious as himself, and that, after all, the parties were not so unequally matched. The threatening muzzles were constantly protruding from behind those logs, and it was absolute suicide for any one to attempt to stand before them.

Dernor having caught a glimpse of O'Hara, his companion, wondered considerably that he did not follow the example of the Huron, and unite with him in the fort. Thus strengthened, his confidence would have been restored, and he would bid defiance to the Shawnees and Miamis. But, as he waited, and finally saw that a number of Indians had succeeded in getting behind him, he was compelled to give up this hope. This excited speculation the more upon his part, because he was fully aware of O'Hara's defects, and felt that it would have been the most prudent course for him to adopt. At length he questioned the Huron:

"Where's Tom?"

"Dunno—gone away."

"Why didn't he do as you did—come over and join me?"

"Tom 'Hara goin' *to do sumkin' else—he know what.*"

"I expect he does. He'd better move his carcass from where he was a few minutes ago, or them dogs will move it for him."

"He know—*dey* won't move *him*—he get out way soon enough."

"He's got too short legs," said Dernor, who, aware of the affection the Huron bore him, and experiencing a sort of reaction of his spirits after their continued depression, was disposed to quiz Oonamoo a little.

"Got *long* eyes, dough," replied he, quickly.

"Got long eyes?" laughed Dernor. "I don't know as they're any longer than mine."

"Good 'eal longer. Tom 'Hara neber let Shawnee and Miami get him atween the logs—he know too much."

Dernor felt the sarcasm of this remark and took it kindly.

"Neither would they have got me here, had I been alone."

It would be difficult to describe the expression that illuminated the Huron's face at this remark. He turned his dark, basilisk orbs (their fierceness now subdued into a softer light) full upon Edith, who, seated upon a portion of one of the logs, was listening to the conversation. The muscles around the corners of his mouth twitched a little, a wrinkle or two gathered, his beautiful white teeth became visible, but she only half-suspected that he was smiling.

"Nice gal," said he, his voice now as soft as a woman's. "White man love her—fight for her—Oonamoo do so too."

She did not know whether to be pleased or frightened at the look of the Huron. In her perplexity she turned toward Dernor.

"You needn't be alarmed," said he, understanding her embarrassment. "Oonamoo here is an old and tried friend, and will stand by you as long as I will, which," he added, in a lower tone, "will be as long as the One above gives me breath. He is devoted to me if he doesn't love you."

"Yes, Oonamoo does—he love all white folks—love the gals—clever to him and feed him when hungry."

Dernor merely smiled, believing that the remark of the savage fully explained his passion without any qualifying observation of his own.

"Oonamoo love white folks—love missionaries—tell him all about God up dere"—pointing upward—"spirit land—happy place—Oonamoo don't take scalp when Injin sleeping—so he go up dere when he die."

"I believe you will, for if there ever was an honorable savage you are one," said Dernor, warmly.

The Huron made no reply to this compliment, evidently thinking enough had been said.

It must not be supposed that this conversation occurred in the connected form in which we have given it. Several moments sometimes elapsed between the different remarks, and hardly once during its progress did Dernor look at the savage. Once or twice he turned toward Edith, as also did Oonamoo, but the danger that menaced him was too great for either to be diverted from it.

Some twenty minutes had elapsed, when an exclamation from the Huron showed that some new scheme was afoot. Immediately after, a blazing arrow came whizzing through the air, and buried itself in the logs. The sharp crackling told that the twist of flame had communicated with the logs and it was burning.

"My God! are we to be burnt alive?" exclaimed Dernor, losing his self-possession for a moment.

"Ugh—can't burn—logs too wet—go out," replied his unmoved companion.

So it proved, although an inch or two of some of the logs were sufficiently seasoned to take fire, they were all too damp and soaked to burn. Oonamoo had hardly spoken when the blaze went out of itself. A perfect storm of arrows, tipped with burning tow, now came sailing in upon them, but the only inconvenience they occasioned was a blinding, suffocating smoke, which lasted, however, but a few moments. [105]

"Where the deuce did they get their bows and tow from?" asked Dernor. "Do they carry such articles with them?"

"Sent for 'em after git here," replied Oonamoo.

"Won't any of these logs burn?"

"Too wet—smoke—but won't blaze."

The Indians soon found that nothing could be accomplished in the way of burning out the fugitives, so they ceased the attempt only to devise some other expedient. What this was to be, the besieged party for a long time were unable to determine. The first warning they had was a bullet, which grazed the face of Oonamoo, coming in at the *top* of the fort.

"Ugh! Shawnee climb tree—Oonamoo fetch him out dere," said the latter, sheltering himself as quick as lightning, and peering out in the hope of gaining a glimpse of the miscreant who had come so near shooting him. He was disappointed, however, the savage descending the tree with such skill and caution that his person was never once exposed to the eagle eye of the Huron.

For an hour succeeding this last attempt nothing further was done by the besieging savages. They carefully kept their bodies concealed, so that the utmost watchfulness on the part of Oonamoo and Dernor failed to get a shot at them. They saw enough, however, to make them certain they were surrounded by their enemies, and that for the present, at least, under Heaven, they had nothing but their own bravery and good rifles to rely upon.

There were several means by which the fugitives could be compelled to succumb in the end, if these means were only employed by the savages. The first and obviously safest was to keep up the siege until they were compelled to come to terms. Dernor had not a drop of water nor a particle of food, and consequently this plan on the part of the besiegers would have been only a question of time. Again, a rapid and determined assault could scarcely fail to take the Rifleman and the Huron. There were ten Indians to make the attempt, but those ten knew well enough that two of their number would never live to reach the fort in case the rush was made and that there would be desperate work before the two men could be overcome. [106]

During the hour of silence these plans occurred to Dernor, and he mentioned the first to Oonamoo. The cunning savage shook his head.

"Won't do that—*afeard*."

"Afraid of what?"

"Settlement two—t'ree—fifteen mile off—*afeard* other Long Knives come afore we got starve."

"I hope the boys are somewhere in the woods. Why don't the cowardly dogs rush in upon us? They could batter these logs down in five minutes."

"*Afeard* we batter 'em down," replied the Huron, with a sparkle of his black eyes.

"We would surely knock some of them over, but I don't suppose we could finish up the whole ten."

"Finish some—don't know which—dat de reason."

"Their heads are so full of their devilish inventions, I should think they could get up some way to attack us without getting a shot at them."

"Attack purty soon—keep eye peeled—don't see notting?"

"Nothing at all," replied the Rifleman, who, all this time, was peering through a chink in the logs and not looking at the Indian.

Taking it for granted that if the Huron saw no danger there could be none, Dernor turned toward Edith, and asked, in that low, passionate tone which he instinctively assumed in addressing her:

"And how do you feel, dear Edith, all this time?"

"*My* courage, I think, will bear up as long as *yours*," she answered, with a faint smile.

"It will bear up to the end, then," he added. Then looking at her a moment, he continued: "Edith, how you must feel toward me for bringing you into this trouble! I have been thinking of it for the last day or two."

"Did you do it on purpose?" she asked. "That is, did you *know* we should be pursued and persecuted as we have been when we started?"

"Know it? of course not. I would have been shot before I would have come."

"Then why do you ask me such a question? No, Lewis, I do not blame you in the least. On the contrary, I shall never be able to express the gratitude I feel for what you have done."

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This was the first time Edith had addressed the Rifleman by his given name, and it gave him a peculiar pleasure which it would be difficult to describe. He was only restrained from approaching by the reflection that he would cut a most ridiculous figure in the presence of the Huron. His feelings were now such that, upon his own account alone, he would have welcomed several days' siege. In fact, he would have cared very little had Oonamoo been a hundred miles distant just then.

But these emotions were only temporary. Five minutes later, he felt heartily ashamed that he should have entertained them.

"I am certain, Edith——"

Further utterance was checked by an exclamation from the Huron. Looking forth, Dernor saw that the crisis of the contest had arrived!

## CHAPTER XII.

### CONCLUSION.

They come!—be firm—in silence rally!  
The Long Knives our retreat have found!  
Hark! their tramp is in the valley,  
And they hem the forest round!  
The burthened boughs with pale scouts quiver,  
The echoing hills tumultuous ring,  
While, across the eddying river,  
Their barks, like foaming war-steeds, spring,  
The bloodhounds darken land and water,  
They come—like buffaloes for slaughter.—G. P. MORRIS.

At that point from which the Huron had advanced to the fort, the Shawnees and Miamis had now collected, preparatory to their final attack upon it. The wood being thick at this spot, they had little difficulty in keeping their bodies out of sight, the besieged being enabled to judge of their position by the points of their rifles and portions of their dress, which they took no pains to conceal.

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"That means business," said Dernor, loosening his knife, and examining the priming of his rifle. "What's their idea, Oonamoo?"

"Run all togedder—make big rush—all come from one side."

Being satisfied of this, the Huron crossed over to the side of the hunter, so as to be ready for the assault. He was as cool as if sitting in his own wigwam, although none was more aware than himself of the peril that hung over his head. Could the Shawnees or Miamis once obtain his person, no species of torment that their fiendish minds could invent would be left untried upon him. But he had played hide-and-seek too long with death, to be disconcerted in a moment like this.

"What are they waiting for?" asked Dernor, who began to grow impatient at the delay.

"Ain't waitin'—here dey come!"

As he spoke, ten Indians suddenly appeared to view, from behind as many trees, and, pausing a moment, set up a yell that must have been heard miles distant, and rushed with the speed of the whirlwind toward the fort. Half-way across the clearing they had come, when the sharp crack of two rifles was heard, and the two foremost savages, making a tremendous bound in the air, came down to the ground in their death-struggles. But the others were not checked in the least. On they came, right over the prostrate bodies, and the next minute were tearing at the pile of logs, with the fury of madmen.

The Rifleman and the Huron had discharged their rifles together at the savages, as they came pouring forward; then drawing their knives, they awaited the onset. The logs, loosely thrown together, could not long resist the efforts to dislodge them, and, in a few minutes, came tumbling to the ground. The first bronzed skull that appeared above them was shattered like an egg-shell, by the stock of the Huron's rifle; while, as the savages swarmed in, Dernor stooped, and catching Edith round the waist, bounded clear of the logs, and dashed at headlong speed across the clearing. Right behind, like a pack of hounds, poured his relentless enemies, held in check solely by the Huron, who, covering the retreat of his white friends, raged like a tiger with his clubbed rifle; but, powerful and agile as he was, he was finally brought to the earth, and, heedless of him, the savages poured onward, intent only on capturing Dernor and Edith.

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At this moment the edge of the clearing was reached; the fugitive had dashed into the wood, and his enemies were just following, when several flashes illuminated the edge of the forest, and simultaneous with the report, the remaining Riflemen of the Miami, with one exception, burst into the clearing and shot forward like a tornado toward the savages. The number of the whites was increased by Harry and Jim Smith, but half of the Indians had already gone to the earth, and the remaining ones broke and scattered as if a mine had exploded beneath their feet.

"Hello! anybody hurt?" demanded Harry Smith. "Come back here, Lew, and let us see you."

The fugitive had run quite a distance; but, recognizing the voice of a friend, he halted, looked back, and then returned. In the clearing, he saw standing the panting, excited forms of the brothers Smith, Allmat, George Dernor and Ferdinand Segó! The latter was leaning on his rifle, and looked up as Lewis and Edith came to view. He instantly started, as if struck by a bullet, and gazed at her as though he doubted the evidence of his own eyes. Edith, on her part, was hardly less agitated. She trembled and leaned heavily a moment on the hunter's arm, and then, relinquishing her hold, bounded forward and was clasped in the arms of Segó. Neither spoke until they had partly recovered from their emotions; then they conversed in tones so low, that the bystanders, had they wished, could not have overheard the words that were said.

All this time, as may well be supposed, Lewis Dernor was tortured by the most agonizing emotions. The beautiful dreams and air-castles which he had been continually forming and building during the past few days, now dissolved like mist in the air, and left nothing but the cold, cheerless reality, far colder and more cheerless than had ever before impressed him. Segó and Edith were reunited, and although there appeared to have been some mystery and misunderstanding between them, it was now cleared up, and their happiness seemed complete. The Rifleman drew a deep sigh and looked up.

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"I say, Lew," said his brother, "I've asked yer half a dozen times, whether there's any thing that need keep us here any longer?"

"The Huron—Oonamoo?" asked the hunter, looking around him.

"Was Oonamoo with you?—I recollect, now, Tom said he was. Well, that must be him, then, stretched out yonder."

The two moved toward the prostrate form of the Indian, which lay upon its face. They rolled him over on his back, but he was limp and nerveless as a rag. His body was still warm, but to all appearance he was entirely lifeless—a gash on the side of his face, from which a great quantity of blood had streamed over his person, adding to the ghastly appearance of the body.

"Poor fellow! he's dead," said Lewis, with a saddened feeling, as he looked down upon him. "He was a faithful fellow, and had few equals. I'm sorry he's dead."

"Oonamoo ain't dead," said the prostrate individual, opening his eyes, and getting upon his feet with some difficulty. "Play 'possum—dat all."

"You're a good one," said George Dernor, admiringly, as he supported him. "You've had considerable of a hurt though, along side of your noddle."

"Hit purty hard—hurt a *leetle*," said the Huron.

"We'll dress your wounds as soon as we reach the brook out in the woods. What did you

play 'possum for?"

"Fool Shawnee—fool Miami—t'ink dey cotch Lew and gal, den come and git Oonamoo scalp. If t'ink he ain't dead, kill him; wait till get out of sight, den run."

The meaning of which was, that the Huron, upon being felled to the earth, concluded it best to feign death until his enemies were out of sight, when he would have risen to his feet and fled. The wound he had received was so severe, that he knew his flight would be difficult and tardy, and he, therefore, avoided giving any signs of life as long as he had reason to believe the savages were in the vicinity. Of course he was perfectly conscious when the two Riflemen stood over him, and heard their words. Understanding at once from these the changed condition of affairs, he arose to his feet, as we have mentioned. [111]

A few minutes later, the party was moving slowly through the wood. The brothers Smith led the way; behind them came Sego and Edith far more affectionate and loving than she and Dernor had ever been. The latter, with his brother, and Allmat and Oonamoo, brought up the rear. In a few minutes they reached the brook, where the party halted.

The stoical Huron had borne up like a martyr thus far; but the precipitation with which he sought a seat the moment a pause was made, showed that he had taxed nature to the utmost. The cool fluid was taken from the brook in the canteens of the hunters, all the blood thoroughly washed from the Indian, and then the wound was carefully bandaged by Edith, from pieces of her own dress. This done, the savage rose to his feet—his head being so swathed and bundled up that it was nearly thrice its ordinary size—and looked about him with an air that was truly amusing.

"You'll be all right agin in a few days," said Harry Smith. "Let's move on, as the day is getting well along."

"Oonamoo don't go funder—leave you here," said the savage.

"How is this? Come, go with us to the settlement and stay till your wound gets better," said Lewis.

All joined their entreaties, but it availed nothing. The savage had made up his mind, and it could not be changed.

"Can't stay—Shawnees, Delawares, all round—git much scalp in woods," and waving them an adieu, he plunged into the forest.

"Injin is Injin!" said Jim Smith; "you can't change his nature. The missionaries have had a hold of him, and made him an honorable red-skin, but they can't get that hankering after scalps out of him. Shall I tell you where he's going? He's going back: to the clearin' where them dead Injins are stretched, and intends to get their top-knots. I seen him look at 'em very wishful-like when we started away. He was too weak, and he didn't want to do it afore Edith, or he'd 've had 'em afore we left that place."

[The next time the Riflemen encountered the Huron, it was upon the war-trail, and full a dozen more scalp-locks hung at his girdle!] [112]

Again the party moved forward, now with considerable briskness, there being no cause for tardiness or delay. Sego and Edith conversed in low tones, every look and action showing their perfect happiness, while the hardy leader of the Riflemen was as wretched an object as it is possible to imagine. They had progressed several miles, when, as they descended a sort of hollow, they encountered O'Hara, hurrying along as fast as the shortness of his legs would permit.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, suddenly halting. "Is the row done with?"

"Of course it is," replied Harry Smith.

"Who finished it?"

"We all had a hand in it, I reckon."

"It's an all-fired shame. As soon as—where's Oonamoo?" he abruptly demanded, looking around him.

"Gone off in the woods for scalps."

"Didn't lose his?"

"No; although he come mighty nigh losing his head."

"It's an all-fired shame," resumed O'Hara. "As soon as he got inside the fort there with Lew, I streaked it for the settlement to get the boys. I told you to hurry, but after you got to the clearin', I wanted you to wait so that I could jine in the fun, and pitch in promiscuously. Why didn't you do it?"

"Matters were mixed up a little too much to allow us to wait," replied Lewis Dernor.

"S'pose they was, but I'm mad and want to lick somebody. Won't you fight, Lew?"

The latter merely smiled, and the party moved on, O'Hara being forced to bottle his wrath, as he could find no one upon whom to expend it. Occasionally, however, he and the brothers Smith had a war of words, but it amounted to nothing, being attended by no real ill-feeling upon either side.

It was just growing dark when the party reached the settlement. The delight with which the fugitives were welcomed by the settlers need not be described. Many had had the most painful apprehensions regarding Edith, and nearly every family felt as if one of its members had been restored, upon her return. And the confidence which they reposed in the gallant-hearted Rifleman, the reliance which they placed upon his prowess and bravery, were such that all felt his death would have been a public calamity. [113]

The Riflemen remained several days in the settlement, there being no special cause for hurrying their departure. While the members of this small party enjoyed themselves to the utmost, the sadness and dejection of their leader was remarked by all. He was often seen wandering in the woods, silent and moody, resolutely refusing communication with any one. He carefully avoided Sego and Edith, until the latter, wondering more than the others at the cause of his changed behavior, sent word to him that she wished him to spend an evening with her. Dernor's first impulse was to refuse the invitation; but, on second thought, he concluded to accept it, and he returned a reply promising to call upon her on the following evening.

Edith was living with Smith, where Sego was also spending his time, and, from the wording of her invitation, he confidently expected to meet her alone. He was considerably disappointed and chagrined, therefore, on entering the room, to find Sego seated within a few feet of her, the expression of both faces showing that each was full of happiness and utterly delighted with each other. Both welcomed him, and when he had been seated, Edith asked, rather abruptly:

"Now, Lewis, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing," he replied, looking at the toe of his moccasin, and feeling a little stubborn and ugly simply because his fair questioner was just the opposite.

"Now you needn't tell me that," she persisted. "What makes you act so strangely—and keep away from me as though you hated me?"

"*You* ought to know," replied the hunter, more sullenly than before.

"I? I am sure I do not. Pray, what is it?"

The hunter, who was acting much like a pouting child, refused to make answer. Edith laughingly repeated her question several times, but it was not replied to. Still laughing and blushing, she arose, and moved her chair close beside him; then, sitting down, placed one of her warm hands in his. Gently patting his embrowned cheek with the other hand, she asked, in that voice which none but the maiden can assume who is conscious of her power: [114]

"*Won't* you tell Edith what troubles you?"

Matters were getting decidedly dangerous. There sat the sullen hunter, his head bent, his lips closed, and his eyes fixed resolutely upon the toe of his moccasin. Right before these eyes, so directly before them that the view of his foot was almost hid, was the beaming, laughing, radiant face of Edith, looking right up in his own, her eyes sparkling, and her countenance a thousand times more lovely than ever. Several times Dernor felt like catching her to his bosom, and kissing her lips again and again; but, as he was on the very point of doing so, he remembered that Sego was in the room, and felt more angered than ever, and gazed harder than ever at his moccasin.

"Won't you even look at me?" asked Edith, putting her open hand over his eyes, as if to pull his gaze down. He instantly looked her steadily in the face, without changing a muscle of his countenance, while she, folding her hands, returned the gaze with equal steadiness. Her lips, too, were resolutely closed, but her eyes fairly scintillated with mischief, and she seemed just able to prevent herself from laughing outright. How long this *oculistic* contest would have continued we can not pretend to say, but it was ended by Edith asking:

"What makes you look so troubled, Lewis?"

"Because I am," he replied, curtly.

"Tell me the cause, and I will do all I can to help it."

"It's *you* that have done it!" He spoke with deep feeling.

"I that have done it!" repeated the girl, in consternation. "Why, how did I do it?"

"Edith!" His words were ringingly clear. They were winged with reproof. "Do you want me to tell you?"

"Of course I do."

"When we were alone, you led me to believe that you loved me. As soon as you saw Sego you went right into his arms, and I was forgotten."

The lurking mirth and mischief in her face grew more perceptible each moment, while he was certain, although he did not look in that direction, that Sego was doing his best to smother a laugh.

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"Well, what of that?" she asked, looking down from his face and toying with a button at his waist.

"*What of that?*" he exclaimed, indignantly. "It is the meanest thing a person could do."

The reader must be indulgent, and consider the circumstances in which the hunter was placed. The mischievous Edith was tormenting him. How could she, being a woman, help it?

"Don't you believe I love you?" she asked, after a moment's pause.

"Believe it? To my sorrow and mortification, *I know* you don't."

"Lewis!"

"You love Sego, and I can be nothing to you but one of many friends," he added.

"Yes, dearly do I love Sego!" the maiden replied, with the old roguishness in her eyes.

"Fudge!" he exclaimed, impatiently, and making a movement as if to move away. "Edith"—he spoke earnestly—"I can not bear this trifling. I am sorry you have treated me thus. I must leave you——"

"No, you must not leave me!" she as earnestly answered.

"Do you wish to keep me here longer, to mortify me?"

"I have something more to say to you."

"Say it quickly, then."

"In the first place, look straight into my eyes, as you did a few minutes ago."

The hunter did as requested, although it was a harder task than he suspected.

"Now," said Edith, "in the first place, *I love you*; and, in the second place, I love him (pointing to Sego); but (here a pause) I do not feel the same toward each of you."

"I shouldn't think you did, the way things looked in the clearing!"

Edith laughed outright, and then said:

"Lewis, let me tell you something. The man sitting there, whom you know as Ferdinand Sego, *is my own father!*"

"Is that so?" demanded Dernor, almost springing off his seat, "Then, by thunder, if you ain't the most noble gal in the wide creation, and I the biggest fool."

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And he embraced her, unmindful of the presence of Sego, who seemed in danger of an epileptic fit from his excessive laughter.

"How is this? Let's understand matters," said the Rifleman, a few minutes later.

"I can soon explain," said Sego. "To commence at the beginning, my name is Ferdinand Sego Sudbury. I emigrated out in this western country some years since, with my wife, and only daughter, Edith, here. Shortly after, my wife died; and, feeling lonely and dejected, I took to wandering in the woods, making long hunts, to while away the time. You remember when I encountered you, and received an invitation to make one of your number. I accepted it, with the understanding that I could not spend my entire time with you. When not with you, I was at my own cabin, with my daughter. I joined under the simple name which you have known me by, for no reason at all save that it was a mere notion, I having used that name in the East on more than one occasion. I kept my relations with your band secret from Edith, as I did not wish to alarm her by letting her know that I took part in your desperate expeditions.

"It happened on one occasion, when wandering along the Ohio, on my return to my cabin, that I encountered a flat-boat, in which were several of my acquaintances. At their urgent request, I waded out, was taken on board, and accompanied them to their destination, down the river. Here I left them, and several days after reached my cabin. I found Edith gone. The undisturbed condition of the furniture forbade the supposition that she had been carried off by the savages. I endeavored to find her trail, but a storm obliterated all traces, and I was compelled to give her up as lost.

"It was quite a while before I rejoined you. When I did, I said nothing of my loss, not believing that you knew any thing about it. It seems singular that I should have omitted to mention it; but, I will not deny I had a lingering suspicion that Edith had eloped with some young hunter, whose acquaintance she had formed during my absence. After I

had been with you some time, I mentioned her name, but, you not having heard it, I gained no satisfaction by doing so.

[117]

"What happened after this is known, perhaps, better to you than to me. If you love Edith, as I rather suspect you do, from all I have heard and seen, you are welcome to her. I know she has a strong affection for you."

It is wonderful how a matter like the one in question will become known in a small community. The next day there was not a person in the whole settlement who was not aware of what has been related in the last few pages, and there was not one who did not rejoice in the happiness of the noble-hearted leader of the Riflemen of the Miami.

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As we have hinted in the commencement of this work, the organization known by the name last mentioned, kept up its existence several years longer. Lewis Dornor remained its nominal leader, but, after his marriage, the exploits of its members became less frequent and noted. All, however, joined in the great border war which raged for several years previous to 1794. In Anthony Wayne's great battle of this year, Tom O'Hara and Allmat fell, and, as has been said in another place, the organization was broken up, never again to be revived. Lewis Dornor and Edith lived to a ripe old age, and their descendants at this day are among the most respectable and widely-known of the inhabitants of Southern Ohio.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RIFLEMEN OF THE MIAMI \*\*\*

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