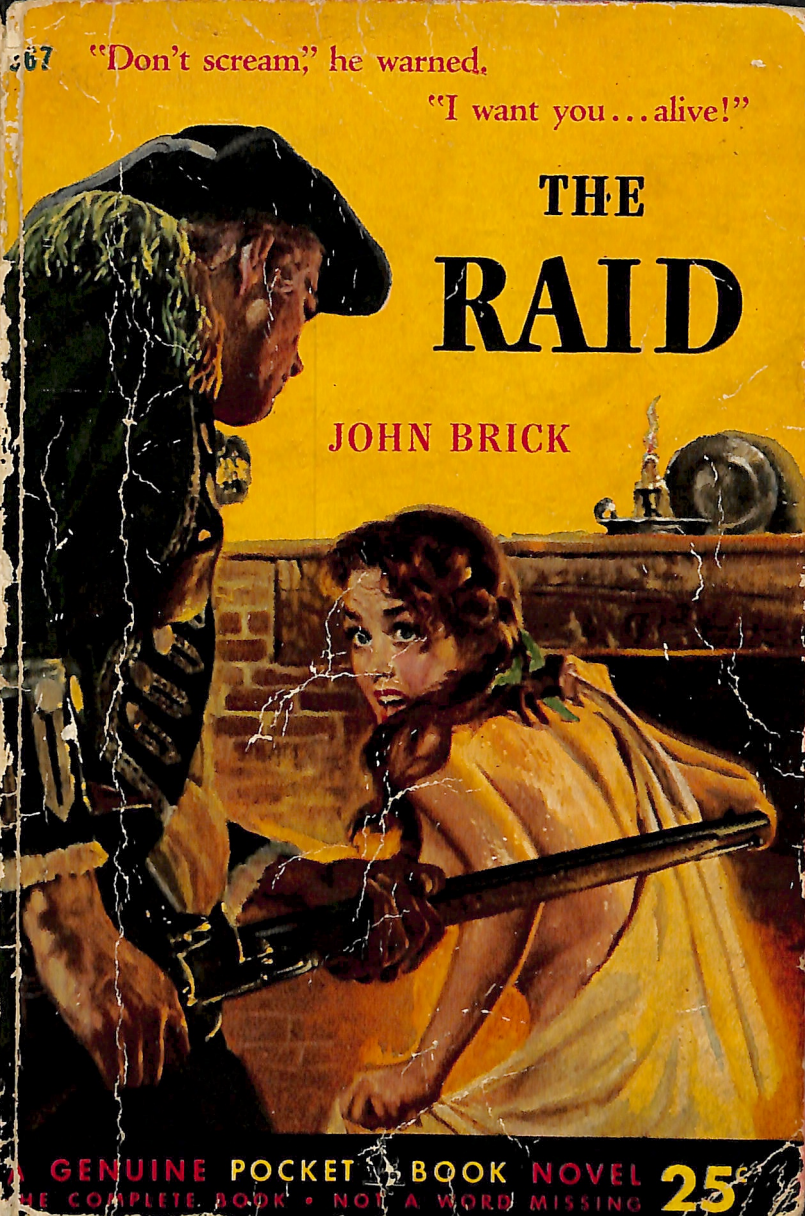
"Don't scream," he warned.
"I want you . . . alive!"
THE
RAID
JOHN BRICK
A GENUINE POCKET BOOK NOVEL
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25¢

A GENUINE POCKET BOOK NOVEL

KIDNAPPED

Jessica Currie sang in her bath. Soon her husband would return and she would be waiting for him. Suddenly Jessica felt a blast of cold air on her naked shoulders. She turned to see a tall British soldier blocking the cabin door. Behind him was the leering painted face of a Seneca brave.

"Don't scream," the soldier warned. "I want you alive."

"Get out of here," Jessica gasped.

"No," the soldier said softly. He watched her. "You're beautiful. I never expected to find anything like you in this sinkhole of a town."

The raid was a success. Jessica was kidnapped and made a prisoner of the Indians and Captain Desmond. Faced with their savagery, she waited desperately for one thing—rescue by her husband, an American scout who could outfight and outtrack any man on the Hudson River frontier.

The Raid was originally published by Farrar, Straus and Young, Inc.

Other Books by John Brick

TROUBLED SPRING

THE RAID

by

John Brick

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FOR JOHNNY

Who wanted the Indian book for his own.

NOTE TO READER

The chronology and events of this novel parallel those of the Battle of Minisink, in July of 1779, when Joseph Brant, with a party of Indians and Tories, attacked the hamlet of Minisink in Orange County, New York. The narratives of that raid and the battle which followed have been used freely in the writing of this book. However, since this is a work of fiction, the author has frequently adapted the facts to his fancy, particularly in geographical details. The reader should remember that Highland County, Cedar Bush and Highland Landing cannot be found on any map of New York State. While there are no mountains in the Catskill range which readily can be identified with those herein, care has been taken to present a topographically accurate description of that region.

J. B.

THE RAID

1

THE SUN was sinking behind the Catskill ridges to the west. Dusk had already darkened the forested foothills. The katydids were singing in the meadow near the cabin, and down by the Deerkill the peepers in the marsh grass were beginning to join them.

Across the smooth swift waters of the stream, a few candles flickered through the screen of trees which hid most of the settlement. Here and there children's voices called, and once a dog yipped shortly and then quieted.

On the rough-hewn log steps of his cabin, Tom Currie sat with his hands clasped about one knee, his back against the doorframe. Occasionally he looked across the stubble of the freshly cut meadow toward a slowly moving small brown spot near the stone wall on the west side of the meadow. It was a woodchuck feeding on the new shoots of sweet grass in the stubble. For twenty minutes Tom had been wondering idly whether he should get his rifle and try a shot. It was almost a hundred yards, and it was getting pretty dark. He might miss, and then Jessica would laugh. Maybe she hadn't much to laugh about out here in the woods, with it all so new to her, but he didn't see much sense in giving her the opportunity of laughing at him. His shooting was one of Tom Currie's few vanities. He didn't like to miss. Then again, a rifle shot would alarm the settlement needlessly. They were jumpy enough since Pulaski and his cavalry had left the valley. So Tom contented himself with drawing an imaginary bead on the groundhog and squeezing an imaginary trigger.

He was a tall man in his late twenties. His hair was long and black and he kept it tied in back. His face was quiet, lean, and it bore an alertness born of years in the woods. He seemed always ready to move swiftly and soundlessly if necessary. He was deeply tanned from working in the sun.

Strangers often misjudged his abilities because of his soft voice and quiet manner.

His wife was sitting beside the steps in the mahogany rocking chair she'd brought with her from Highland Landing last March. She was rocking gently as she sewed one of his brown linen shirts, and from time to time she hummed a tune softly.

Tom took his attention from the woodchuck for a few moments. He watched her sew, thinking that it had been a long time since he'd heard her humming. He wondered if that was because he just hadn't noticed. She'd been singing often in the first few weeks of spring. Maybe she still did; maybe he was becoming a settled husband who didn't notice when his wife was happy and when she was sad. Farming was sometimes enough to drive everything else out of a man's mind, Tom thought, but it didn't seem right that it could cause him to neglect his wife, especially when she was as beautiful a woman as Jessica. Come to think of it, he'd noticed that she'd been pretty sober and straight-faced lately. It troubled him. Probably it was his fault.

If it isn't the loneliness out here, with me in the fields all day, then I can't figure what it is, Tom thought. I think of her all the time when I'm working, and she says she looks out and watches me and it makes her feel good to see me out there. I guess it's just the way married people get after a while. It doesn't seem right, though. Marriage is something you shouldn't allow to be an ordinary thing. I don't think it's being on a farm. She knew what farming was in the back country before she came out. She said she knew. No farmer in Cedar Bush has a nicer place, as far as the land goes, anyway. We ought to have a house of milled lumber instead of this cabin, but that will come in time. She knows that. It's a lot different from Highland Landing. I guess that's the main thing. She gets lonely for the parties and big dinners and things the Bellnaps used to have.

Anyway, it's been the same right along in the nights. She hasn't changed any that way. Just like it was back in March and April. I hope we never change about that.

"Light's getting bad, Jess," he said. "You'd better quit that."

"I'll be able to see a while yet," she answered softly. "You're hard on shirts. This one's practically new, and it's all gone under the arms."

"I sweat too much," he said, grinning. "Guess I work too hard."

"Yes. You work too hard." The words were soft; he could scarcely hear them.

He supposed he did put in more time in the fields for the size of his farm than any other man in Cedar Bush, with the possible exception of Daniel Dunning, whose scrabblings didn't count anyway. There were two reasons why Tom worked so hard. The first was that a man can't spend most of his days since boyhood tramping the woods and running the Indian country and, later, soldiering, and expect to make an easy job of farming right off. The second reason was that part of his day was taken up with things he wanted to do for her. Feeding the pigs and taking care of the firewood, for instance. He wanted it that way. Most of the farm wives in Cedar Bush—all the farm women he had ever seen, for that matter—worked themselves into old age and ugliness while they were still in their twenties. He was determined that Jessica would not.

She was the most beautiful woman Tom Currie had ever seen. Of course, most of his life had been spent hunting and trapping far beyond the frontier settlements, where he sometimes hadn't seen a white woman for six months at a time. But he was sure there weren't many women to match her, even in New York, Philadelphia, or Boston. Maybe even London. She was tall, almost as tall as he was, and as graceful, he thought, as a young doe in the autumn woods. Her body was slim and firm and at first glance she might have appeared thin.

She's not, though, Tom reflected. I know that if anybody does. It's just that she's not big and lumpy like most of them around here. But she's as strong as any of them. It's just like seeing a doe grazing with a herd of milk-cows. He smiled to himself at the simile, wondering if she would understand what he meant if she knew.

Jessica had auburn hair, long and loosely waved, tied with a ribbon at the nape of her neck. Tom liked to watch it when the sun was bright, for then it seemed to turn a deep red and shone brilliantly.

That's another way she's different, he thought. The rest of them tie it up on the back of their heads in those big knots—buns, they call 'em—and keep it that way from one year to the next. Jess knows how pretty her hair is, and she wants everybody to see it.

It was her eyes which fascinated him most, however. He had long ago decided that they were green, yet he wasn't always sure. In moments of excitement or anger, they would flash like a hawk's, seeming to change color as they did so. He had often joked with her about it, telling her that his Mohawk friends would surely name her "Hawkeye" if he ever took her up to the country of the Long House. She told him the eyes were a family heritage. That was true, he knew. He remembered the portrait of her grandfather, old Jacob Bellnap, which he had seen at her home in Highland Landing, and he knew that her cousin Elihu, Colonel Bellnap, who had been at Saratoga almost two years ago when Tom had taken the musket ball in the shoulder, also had those curiously changing eyes.

Tom absently flexed the muscles around the old wound as his gaze returned once more to the woodchuck. It was almost too dark to see him.

Suddenly the small brown spot scurried a few yards and disappeared.

Something scared him, Tom Currie thought. A fox along that stone wall, maybe.

Then a thin yelping came sharply from the wood lot beyond the meadow. It ceased suddenly and was repeated a few seconds later.

"What's that, Tom?" Jessica asked, glancing up from her sewing.

"Fox," he answered. "Over in the trees there."

He ought to have more sense, Tom thought, than to scare the game away by barking. Nothing for him to bark at, not

even the moon. That's funny. First fox I ever come across that didn't have the sense to keep quiet when he's hunting. Well, maybe he isn't hunting.

Instantly then came the thought which should have come at the first sound of barking. Maybe he isn't a fox!

Tom Currie rose from the steps slowly, and casually stretching his arms over his head, he turned toward Jessica and said softly, swiftly: "Don't jump now, Jess. Don't act quick, but pick up your stuff and go into the house. Do it just like you were finished sewing for the night."

"Why, Tom? What's the matter?"

She was on her feet already, coming around to the steps with her sewing in her hand. Her face was calm, yet he could see that she was frightened.

"That's not a fox," he said. "Go on in the house, but don't act scared. Get my rifle and come up close to the door with it."

She passed him and he turned as if to follow her. Instead, he turned once more and leaned against the doorjamb—a farmer taking his evening's last look at his fields. Without showing the least sign of concern, he was studying every foot of that stone wall and the wood lot beyond.

I'm getting pretty damn careless, he thought. Letting him—or them—get that close, and me thinking it was just a fox. I should have known soon as that woodchuck ran.

He heard Jessica moving behind him.

"Got the rifle?" he whispered.

"Here. What is it, Tom?" Her voice was not quite steady; he could detect the fear in it, and he felt her hand tremble as he took the rifle from her.

He grasped the rifle with one arm and held it beside him in the darkness of the doorway.

"Nothing's going to happen," he told her gently. "There's only two things it could be. Rangers or Indians. And you can count out the Rangers. They haven't got any man from here to Canada could make me think he was a fox, not even for ten seconds."

He heard her gasp, and then he felt her hand and forearm on his waist.

"Don't you get scared, now, Jess. It's not likely to be a war party with dark just coming on. They'd wait till morning. Get away from the door now. And don't worry. There's not many of them, and they won't start anything so close to the town."

He felt her move away from him. He could hear her breathing rapidly. It was getting darker every moment, and he could scarcely see the stone wall. His eyes played the old trick of seeing flitting shadows along the wall.

Then, piercing the quiet of the evening, came a short high-pitched call in a strange tongue which Jessica had never heard.

Tom straightened his body and brought his rifle into sight.

"Mohawk," he said. "He wants to talk."

From her husband's lips Jessica heard an answering call in those terrifying alien syllables.

Much closer to the house along the stone wall, the other voice now spoke at length. Tom Currie listened intently. He didn't answer immediately.

"What did he say, Tom?" Jessica whispered.

"Says we're to leave the rifle and come out. They'll let us go into town unhurt, while they burn the house and barn. He says they won't touch us. He says Joseph Brant is up on Dan's Point yonder, and told them not to harm us."

"What will we do?"

"It's a trick of some kind," Tom answered softly. "He doesn't sound much like a Mohawk to me. There's something about his voice. It might be a Ranger, but more likely it's a Seneca who knows me and remembers that Brant and I were friends once. If they're Senecas, we'd be crazy to walk out there into the middle of them. It don't make sense—it's not a big party, or they wouldn't have bothered to talk. And if they were raiding the town, they'd wait until dawn to see what they were doing."

Tom spoke again, a few words, and then listened to the other's voice once more. Suddenly he began to chuckle, and then he laughed. He called again, this time in English.

"First Mohawk I ever heard with an Irish brogue!"

Jessica thought that suddenly her husband had lost his mind, and was sure of it when he moved out of the doorway to the steps, leaving his rifle inside.

"Come back! Tom!"

He didn't answer, but stood there laughing.

The next thing she knew there was a yell from the dusk, the sound of running feet, and her husband launched himself from the steps and was rolling about furiously on the ground in an entanglement of arms and legs. She was terrified. She called Tom's name several times and thought for an instant that she should run to get Gabriel Quick on the next farm. It would take too long.

Tom seemed to be struggling with two men. There didn't seem to be any more. Sobbing, she picked up the rifle and held it ready. In that boil of dust and bodies on the ground, she couldn't tell where Tom was. A savage mixture of grunts and thuds and exclamations came from the strugglers. Then she saw that the other two had pinned her husband's arms and shoulders to the ground in spite of his violent twistings.

"All right," she said, keeping her voice as steady as she could. "Let him up, and raise your hands!"

There was no answer from the tangle on the ground.

"Let him up!" Her voice quavered a little, but she couldn't help it.

"Better let go," Tom said. His voice sounded strange; she imagined that he was laughing again. "She'll shoot if you don't."

They separated, and her husband rose to his feet. "All right, Jess," he said. "Put up the rifle." Then he turned to the others. "Murph, you old pignut! And Dave! How in hell are you? And what you doing way down here? I thought you were running hell out of the hostiles up along the Mohawk. Come on in the house and I'll introduce you to my wife."

The man addressed as Murph eyed the rifle which Jessica still held leveled. "Are you sure that thing won't go off, Tom?" he asked.

Tom Currie laughed again, louder and with more abandon

than Jessica had ever heard before from him. "She never fired a gun in her life, Tim."

"There's always a first time," Murph said.

"Come on inside," Tom Currie repeated. "I'll be damned! It's good to see you."

2

WHEN THEY were all inside the cabin, and Tom had lit two candles, Jessica saw that the strangers were dressed in thrummed hunting shirts, leggings, breechclouts, and moccasins. They carried powder horns, knives, hatchets, and bullet pouches.

She was angry with Tom and with them for frightening her so, but she didn't say anything. Obviously they thought it was a good joke, and she didn't want to embarrass Tom. However, she couldn't see that it was very funny. She'd give Tom a good piece of her mind after they left. He deserved it.

The man called Murph was of medium height and solid frame. He had long shining black hair clubbed like Tom's and tied with a bit of leather. His eyes were bright blue, and his face was round and cheerful. The other man, the one Tom had addressed as Dave, was taller and slimmer. His face had a mournful look, as if something he had eaten had disagreed with him, and he was looking around the cabin as if he had never before stood within four walls.

"Well, Jessica," said Tom, his lean handsome face shining. "These are the two best scouts in the whole army. You've heard me speak of them often. This is Tim Murphy and this is Dave Elerson."

Dave smiled briefly and grunted a word or two. Murphy bowed to Jessica. "Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Currie. I'd be a poor friend of Tom's if I wasn't proud and honored to meet his wife. I've got to add something to what he said, though. Any talk of scouting has got to count him in. He's more know-

ing in the ways of Indians than all the rest of Morgan's riflemen put together."

So this is the famous Tim Murphy, thought Jessica. He doesn't look dangerous. If he hadn't given me such a scare, I'd take to him right away.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Murphy. I've often heard Tom tell stories about you. To hear him tell it, you can lick the entire British army all by yourself."

"Damn near did when he killed Fraser at Saratoga," Tom exclaimed.

"Makes up most of them stories about himself," Elerson said. "He ain't no fighter, ma'am. Why, I saw some fellows from Connecticut—from Connecticut, mind you—wipe up a tavern floor with him in Albany. Couldn't have been more than ten of 'em, either. Whipped him good, they did."

"What were you doing all this time, Dave?" Tom asked.

"Drinking flip, of course. I don't mix in tavern fights, specially with Connecticuters. There ain't any sport to it."

"So you thought to jump me, Murph!" Tom remarked. "You ought to know better. Time was when you could have got so close to that woodchuck you could grab him by the tail."

"I was close enough. I had to chunk a rock at him to make him run. You should of had your rifle ready then. Even a Tuscarora woman'd done better than you did."

"I'm getting soft from this farm life, I guess."

"You're hard enough. The two of us had plenty to do, pinning you to the ground."

"I can remember when you wouldn't have done it at all, without maybe losing an ear or breaking an arm. Sit you down, Tim, and you, Dave, and tell me what you're doing down here."

Jessica began arranging the table so that her husband's friends might eat. She had a vague presentiment of trouble ahead as a result of their visit—she saw now for the first time since their marriage how Tom acted among the kind of men with whom he had spent most of his life; she noticed how happy he was to see these woods-running friends of his; she

had caught the note of disparagement, almost of shame, in the words "this farm life"; she saw how, as Murphy and Elerson sat at the table, Tom picked up Murphy's strange-looking rifle with its two barrels and fondled it lovingly. She felt for the first time in all these months of marriage that she didn't know Tom at all and never would understand him; she felt with despairing certainty that this compromise of farming in Cedar Bush was at best a temporary thing and that one day she would see him shoulder his rifle and vanish into the Catskills, westward, out of her life. These two men represented a world she could never know, a world which was shadowed now for a while by his love for her. The day would come, she thought, when his love would no longer be shining and new, and then he might go and never return.

"I said it before, Murph, and I'll say it again," Tom remarked. "Golcher did himself proud when he made this rifle."

"She's still knocking 'em over, Tom. Lord be praised! That gun sure puzzles Indians. I puncture one of 'em, and another one comes at me with his tomahawk, figuring to sink it in my noggin, and then I blast him with the other barrel. An Oneida up to German Flats told me that the whole Seneca nation is talking about that gun. They call it a devil-gun, and claim I can fire ten shots without reloading."

Tom returned the Golcher to its place beside his own rifle, and seated himself at the table. "We can talk later, boys," he said. "You must be hungry."

"Not very," Elerson said. "We et day before yesterday."

Jessica put her best tableware before the two men, and then ringed them around with every kind of food she had. There were biscuits left from supper, with fresh butter, and garden corn which Tom had picked late that afternoon, a pot of cold baked beans, boiled potatoes, bacon and ham from the smokehouse, carrots and peas mixed, and a two-quart jug of milk. She noticed that Elerson picked up her table silver, brought from Highland Landing, and tried ineffectually to use it. Finally he put it down and drew his long slim knife from its sheath and began stabbing the food with that and

transferring it to his mouth. Both men ate methodically, without pause, until there was scarcely a crumb left on the boards of the table. Throughout their meal, Tom sat smiling at them, talking about the old days with Morgan and asking about former comrades among the riflemen. Usually, Jessica noticed, either Murphy or Elerson would nod at the mention of a name to signify that the man was still alive, but once Elerson lifted his knife and made a circular motion around his skull. She shuddered, realizing that he was indicating that the man had been scalped.

"Too bad," Tom said. "He was a good man."

"Senecas," Murph said through a mouthful of food. "Gave him the fire treatment. Wasn't much left when we found him."

They speak of it so casually, Jessica thought. And it might happen to them any day! Or to me. Even away down here.

"Good food, ma'am," Murphy said when they had finished. "We thank you."

"Obliged," Elerson said.

"You're very welcome," Jessica answered. She felt quite pleased that they had eaten so well. These were the first real guests, other than neighbors, that she and Tom had had in four months.

"All right, now, Murph," Tom said. "What's the news from up on the Mohawk? What's happening in the border settlements?"

"Seems to me this is a border town," Elerson said.

"I suppose you might say so, but we haven't had any real trouble since spring, and then it was only a few Mohawks burned a couple of cabins up in the mountains. They didn't come down here. Last year a bunch of them showed up, but the militia drove 'em off. We don't look for any trouble."

"That so?" Elerson nodded. "Maybe you're right. I guess them Mohawks and Senecas won't bother to come down this far. I guess they'll figure they won't be able to get close to a big settlement like this. Not at least close enough to a house so they can count the stitches the woman's putting in a torn shirt. I guess you're right, at that."

"Now wait a minute, Dave," Tom said. "They've got no reason to come down here with a big party. They're not mad at us so much as they are at the people in the Mohawk Valley. You know that. They want that country for themselves. That's what Brant always said. I know Joseph Brant pretty well, you remember."

"That's right. You know him. I was just thinking he'd remember you some day, and wonder how you was making out farming, and drop in to see you. Friendly-like, to talk about crops, maybe. About how nice a picture a wheat field makes when you put a torch to it. Maybe he'd think they don't have many hairdressers around here. His boys are handy with a nice head of hair like yours. They're good at kindling fires for folks, too."

"That's enough of that stuff, Dave," Murphy said. "You'll frighten Tom's wife." He spoke to the Curries. "Dave's been talking like that ever since Cherry Valley and Wyoming. He thinks all the settlers should live in forts all the time. It ain't practical."

"I've been making a swing up through the mountains every now and then. I've yet to see a sign of hostiles," Tom said.

Jessica recalled those times when he would be gone for a day, as he said, "just looking around."

"You wouldn't see no signs," Elerson said gloomily. "They'd come in fast and then skedaddle."

"Say, Tom," Murphy remarked with a grin, "Dave and I are just a bit thirsty. Climbing them Catskills is dry work in the summer."

"I haven't a thing in the house, Murph. We can go down to the tavern and do our talking. What do you say?"

"Fine. They make good flip?"

"The best. Lots of rum in it, the way you like it."

"Let's go, then. Grab your rifle, Dave."

"It's only a short way to the tavern, Mr. Murphy," Jessica told him. "You can leave your rifles here. I'll be fixing a place for you and Mr. Elerson to sleep."

"Never go any place without my rifle, ma'am. I know it'd be safe enough here, but it was stole from me once by a young

Tory thief, and I ain't let it out of sight since. And don't bother fixing for us, ma'am. We'll lay out in the barn. Dave don't take kindly to houses as nice as this one."

"We'll be back at closing time, Jess," Tom said. "You go on to sleep."

"Yes," Elerson said. "If we can make it back. How much rum did you say they put in the flip, Tom?"

"We'll be back in good time, Jess," Tom grinned. "Come along, boys."

Jessica stood in the doorway as the three of them walked down the lane toward the bridge. She saw that her tall husband had his arms around the other men's shoulders, and she heard his laugh rising full and free in the night air. She felt lost and lonely there in her own home, as if she were abandoned on the fringe of the vast wilderness. Yet Highland Landing and her family was only thirty-odd miles away on the banks of the Hudson River. That wasn't so far. She was that close to civilization. She felt a touch of shame in thinking of Highland Landing as "civilization." Certainly Cedar Bush was a progressive settlement, growing rapidly, and more "civilized" than some of the towns much closer to the river. Before she turned into the house, however, she looked up at the dark outlines of the mountains silhouetted against the evening sky. She saw Dan's Point, and she remembered the talk of Joseph Brant. She could picture a long silent file of war-painted Mohawks winding through the pass below the point. An owl hooted in the wood lot. She started, then shivered, and went inside the cabin, closing the door behind her.

3

THE TAVERN in Cedar Bush was on the road from Highland Landing, in the center of the small group of cabins which comprised the town. It was a two-story building, with the top floor jutting out on three sides. There were three windows

front and rear on the top floor, and one window on each side. All were flanked by heavy shutters with loopholes. On the ground floor were the family dining room, living quarters for the landlord and his family, and the taproom. All windows had the same kind of stout shutters as did the upper floor.

"Make you a good fort," Elerson said as they approached the building.

"Guess that's what they had in mind when they built it," Tom Currie told him. "But we've got a big fort down toward the river, with a stockade big enough to hold all the livestock in Cedar Bush. Then a couple of the houses near the fort are fixed up to hold off Indians, so we've really got three forts —four, counting the tavern here."

"What you need 'em for? Thought you wasn't scared of war parties? Anyway, you only need one if it's big enough."

"Don't ask me, Dave. I wasn't here when they were built. Years ago, even before the French war, they used to have trouble."

Murphy was standing at the entrance to the taproom, peering up at the tavern's sign. "What's that sign, Tom? I can't quite make it out."

"Used to be a picture of General Wolfe, Murph. They called this place the Wolfe Tavern. When the Liberty Boys got acting up a few years ago, Ike Youngblood crossed out the word 'Wolfe' and left just 'Tavern.' Some folks didn't like him crossing out Wolfe's name. Used to be lots of Tories around here. There were a couple of free-for-alls in the taproom about it. Then the Sons of Liberty objected to the red coat, so Youngblood painted it white. Then some of the older ones claimed that made the soldier look like a Frenchman, and they didn't like that. So a couple of years ago, Youngblood painted the coat blue and wrote in 'Washington' where 'Wolfe' used to be. A little cramped for space, maybe, but it suits everybody now."

"Folks sure are touchy about politics, ain't they?" said Murphy.

"Let's go inside," Dave said. "I've got an awful thirst."

It was a big room, bright and cheerful, with white-painted

walls of milled lumber. Tables and benches were scattered about. A great fireplace filled one entire wall of the room, and there was a small bar opposite. Above the bar was a crude painting of a resplendent General Wolfe dying happily on the Plains of Abraham. On another wall was a painting of a soldier, possibly intended to be Washington, mounted on a steed which bore a remarkable resemblance to a white bull without horns. Between two small casks behind the bar a large mounted bird with dusty bedraggled feathers tilted perilously.

Dave Elerson nudged Tom and nodded at the stuffed bird. "What in hell's that thing?" he asked in a whisper.

"Can't you tell? It's a turkey, Dave. I shot him last winter when I was working for Youngblood, providing meat for the tavern."

"Turkey, huh? Good thing nobody et him. He sure enough looks like a dirty old buzzard to me."

"Don't let Youngblood hear you, Dave," Tom grinned. "He stuffed it himself."

"What'd he do? Pull all the feathers off the outside and use 'em for stuffing?"

There were seven or eight farmers seated at tables near the huge fireplace. They nodded or called greetings to Tom as he guided his guests to a little table in one corner of the room. They all stared curiously at the two scouts. Tom smiled to himself, thinking that they'd soon gather around to find out who the strangers were, and what was the latest war news from wherever they'd been.

Youngblood, the landlord, a tall beefy man with a pleasant face, came from behind the bar and crossed to their table. "Evening, Tom," he said heartily. "Evening, men. You strangers in this part of the country?"

"Never been here before, and can't see myself coming back," said Elerson morosely, looking past the landlord at the stuffed turkey. "Specially if I eat one of your turkey dinners."

Youngblood flushed. "I serve the best food anywheres from New York to Albany, mister."

"Sure," Dave said. "Don't mind me. I just don't go much for turkey, is all."

"What'll you have?" Youngblood asked.

"A big bowl of flip, Ike," Tom said.

"Your biggest," added Dave.

"With plenty of rum in it," said Murphy.

"West Indies Rum," said Dave.

"None of that New England stuff," said Tom. "That made me sick up to Boston."

"Right you are," said Youngblood. "A bowl of flip." He returned to his bar.

"All right now, Murph. I've asked you four times since you came," Tom said. "What are you doing down here?"

"Just visiting, that's all. Paying a friendly visit."

"Sure," Dave remarked while he eyed the landlord's mixing of the flip. "We got tired of waiting for Clinton and Sullivan to get off their tails and get moving, so we got to thinking that you were stuck away off on a farm, just married, that maybe you hadn't heard all the latest news about the war and all. We thought that maybe you'd forgot there was a war. Murph said we'd better come on down and see this wife of yours that made you turn farmer. Now that I seen her, I can understand it better."

"She hadn't anything to do with it," Tom said uncomfortably. "I got tired running the woods. There's no future for a man that way. What's he got to look forward to? No family or no one to take care of him when he gets old. Except maybe a squaw somewheres in the Indian nations and a passel of light-colored kids who don't even know they're not all Indian, and who would be shamed if they did know." While he spoke, Tom knew that Jessica had been the only reason he'd come back to his father's farm here in Cedar Bush. He knew he was right about the rest of it, though—a trapper could look forward to nothing but miserable old age, if he was lucky, and if he wasn't, then maybe he'd get sick some winter and freeze to death or get his scalp lifted.

"Nobody said nothing about running the woods," Dave answered. "Like I said, there's a war going on, only some

folks don't seem to realize it." He looked over at the farmers near the fireplace. "Anyways, this is Major Parr's idea, when you get down to it. He was the one who told Murph we ought to come down for a look."

"How is Parr?" Tom asked. "Still hate the British as much as ever? And all the rest? How are they?"

"We all miss you, Tom," Murphy said simply. "We could have used you up to Schoharie these past few months. Butler and Brant! Brant and Butler! I'd like to line either of them up in the sights of that Golcher. Particularly Walter Butler. I'd give a year's pay to lift his hair."

"Murderin' skunks," muttered Dave.

Youngblood brought a great pewter mug of flip and four glasses to the table. "I'll have the first one with you," he said as he poured the flip. "Your health, gentlemen."

They raised their glasses to his. Murphy and Elerson drained their glasses in the first tilting and held them to be refilled.

"Good flip," said Dave.

"Nice of you to say," Youngblood told him. "I heard you mention Butler and Brant. You just down from the Mohawk? I got a brother-in-law farming up to German Flats. Name of Wynkoop. You heard news from there?"

"It's quiet right now," Murphy said. "They had some trouble earlier. Brant's mostly down at Unadilla this summer. Butler and his father is all over, like cow dung in a meadow. Hit and run is what they do. A scalp here, a barn-burning there, and all we can do is chase 'em."

"Name of Wynkoop?" said Dave. "Seems to me a party of Rangers and Senecas carried off a boy of that name from German Flats around the end of May. We followed 'em, but never caught up with 'em."

"Boy about twelve years old? Name was John, I believe," Youngblood said.

"Sounds like him. I should say that was the one," Dave told him.

Youngblood nodded sadly. "My sister's boy. The oldest. You'll excuse me. I'll go tell my wife."

"Tell her he'll be all right," Elerson added. "They mostly don't harm 'em at that age. Teach him their ways and treat him pretty good. That's what they generally do. When your sister gets him back, end of the war, she'll have trouble telling him he ain't an Indian. Kids take to it."

"Kids aren't the only ones," Tom remarked. "You're half-Indian yourself, Dave."

"Maybe so. But I'll tell you—being half of an Indian ain't nowheres near as bad as being even the smallest part of a farmer."

Tom Currie was eager to talk to the two riflemen about their adventures since the spring of 1778, but he noticed that most of the farmers had left their tables and were slowly approaching in a half circle close enough to listen.

"Step up, men," he said. "I'll stand treat when Ike comes back. Want you to meet my friends, Tim Murphy and Dave Elerson."

A murmur of welcome came from the assemblage.

"Heard a bit about you," one of the farmers said to Murphy.

"Yeah," one of the others ventured. "We heard about the way you picked off that British general at Saratoga. Shot him right off his horse, the way I heard it. That right?"

"Wasn't much of a shot," Murphy said. "Morgan told me that was Fraser and said to climb a tree and knock him over. So I did."

"Man told me," the farmer said, "that you got a charm on that gun of yourn."

"No charm," Tim smiled. "Shoots straight and shoots twice, that's all."

"Heard you've killed close to a hundred with that rifle," the first man said.

"Closer to two hundred," Elerson told him.

Tim Murphy beamed and his bright blue eyes twinkled as he took another drink. Tom Currie could sense one of Murphy's tall tales coming. He decided that news came first.

"Murph," he said, "I think we'd all like to hear what's happening up north. What's this we've been told about Sulli-

van and Clinton moving troops against the Long House?"

"That's right," Murphy said. "Congress—I suppose you all know how wonderful that Congress of ours is about doing things right away when they have to be done—well, Congress decided about two years ago that the only way to keep the hostiles off the settlements was to go into their own country and burn 'em out. So now, two years later, the fiddle-faddling is all done and we're going. That's pretty fair time for Congress at that. Two years. Course, you remember, they were a little faster when we were at Valley Forge—we asked 'em for stuff to keep us alive all winter and we got some of it pretty fast. In the spring, just as soon as the winter was over.

"You see, there's been only a few hundred people killed on this frontier. Killed and carried off, I mean. That ain't really so many to worry about, when you figure how hard Congress has to work to decide something. Why, I hear it took 'em a hell of a long while to figure out how much gold to use to gilt-edge all their papers. Seems there were a few silly bastards who wanted to use gold to back up the money they paid the army with. But that's neither here nor there. Yes, we're going up into the Indian country. You know that just about every Indian in the Long House is a farmer, or at least his squaw is, so we figure to burn their towns and crops, just the way they been doing to us. That will push them way up into Canada, maybe, and the British will have to feed 'em."

"How many men you going to have?" one of the farmers asked.

"Close as I can figure, about five thousand, with artillery, and a good bunch of Morgan's riflemen, which, of course, is the same as another five thousand."

"How you going to go?"

"Well now, that's supposed to be a big secret. Any Tories here, Tom?" Murphy asked blandly, taking another long drink of flip.

"None I know of, Murph," Tom said.

"Well, I'll tell you. Sullivan and Washington and Clinton did lots of letter-writing on that point. They talked her back

and forth for several months, the way generals do. Then they did what they should have done in the first place. They called me and Dave here in and asked us what the best way was, and we told 'em. So that's the way they decided to go. Takes a general a long time to get to the point of something, you know. If it didn't, all the wars would be short ones, and all the generals would be out of work. Generals may be pretty stupid in most ways, but they're smart as ticks when it comes to looking out for Number One." He glanced around the circle of faces and then looked at Elerson. "Ain't that so, Dave?"

"Yeah," Dave nodded gravely. "I never hold much with generals. Every time there's a fight they get in the way. 'Cepting maybe that Arnold. He's pretty good, if he wasn't so damned eager to get everybody shot. Always riding up and down, wavin' a sword and hollerin': 'Go get 'em, men!' when anybody with a grain of sense wants to pick a good big tree to hide behind and let the redcoats come and get us."

"We're going to meet Sullivan at Tioga Point on the Susquehanna," Murphy continued, "and then we're going to cut right up into the Seneca country. We been at Lake Otsego since the first of July. Here it is the middle of the month, and we ain't moved yet. That's another thing about generals. They find a good spot to rest their backsides in, and they stay there. Well, Dave and I thought we might's well drop down here to Highland County and see how our old friend Tom Currie is making out at being a farmer."

"What do you think Brant and Butler will be doing?" asked the farmer who had been leading the questioning, an ensign in the local militia. His name was Bezaleel Finch. "All this time, I mean, that you're starting up into the Seneca country?"

"That's a good question," Elerson remarked. "Shows your mind works the right way. Now I figure it this way—Butler and his Tories and the Senecas will likely fight first-off, until we lick 'em once. But Brant, now. He's over to Unadilla or some place thereabouts. He might figure to get behind us. Then he'll need supplies, because we're going to be right in

his supply country so he can't get 'em there. Now where do you suppose he'd figure to get supplies? What's the most likely place you know of? You been asking good questions. See can you give me a good answer to that one."

Elerson nodded glumly to Finch, as Ike Youngblood re-entered the taproom.

"Flip for all of us, Ike," Tom Currie said.

"I know what you mean," Finch said to Dave Elerson. "It ain't really so far from here to Unadilla. But do you think he'd cross the mountains?"

"Tom Currie knows Brant for ten years or more," Dave answered. "You ever see any mountain stop Joseph Brant, Tom?"

"We're pretty far down, Dave. And the militia is strong. We've got a lot of men."

"Militia!" Tim Murphy spat.

"We drill once a week," Finch declared indignantly. "That's more than most companies, even up to Schoharie."

"Once a week!" Murphy repeated. "That's fine. That's very good, if I do say so myself. Say, Dave, how many times a week do you figure Brant and his Mohawks drill?"

"Can't say. I ain't up on military matters like that. I never drilled once yet, and I been in the army four years."

When they'd finished the second mug of flip, most of the farmers left for the evening. Finch paused on the way out.

"Would you men be around for a day or so?" he asked. "Colonel's coming over from Gardinerville tomorrow or next day. We'd like you to talk to him, wouldn't we, Tom?"

"Leaving in the morning at sunup," Murphy said. "Clinton might decide to get off his tail any time now. Sorry we can't oblige you. Maybe the colonel can bring you all up to Tioga Point. We'll be glad to talk to him there. We could use some well-drilled militia."

"Harvest is coming up. We can't go off fighting just like that," Finch answered. "Anyway, the past three years plenty of us has been with the army. I was to Canada with Arnold," he added proudly.

"The Smallpox Army," said Dave. "How come you to miss catching it?"

"I had it, all right. I was lucky; it don't show much," said Finch.

"Well, only chance your colonel has of seeing us is to come to the Susquehanna. Anyway, we'll tell Tom here all about it and he can tell your colonel."

Later, Murphy asked Tom: "You in this militia business?"

Tom nodded shamefacedly: "I'm a lieutenant."

"I'll be goddam! A lieutenant. You have to drill once a week, too?" asked Elerson in mock amazement.

"They're pretty good men and they'll fight if they have to," Tom answered with some anger. "Colonel Testing is a fine man, sensible and a good officer. He's a doctor over Gardinerville way."

"Maybe he'll have some business at both trades before the summer's over," Elerson said. "You better keep both eyes peeled, Tom, and take a look-see up in those mountains every once in a while. Brant ain't going to sit still. That ain't his style and you know it as well as I do. And you said yourself they was down this way in the spring. They seen you all laid out here in this valley like a row of sitting partridges."

"Never mind Dave's worrying, Tom," Murphy told him. "What we came down for is this. Parr wants you with us when we go into the Long House. You know that country better'n any of us. You lived in there for years. We need you. What do you say?"

Tom Currie smiled slightly. "Bez Finch told you how it was, Murph. Harvest is coming up. I got corn and wheat and some rye in my fields. I got cows coming in with calves. I only been married a few months. You'll have to make out this time without me. I'd like to go—you know that. But I've got to finish making my start here. It takes some time to get a farm going again after it's been sitting idle for ten years. This war isn't going to end this summer. I've fought in it already, and I'll fight again. But not this year."

"We need you," Murphy said again.

"These colonies need farmers as much as they need soldiers.

For a while, anyway, I'm going to be a farmer. That's my answer, Tim. Tell Parr and the rest of them that I'm sorry. Chances are I'll walk into camp, wherever you are, sometime before the war is over."

"I can remember when you'd get mean-mad because they'd all take French leave to go home and get the crops in," Dave reminded him.

"I wasn't a farmer myself, then."

"You think it over between now and morning, Tom," Murphy said. "We have to get started back. We'd like you with us."

"I'd like to go, Tim, but I won't. I'm sorry."

"Women!" Dave exclaimed. "There won't be any woodsmen left if the women have anything to do with it."

"It's not that, Dave. It's just that I've started something here and I've got to get it set up before I can leave it. I don't want you to think it's my wife that's holding me back."

But he knew it was.

4

THE CURRIE CABIN, when Tom's father had built it thirty years before, had been the finest dwelling in Cedar Bush. It had two large rooms and a loft. Most of the earlier settlers in Cedar Bush had built their stock-barns and pig-sheds attached to their cabins, but Nat Currie had long been a farmer near Highland Landing, where farm people, and particularly their women, were more meticulous about their homes. His barns were a good fifty yards from the house, although in the winter snows he had often wished he had not been so vain. Now that Cedar Bush had become a settlement of more than twenty families, several of whom were the second and third generation to live there in the town's fifty-year history, the Currie cabin was no longer worthy of remark. There were several two-story frame houses clustered around the fort in the hamlet across the Deerkill. Almost everyone was talk-

ing of building a frame or stone house. Tom Currie wasn't ready to start thinking about that yet. It would probably be two years more before he finished reclaiming his father's farmland from the brush and brambles which had crept on it in the ten years since his father and mother had died. Tom had set his mind on a frame house with five or six rooms, but apparently Jessica wanted one built of stone when the time came. A stone dwelling was cheaper in the long run, but it involved more time and labor, and it would be more difficult to heat in the winter. Of course, it would be cool during the summer. Well, if that's what she wanted, Tom often thought, that's what she would have.

The Currie cabin had a log exterior, but the rooms were finished with wide mill lumber. In the kitchen, the largest room, the fireplace and chimney occupied most of the north wall. The kitchen chairs and table were of roughly-adzed lumber, but Jessica Currie had brought two fine cane-bottomed mahogany chairs from Highland Landing for her living room. She'd never thought to ask Tom if she would have a living room. These chairs now were kept in the kitchen beside her china cabinet, which housed the china and silverware with which she had served Murphy and Elerson.

The loft, which they seldom used, was entered by way of a ladder kept propped against the kitchen wall. The other, smaller room was the bedroom, containing a high deep feather bed covered by a white silk counterpane embroidered in blue. This had been a wedding present and was the envy of very woman in Cedar Bush. They had all come to visit Jessica on one pretext or another, although she liked to consider their visits neighborly, just to see that silk counterpane. The other furniture in the bedroom was fine but not ornate. There were a chair, a washstand, a wardrobe, and a chest of drawers.

One respect in which Jessica Currie's cabin differed from most of those in Cedar Bush, and even from the frame and stone houses, was that she had curtains on all the windows. Many of the other cabins had not even glass in the window frames.

Long after Tom had taken his friends to the tavern, Jessica sat sewing by the light of a candle on the kitchen table. There wasn't much sewing which had to be done, but she wanted something to keep her hands busy while she thought. Most other evenings after the work was done, and after the lights of Cedar Bush across the stream had been snuffed out, she and Tom sat in the kitchen by candlelight while he read aloud from her father's books, and she occasionally corrected his pronunciation or defined a word with which he wasn't familiar. She had been very proud of his progress and quite pleased with herself for having found a way to help him, who knew so much she could never understand about the wilderness and its ways.

She knew why Murphy and Elerson had come. She wouldn't even have to ask Tom when he came home. She'd know what he'd made up his mind to do as soon as she saw his face, or if the lights were out, as soon as she heard his voice. She didn't want to pray that he wouldn't go. That wouldn't be quite fair. There was almost a knowledge within her that he should go, that she would be selfish to hold him. They needed him, that was sure. He knew more about the Six Nations, probably, than anyone they had—except maybe those two who were with him tonight. Without any feeling of conceit, she realized that there might be times when he could be the most valuable man at a particular moment that the colonies had.

So those two were woods-runners, like Tom. She'd always thought that it was the wildest, most undisciplined life a man could lead, and she had considered Tom, with his quiet ways and the gentleness which was hidden beneath his strength, to be an exception among frontier men. But those two weren't really as bad as she'd expected. Maybe they were just a little bit dirty, but they'd had a long trip. All the way from up near Cherry Valley, they'd said, and they'd come through the mountains without stopping for more than a few hours. She shivered. She was thankful for those protecting mountains. It would be terrible to live up there on the border of what Tom called the Long House. The Indians were likely to

come running out of the woods any minute of the day. Here at least there was far less danger—none at all, some people said—although she knew that Tom had been concerned during the spring months and that he'd been the one to suggest that the militiamen make frequent patrols through the foothills.

She wished that she could like it more here in Cedar Bush. She thought that perhaps neither of them really enjoyed this life, although he seemed happy and contented, and she hoped that her own dissatisfaction didn't show. He was used to the woods and its ways; she had always lived in a big town, and as a Bellnap in Highland Landing, she'd had just about everything she had wanted. Here there were so many things that she really needed and couldn't have. The other women did without them, too, but that was different. They were used to it. She imagined that made all the difference in the world. How many times had she vowed that she would accustom herself to it. But she and Tom had compromised, and now it just wasn't working out as it should for either of them.

She wanted to do everything possible to make him happy. He worked so hard to get the farm back into production after these ten years of lying fallow. But she missed her family, and she missed the variety of life in Highland Landing. There had been picnics, and trips on the river, and parties for army officers—there had been so many things which she would never see in Cedar Bush. She couldn't help thinking that this was a drab little backwoods hamlet in which she would have to spend the rest of her life. There was no question about it—she was homesick.

Most of all, she missed the man she had married. Because Tom wasn't the same. He was too quiet now, almost taciturn. He worked too hard and worried too much. And sometimes he would sit beside her silently for a long time and she'd know he was hundreds of miles away, traveling a trapline, or hunching down to a meal in an Indian village. Just after sunup he would leave for the fields, and he would be out there until the sun began to dip behind the mountains. All day long he did work that he hadn't done since he was seven-

teen, when his father and mother had both died in the same winter and he had left the farm and crossed the mountains to live with the trappers and Indians. All day, every day, he did the work which he had wanted never to do again.

So, instead of being quite happy and contented on the farm, they both wanted the things they'd left behind them. Only when he climbed into the great bed beside her in the dark nights, was it the way it had been when they were first married. Sometimes when she was alone she blushed and wondered if she should be ashamed when she thought of his long sinewy body, the fierceness and intensity of his love-making—after all these months it was still just like their wedding night. He'd told her he felt that way, too. She hoped it would never change.

This evening, however, had been the first time since their marriage that she had worried about the immediate future. Murphy and Elerson would want him to go back with them. That was why they were here. The war showed no signs of letting up, although things looked brighter than they had back in the winter of Valley Forge. Here it was—July of 1779—and the war had been going on since the summer of 1775. Tom had already spent almost three years fighting. She knew he wanted to go back. Well, she wouldn't try to stop him. She'd know as soon as he came from the tavern tonight. She didn't pray—she just hoped—that he'd stay. If he did, she would try to make herself a better wife for him. She'd like it in time—she knew she would—if he would only stay with her.

Finally, Jessica rose and put her sewing away. She took a last look around, and replaced Tom's rifle on its hooks above the fireplace. He must have been excited about Murphy and Elerson, she thought, or he never would have left that gun standing by the door. He's careful with his things.

Later, she lay in bed sleeplessly, gazing into the darkness. Through the window she could see a few stars shining in the clear sky. This was the first time she had lain in this bed without him beside her. Usually when he went down to the tavern of an evening, he'd be back long before closing to tell

her the war news and what was happening in the county. This time he was late, however. She hoped those two wouldn't get him drunk. Well, what if they did? He had little enough gaiety on the farm. If he wanted to carouse with his old friends, she wasn't going to be angry. She smiled in the darkness. What would he be like drunk? It would be something else about him for her to learn. Would he be solemn and silent? That was possible, but somehow she thought he would whoop like an Indian, dance and sing, and smash up a few pieces of furniture. That would be something to see.

Well, she wouldn't think about him any more. It might be bad luck to wonder what he would decide. She'd concentrate on other things.

So her mind went back through the months, all the way back to that autumn day in 1777 when he had arrived in Highland Landing.

It was a few weeks after the battle of Saratoga. His wound hadn't healed readily, and since his enlistment was up, he'd come home to Highland County, planning to spend the winter hunting and trapping before the army was ready for the spring campaigns. He had stopped in Highland Landing to pay the taxes on his father's farm in Cedar Bush. He might have sold it years before, since it was good cleared land, but he'd always held on, letting neighbors rent some of his fields, and paying the taxes every year from his trapping money—later, from his meager pay as a soldier.

Tom had met Colonel Elihu Bellnap in a Highland Landing tavern that day, and after they'd talked a few minutes and discovered they'd both just come from Saratoga, Bellnap invited him to his home for dinner and a night's lodging. That was how it had started.

Jessica was living with her cousins in the rambling old Dutch house which Jacob Bellnap had built in 1712, two years after he brought the first shipload of German settlers to Highland County from the Palatinate. Jessica was twenty-one in 1777, an age when most Hudson Valley girls would have been married for five or six years. Indeed, Elihu and his wife, as well as the various other Bellnap relatives, were beginning

to wonder why she had not chosen a husband long before. Her parents had been dead for several years, and she had mourned them for a long time, but that was over and done with, they thought. She should have a family already started. If she waited much longer, she would be an old maid and none of the Highland Landing young men, most of them away at the war now, would want to court a woman of such advanced age. She had had many suitors—after all, she was a beautiful woman—but never yet had she centered her affections. Jessica wasn't much concerned; she would marry when she fell in love. She remembered how, when she was three or four years old, her grandfather, old Jacob, would take her on his knee and tell her fairy stories. There was one about a handsome prince who would come to rescue her sometime when she needed him.

At dinner that evening, she thought of the old story, and although thrummed buckskins were certainly not the fitting garb for royalty, she knew that Tom Currie was the man. In spite of the incongruity of his appearance at her cousin's formal table—the buckskins, leggings, moccasins, his long dark hair which obviously hadn't been trimmed for months—she knew that having seen him once, she would never forget him. He was tall, strong, handsome; his patent unfamiliarity with the formalities of dining with such wealthy and influential people as Colonel and Mrs. Bellnap did not overcome his natural grace and self-confidence, his woodsman's aptitude for adapting himself to his surroundings. She noticed with approval and some amusement that he did not pretend to know the uses of all the silverware, but sat with his hands folded until one of the others picked up the proper fork or spoon. Then he took his own. She was reminded of a caged panther which had once been exhibited in Highland Landing; it had seemed so fearless and unconcerned at its strange surroundings and the crowds gathered to watch it. In its eyes had been a faraway look, as if already it was free once more and was roaming its mountains again.

Even as she realized that she was attracted to this man as she never had been to any man before, she immediately

despaired that anything would come of it. He paid not the slightest bit of attention to her, so far as she could see. His conversation was confined to brief remarks to Elihu about the war, and a few polite answers to questions her cousin Bess put to him. Well, if he wouldn't talk to her, she'd talk to him.

"Mr. Currie, those buckskins are picturesque. Do all of Morgan's men wear them?"

"No, ma'am."

"What do the rest of them wear?"

"Some linen, some cotton."

"Don't they have uniforms?"

"No, ma'am."

"Elihu told us that you're the best fighting men in the world. Is that right?" There, that would make him talk, she thought. He'd be modest and talk about others who could fight just as well. What would he say?

"Yes, ma'am."

"Come now, Mr. Currie. Do you mean to tell me that your men could stand up to the best regiment in the British army?"

"No, ma'am. We don't stand. We hide behind rocks and trees."

"Well, then, that proves my point. You can't meet them face-to-face."

"War means killing," Tom Currie answered softly. "The one who does the most killing wins the war. Morgan's men kill more Britishers than anybody else and don't lose half as many men. If everybody fought our way, we'd have won the war long ago."

He's conceited, she thought. Then she changed her mind. It's self-assurance. Anyway, I made him say more than two words at a time. She felt well-pleased with herself.

However, he was leaving in the morning for Cedar Bush—he would have started that evening, but Elihu was adamant—he wanted to talk about Saratoga and about other campaigns. Jessica thought that she would never see Tom Currie again. She wanted to tell him to come back, but that would not be proper. She hoped that Elihu would invite him to come again—she knew her cousin was quite taken with him, because

he had spoken at length to her and to Bess about Currie's reputation as one of the best of Morgan's riflemen. There was no sign of another invitation during dinner, however, and even if there had been, she thought that Tom Currie would not take advantage of it. He seemed totally unconcerned with her presence. He probably thinks we're just having sport with him, Jessica thought, inviting him out here to dazzle him with the Bellnap wealth.

After dinner, Elihu and his guest went to the library to talk, while Jessica and Bess helped the maid clear the table. When the maid finished and departed, Bess began to scold Jessica.

"I don't know what got into you! You were very bold, Jessica. Why, I've never seen anything like the way you threw yourself at that man, trying to make him talk to you. He's Elihu's friend, not ours. I trust Elihu won't be angry with you."

"Isn't he wonderful, Bess?"

"Why, Jessica! He's nothing but a backwoods bumpkin. I never heard of such a thing in all my days."

"Isn't he handsome?"

"He certainly needs to have his hair clipped."

"So tall and strong and sure of himself."

"Jess! What's got into you, for Heaven's sake?"

"Let's go in and listen, Bess."

"No. We couldn't do that. I'm sure Elihu would disapprove," Bess said. Most of her waking thoughts were devoted to worrying about Elihu's disapproval of every decision she made during the day. He might be four hundred miles away with the army, and still she worried. The fact that he had never said a harsh word to her in all the years of their marriage did not matter in the least. Her fondest wish was that Elihu would assume the role of patriarch in Highland Landing which old Jacob Bellnap had held for so many years. Her husband was a distinguished-looking man in his late forties, always seeming stern somehow, yet Jessica knew, as did Bess, although she wouldn't admit it, that the sternness was a cloak for the youthful spirit which he felt didn't befit his station.

"Besides," Bess continued, "they're going to talk the way men do about battles and armies. It wouldn't be proper."

"Proper or not, I'm going in! I'm not going to lose any time with the most fascinating man I've ever met."

"He's just a trapper, Jessica, a scout," her cousin said gently. "We'll never see him again. You shouldn't be acting this way about him."

"That's just it, Bess. That's why I'm going to listen to him. I may never have the chance again. Come with me."

"Well, I don't approve of this, but all right. I'm sure that Elihu is going to be angry with us."

Tom Currie was talking of his trapping days when they entered the library. Jessica gathered that he had gone beyond the frontier when he was just a boy, and had spent most of his life among the Indians of the Six Nations.

"I met Joseph Brant that first winter I was up there," Tom said. "That was in '68. He was helping Sir William Johnson then and did a lot of traveling in the Long House."

Elihu nodded. "Yes, I met him once at Johnstown."

"What's the Long House, Mr. Currie?" Jessica asked.

"It's the Indian name for what we call the League of the Iroquois, the Six Nations. You can use it for the country they live in, or for the council of tribes themselves."

"Indian names are always so descriptive," Jessica said.

"Yes, ma'am," Tom said. "Well, Brant and I were good friends," he continued. "I'd like to tell you, sir, that he's not the man most folks make him out to be, unless he's changed considerably since he went to England. I haven't seen him since."

"You mean Brant, chief of the Mohawks?" Jessica asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Why, people call him 'Brant the Monster.' I've heard them. That name has been in the newspapers."

"I knew a different Joseph Brant. He may have changed, but I doubt it. Of course, he's an Indian and has Indian ways, and now he and his people are fighting the same way they always have. But I think he's a good man in spite of it all, even if he is on the other side. That's another thing

about him I admire. We used to talk about what was coming. He said he and his people took their oath to the King, and he would keep it. How many white men are always true to their word when it might pay them to break it? He thought the world of Sir William Johnson, and used to tell me that Johnson was the only white man his people could trust. He was right, too. The settlers break all the treaties and nothing will stop them from stealing the land that Johnson watched over for the Indians. Every time they turned around in the years just before the war, the Indians saw a new settlement popping out of the woods right behind them, driving the game out of the country, ruining the trapping—most of all, stealing the land which was their own and which had been promised to them forever."

"That's a trapper speaking," Elihu said, smiling a little. "You can't halt the growth of the country, Mr. Currie. If we win this war, I believe we'll live to see—in our lifetime, mind you—settlements all the way to the Mississippi, along its entire length."

Tom nodded. "I've been out there, sir. It's a great country, bigger and richer than most men dream of. But it's Indian country. They'll fight for it. I know they will, and they'll be right. Why, we're fighting for our own country right now."

Elihu smiled again. "Of course, Mr. Currie, that's true. But most people, as you know, are pretty selfish. Not many of us will look at the Indians' viewpoint. Other men have told me what a wonderful land lies beyond the Ohio, and nothing is going to stop our people from taking it for their own. Not the Indians, not the British! If we lose the war, we'll fight again. The Indians will try to keep us out, but they will lose and the country will move westward. It's inevitable."

Tom Currie grinned wryly. "It will ruin all the trapping country. The trappers will have to keep ahead of the settlers, and some of those western tribes don't take kindly to white men."

He ran his hand swiftly across the top of his head, grinning again. "If I was a bald-headed man, maybe I wouldn't care so much."

Jessica shuddered at his implication. She marveled that he could joke about it.

"Your opinions on Joseph Brant and his Indians, Mr. Currie," said Elihu, "might not be too popular in our frontier towns."

"I know it. Most settlers reach for a musket as soon as they see an Indian, even if it's only an old Oneida farmer coming to the store for some rum or tobacco."

"What are your plans now, Mr. Currie? Are you going to rejoin the army soon?"

"Not just yet. I'll let this shoulder heal first. There won't be much doing from now until spring. The British don't like cold-weather fighting. I'll go out to Cedar Bush and fix up my father's house a little—I haven't been there in close to four years. Maybe I'll sell the farm now. It's hard to meet the taxes. Then I figure to hunt some deer and bear up in the Catskills. Maybe I'll head back for the army in a couple of months, and maybe I'll wait till March or so."

"Hunting in the Catskills!" Elihu exclaimed. "I haven't been on a hunting trip in seven—maybe eight—years."

"Come along with me, sir. I know that country pretty well. We'd get some shooting. I usually supply some meat when I'm home for the Cedar Bush people in return for them taking care of my place."

"I'd like nothing more," Bellnap said. "But I'll be home only a month. And there's business here—"

"Go ahead, Elihu," Jessica exclaimed. "It will do you good." She hoped that he would; he might bring Tom Currie back with him. She was standing behind the chair in which Bess was sitting. Her fingers pressed sharply into her cousin's shoulder. Bess started.

"By all means, my dear," she said. "Go ahead. You should relax from your army worries."

"Maybe I will," Elihu mused, thinking a moment. "I'll tell you, Mr. Currie. If I come, I'll be in Cedar Bush with my gear Sunday week. Is that all right?"

"Fine, sir. I'll be waiting for you."

"I might very well do it," Elihu said. "I don't know why I shouldn't."

Elihu went on the hunting trip after a week of eager persuasion by Jessica and more reluctant agreement by Bess. He returned in two weeks' time, happy and carefree and seeming younger by years, driving a hired cart loaded with venison and bear meat already salted for the winter. His talk of Tom Currie was, for a man of Colonel Bellnap's years and his standing in the community, almost a small boy's adulation of a popular hero.

"The best marksman I ever saw! He says there are better shots among Morgan's men, but I don't believe it. He killed a bear going downhill with one shot at two hundred yards! I'm going to get myself one of those Pennsylvania rifles, Bess. And there's no man in the world knows more about the woods. Up near Silver Tip Mountain, he found a spot where he said two Oneida Indians who were traveling from Pennsylvania up to the Mohawk had killed a doe for food sometime last November. And all I could see was a pile of bones and the ashes of a fire!"

"Never mind that, Elihu," Jessica interrupted. "What did he say about me?"

"Yes," Elihu said. "Of course. I should have mentioned that first, before I was in the door. Seems to me he said something about you. Matter of fact, I got just a bit tired of talking about you all day long, every day, and on into the night. But he travels fast in the woods and I had such a time keeping up with him I'm not sure I heard him right. I think he asked me if he might come to Highland Landing again and pay his respects to you."

"He did! When is he coming? How did he say it? What else did he say? Oh, and I thought he was practically tongue-tied about anything but fighting and Indians."

"Wait, now! Wait. You're not even going to ask me if I approve of his coming?"

"Approve! Haven't you and Bess been trying to marry me off for the past five years? Haven't you dangled every man under forty in this town under my nose? All right, then. Be

satisfied. I'm going to marry Tom Currie, if he ever comes out of the woods long enough to ask me."

"Jessica!" reproved Bess. "He's only a trapper. How could he keep a home? What can he do?"

"What can he do? Didn't you hear your husband, Bess? The man can do anything!"

"He's not the kind of man we were thinking of for you, Jess," said Elihu seriously. "Beneath that quiet way of his, he's probably just about as civilized as a timber wolf. But I'll say this right now. You can't spend a couple of weeks in the woods with someone and fail to know him pretty well. If he ever asks you to marry him, I'll be proud to approve."

Jessica kissed Elihu's cheek and hugged his shoulders. "I knew you would!"

"He hasn't asked you yet," Elihu remarked dryly. "Hasn't even thought about it, probably."

"He will. I'll make him."

"But, Jessie," said Bess anxiously. "You don't seriously plan to marry a wild woodsman! Not a man you've met only once!"

"How many times had you met Elihu before you decided to marry him?"

"That was different. He was a man of standing in the community. And it was all decided beforehand."

"Yes," grinned Elihu. "Grandfather picked her out for me."

"Well, I'm deciding this beforehand," Jessica declared. "Before Thomas Currie has a chance to get away."

A month went by and there was no sign of him. The least he could do, she thought, is write a letter. Then she wondered if he could write. Well, if he couldn't, she would teach him. After a while she began to doubt that he was going to come. Scared away, she told herself. Maybe she'd been too forward that night.

Then he came to visit her. It was a bright cold evening midway in December. She was home alone; Elihu had long since rejoined the army, and Bess had gone out to dinner. She was overjoyed to see Tom at the door, but she tried not to show it. She was nervous. After all, she had met him only once before, and here she was alone in the house with him.

She soon decided, however, that there was no reason for nervousness. "Visit" was the proper word to describe the evening. His behavior did not justify so blatant a word as "courting." She had to keep the conversation going; he was voluble only about the things he knew best: the woods, trapping, Indians, and Morgan's riflemen. Even with these topics he displayed a dismaying economy of words. She was thankful, however, that he didn't seem embarrassed by the luxury of the Bellnap home and the various manifestations of wealth around him. Rather, she somehow sensed that he took it all for granted, as if, having decided that she was the woman he wanted, he thought it only fit that she should live this well.

He had decided, he told her, not to wait until spring to go back to Morgan's riflemen. He was on his way now. He'd heard the stories about desertions from what was left of Washington's army, and he figured he'd do more good at Valley Forge than he would at Cedar Bush. He wore his buckskins, of course, and they did not this time seem at all incongruous in the Bellnap dining room and parlor. Thinking about it, she decided that they were probably the only clothes he owned. She almost giggled as she looked ahead to their wedding day. Would he stand at the altar in St. George's wearing buckskins? She could see the lifted eyebrows and the turned-up noses. But no one would say anything. Not openly. Not about a Bellnap in Highland Landing.

He took the Lord's own time about getting to the point, she thought. Here he was going away to New Jersey or Pennsylvania or wherever Washington was right now, and it might be a year before he got back. Did he expect her to understand that he would come back and why he would? She was irritated at his taciturnity about the one thing they both were thinking of, and yet she was afraid she would scare him off if she appeared at all forward. It was a possibility—but she was beginning to think she would have to say something anyway, if he didn't speak soon. Here the evening was almost gone, and she was getting just a little tired of Indian stories. They were all right in their place, but not here and now.

When Bess came home, she offered him lodging for the

night, but he refused, saying he was going to start down-river and travel all night. When Bess went to bed, she left Jessica and Tom at the door.

"I'll be getting started," he said.

"I guess you'd better."

"It's a long trip."

"I can imagine."

"I'll be there by sundown, day after tomorrow."

"That's fast traveling."

He nodded. "After years of doing it, I can keep it up longer than most."

He picked up his pack, swung the straps under his arms and across his shoulders, and then reached for his rifle which was standing near the front door.

Suddenly Jessica lost her patience.

"Thomas Currie! Do you mean to tell me that you're going off to that army of yours for who knows how long without saying even one word to me about—without even—" And then she couldn't say it. She'd gone too far already. She'd frightened him! He'd go and he'd never come back. All she could do was look at him, without being able to say another word.

He gazed steadily back, his crooked little grin making his lean face more handsome than ever. He didn't seem frightened.

"About what, Jessica?" It was the first time he'd used her name.

Still she couldn't speak.

"You mean you want me to come back?" he asked softly.

"Of course I do!" she whispered.

"I will," he said. "You know I will."

Then he turned to the door and she thought for a despairing moment that he was leaving. Instead he placed the rifle carefully against the doorjamb and turned again. He took her in his arms then and kissed her. They stood there a long time in the dark foyer before he picked up the rifle once more. She held the door for him and watched until he had vanished into the darkness. Just as she was closing the door she heard a

long eerie scream come out of the night into which he had disappeared. She was terrified. What had happened to him? Then she remembered that Elihu had once imitated that scream as best he could. It hadn't sounded as fearsome as that one, however! She began to laugh.

She heard Bess come tearing down the stairs behind her.

"What was that?" Bess cried. "What was that scream, Jessica?"

"That, my dear cousin," said Jessica, "was a Mohawk war whoop. I jumped ten feet when I heard it."

"Who did it?"

"Tom."

"What in Heaven's name for?"

"I just told him I'd marry him, Bess, although I don't believe he asked me."

That winter was bitterly cold, and the news came from Valley Forge that the army was starving, that there was only a handful of men left, that everywhere people were conceding the victory to the British. They prayed for Washington and his men in St. George's, and the minister likened Washington to Gideon in the Bible.

Jessica worried about Tom when news arrived of the starving, freezing army, but remembering his strength and competence, she found it difficult to imagine him unable to look out for himself. The greatest danger was that he would get sick with no one to take care of him. She wrote to him often, although there weren't many replies from him. The letters he sent were surprisingly well written for a man without any formal education, although she remembered that he'd told her how his mother had insisted on his learning reading, writing, and arithmetic. His first letter told her that he wouldn't write often because he couldn't afford to pay the post fee. Sometimes, though, a Hudson Valley man returning from Valley Forge would stop at the Bellnap house with a letter from Elihu and occasionally one from Tom. Elihu wrote that he saw Tom often and that he was well.

"How is the army doing?" Jessica would ask the courier.

"Poorly, ma'am," was always the answer. "There ain't many left if you don't count the officers."

"And Morgan's men? How are they?"

"They're good scroungers, ma'am. If there's any fat left in the land of Pennsylvania, you can bet them Morgan men are living off it."

"Do you know Tom Currie in Morgan's regiment?"

"The tall feller give me that letter? Friends with Tim Murphy, the scout? He's all right—or was when he give me the letter. All of Morgan's men is better off than the rest. If I was you, I wouldn't worry."

The spring came, and she heard news of Morgan fighting in New Jersey. There were fewer letters from Tom as the army became more active, and then they stopped altogether. She worried for several weeks, thinking he had been killed in some obscure skirmish and she would never know. Then one day someone knocked at the door. She opened it, and then she was in his arms, kissing him and sobbing her relief while he held her tightly and whispered to her. Bess stood in the hallway, worriedly asking again and again what the neighbors would think, although the nearest house was two hundred yards away.

He was out of the army. He'd gone only for a six months' enlistment, and now he was going to start a new life for them, he told her.

"They don't need one more man," he said argumentatively, as if expecting her to contradict him. "It's been three years since I went up to Boston to fight. A man can't spend all his life in the army."

"No, dear," she said. "And you were at Valley Forge when they were all going home."

"If a man's going to have a family, he has to make plans," Tom said.

She realized she hadn't given a thought to what they would do once they were married. He told her he was going to take up his father's farm. He would need some time to get it started, he said, and then they would be married. He wanted everything fixed up before he took her there.

"I want to get married now, Tom," Jessica said.

"No," he said quietly. "The place isn't ready. I'll come and get you when it's time."

By no argument could he be persuaded not to wait, and finally she agreed. She knew how great a decision it was for him to give up his nomadic life and become a farmer, and she realized that he would have to start by himself. She wondered if he realized how much she would be giving up as well. After a two-day stay in Highland Landing, the most wonderful days she had ever spent, he left for Cedar Bush.

She had never imagined that she would be a farmer's wife, but now that it was decided, she determined to be a good one. She asked innumerable questions of everyone she knew who had ever lived on a farm and she absorbed as many of the puzzling answers as she could.

He came to Highland Landing sometimes during the summer, always dressed in his best buckskins and moccasins. He apologized for them, saying he hadn't the money yet to buy proper clothes. Everything was going into the farm.

In the autumn he became the hunter for the settlement of Cedar Bush, keeping those farmers who couldn't hunt themselves well-stocked with meat in return for supplies, various farm tools and services, and promises of labor in the spring. He received very little cash, except from Ike Youngblood at the tavern. He trapped in the Catskills during the winter, however, and was paid for his pelts in hard money. He felt rather ridiculous about trapping in those mountains, he told Jessica, because the area was the province of the farm boys in the valley below. While they took some fur from the obvious places, he worked his traplines far into the mountains, at times much too close to the Indian country to the west. Although there wasn't much danger from war parties in the winter, he took great care that he didn't blunder into any Indian hunters or trappers. Jessica thought of him every night when the winter had reached its peak. She could picture him huddled in a lean-to shelter on a bleak mountainside where the wind tore through the pine trees and screamed across the rocky slopes, where the snow drifted so high no man would dare to travel

through it. She wondered if she could ever understand a man who would undergo such hardships because he wanted nothing else. That's what he had done for years. They weren't even married yet, and already she was beginning to fear that the lure of that wild life would prove too much for him some day. Always, when she was his wife, she would have to tie him to her with her love, so that he would never want to leave. How many times had she seen in his eyes the fascination in which the vastness and the loneliness of the unsettled western lands held him?

He didn't come to Highland Landing through December, January, and February. She kept busy much of the time sewing linen for her new home, and making clothes for herself and for Tom.

It was early in March when he arrived and told her everything was ready. They had their first year of farming ahead of them, and now was the time to be married.

The wedding was in St. George's, as she had wanted it. It was a big wedding, with the church packed with relatives and friends of the Bellnaps. Tom looked very handsome, she thought, in his new clothes, although she knew he begrudged the money taken from the farm to buy them. She assured herself that he was by far the most handsome man ever married in St. George's. Bess had planned a big wedding party, but Tom said they couldn't stay. He had hired a boy in Cedar Bush to look after his stock, and if they didn't get started right after the wedding, they couldn't make the thirty-odd miles before the day was through. He'd have to pay the boy for an extra day. Jessica agreed. These details were most important in her new life, and besides, she was eager to get to her new home.

She'd never been past Gardinerville to the west before, although she'd been to New York and Albany many times. As they approached Cedar Bush, she noticed that she no longer saw many frame houses along the road, although there were some made of stone, and when they topped a rise, ahead of them was what appeared to be unbroken forest.

Once she mentioned it to Tom. "Lots of woods out here, aren't there, Tom?"

He laughed. "This isn't woods, Jess. Wait until you get up under the mountains there. From our place on up, there's only one cabin. Belongs to a man named MacDonald. He keeps to himself, mostly because he's a Tory and folks in Cedar Bush don't like him. I get along pretty good with him, as much as I see of him. Our house is the farthest one on the west edge of Cedar Bush, closest to the mountains. The Deerkill runs between us and the town. There's twenty families in Cedar Bush, last count. I don't know if they've added us yet, or not."

"Do we have any close neighbors, Tom?"

"Not what you'd call real close. There's the Quicks next to us, maybe a quarter-mile, and then Oscar Polhamus. All the others live pretty much together, across the river. I don't take so much to Quick and his wife, but Polhamus is a good fellow. He seems dumb until you get to know him. His wife is a nice woman." He glanced at Jessica and then said with some hesitation, "These aren't city folks, Jess. They're not much on manners and things like that, but they're good people."

"Of course, darling. I hope they like me."

"They won't be able to help it."

She was somewhat reassured on her fears about the wilderness when she saw the settlement ahead, with its white church and neat tavern, its cluster of houses near the big stone building enclosed by a stockade overlooking the Deerkill.

"That's the fort with the stockade around it," Tom said. "We haven't needed it yet, but it's good to have. Maybe they won't come down this way any more. I didn't see any sign at all during the winter, although it isn't likely there'd be any in the wintertime. Indians stick pretty close to home when it's cold."

They drove through town in the hired wagon. Jessica was pleased at Tom's obvious pride as he nodded and spoke to the few people they saw. He whispered their names to her as he greeted them.

"That's Terwilleger, the smith. He does good work. Was

one of the first here, years ago. The man by the tavern is Youngblood."

She noticed that most of the men were grinning openly at her, and she felt herself blushing. She wondered if they all knew she and Tom had been married just that morning. She thought some of the women she saw looked sullen. But maybe that was just her imagination. And they stared so! She hoped they wouldn't be unfriendly. She wouldn't be able to stand it. How could one live way out here alone without any women friends?

"The man with the white hair is Jacob Haskell, the storekeeper. Shall we stop and say a word or two with him?"

"No, Tom, please. Let's get home. I feel as if they're all staring at me."

"They sure are. It isn't every day a new woman comes to town. And such a good-looking one."

"If we stopped to talk I wouldn't know what to say."

"Just as well. They'd probably be tongue-tied themselves."

As they went on, Tom remarked that he liked old Haskell. "His prices are as good as can be out here, but maybe a few times a year we can go into Highland Landing to visit and buy."

"That will be nice," she answered. A few times a year! It was only a little more than thirty miles.

He seemed to sense her thought. "When I get my own team, we can go more than that. But I'll have to do with the oxen until maybe next year."

They were through the cluster of houses which formed the town, drove past the stockade, crossed the log bridge on the Deerkill, and then turned north along the stream's bank.

"Just a minute now, and you'll see it," he said, as they climbed a small rise. She noted the excitement in his voice. It was more than that. She knew how anxious he was that she like it right from the start. She determined that she would. Even though she was very tired from the long ride, she sat up on the wagon's seat and peered ahead. It was dusk; the forested slopes of the mountains were dark and forbidding. They came to the crest of the rise.

"There it is," he said, pointing.

All she could see was a few acres of bare cleared ground beside the river. She had to look for a long time before she saw the cabin. It was nestled against a slope above the stream.

Oh! she thought. It *is* a cabin! I thought he just used that word instead of house. It's so small, and I can see even from here that it's squat and ugly.

"You like it, Jessica?" he asked softly.

"Yes, Tom. It's beautiful," she said. "And it's ours. I'm so glad we're home."

She was ashamed for her first thoughts on seeing the farm, so she turned to him and kissed him tenderly.

"I love you, Tom," she whispered. "So very much."

It was dark by the time he had unloaded the wagon, put up the horses, and dismissed the grinning boy, son of Terwilleger the smith, who had cared for the stock in the three days Tom had been in Highland Landing. When he came into the house she was trying desperately to get a fire going in the great fireplace.

"Let me, Jess," he said.

She stood by watching as he expertly built a cooking fire. Then she began to prepare their meal in the pots and pans he had swinging on the crane in the fireplace. He stood beside her once more, watching for a few moments. Then he said gently again, "Let me, Jess."

In a few moments the smell of bacon frying and biscuits baking filled the room. He turned to her with a smile.

"See how easy it's going to be once you know how—" He stopped and came swiftly to her.

She was bent over in one of her mahogany chairs, her new apron over her face, her shoulders shaking with great sobs.

"What is it, Jess? What's wrong? Tell me."

"I'll never—" she began, and then started to sob again. "I can't be a good wife for you, Tom."

"Why not? What are you crying for? What's this all about?"

"I'll never learn how to do things," she sobbed.

He lifted her from the chair and took her in his arms. "You will, Jess. You will. It takes time." Then she clung to him and

wept again. He held her that way until she quieted and even managed to smile.

After dinner, she went into the bedroom to prepare for the night. She was frightened; she didn't know how this would be; she didn't know what Tom would expect of her. Bess had tried to tell her something about it, but had only succeeded in making the prospect more disturbing. When he came in, she lay there, wanting alternately to burst into tears and to run home to the safety of Highland Landing. Instead, she finally managed to whisper into the darkness, "Tom, will you tell me something?"

"What is it, Jess?"

"Do you— Do you know all about this?" She could hardly hear her own voice.

Something in his tone made her think he was grinning. "Not all," he said. "Just enough to get by, I guess."

"Tom, tell me something else?" She was sure he was almost finished undressing. She became more frightened by the moment. "Were you ever with a woman before?" she asked.

Several seconds passed. She thought he wasn't going to answer her. Then he said, slowly, "Yes, Jess. I was. Does that make a difference to you?"

"No, Tom, no!" It was her turn to be silent while she found the right words to say what she had been thinking. "Then, Tom, will you tell me if I—I mean, if there's any way I can be better— Will you tell me, Tom?"

He laughed aloud now, and she heard a swift sudden movement by the side of the bed and then his lips were pressed against hers and she felt for the first time the pressure of his firm body, and then he was caressing her. He whispered to her, and she knew she was answering him. All her fears vanished and she knew she would live in happiness with him forever.

Now, four months after that first night in the new home, she lay awake once more in the deep feather bed waiting for Tom to come to her. It seemed hours to her before she heard laughter and someone singing down by the river. From the mournful tone, she imagined it was Elerson. The cabin door

opened, and she heard her husband crossing the kitchen. Then he was in the bedroom. She lay quietly. She knew he wasn't going with them! She knew it! Then he spoke, whispering.

"You asleep, Jess?"

"No."

"Thought you would be. It's late."

She heard him undressing and tossing his clothes on the chair. He must have had a lot to drink, she thought, or he would hang them up.

"Jess."

"Yes."

"You looked at my buckskins lately?"

He's going, she thought in despair. I was wrong. He's going to the war again. And it's natural that he should, so I can't say a word. She was a long time answering. He spoke again.

"Have you, Jess?"

"No. They're wrapped up the way you said, so the mice won't get at them."

"I was wondering," he said. She heard him draw the curtain at the window and she saw the moonlight sweep into the room. Turning her head on the pillow, she could see his body outlined in the light as he looked across the fields and forest to the mountains.

"Think you could sew me a new shirt and leggings if I fixed the skins for you?" he asked.

"Not right away. It would take time," she answered shortly. At least, she thought, he won't be leaving tomorrow if he wants me to make buckskins.

"Hell, no," he answered, laughing. "Have to wait until fall to kill the deer, don't I? I was looking at Murph's new leggings tonight. That's what made me think of it. He had an Oneida squaw fix 'em for him. By God, I thought, Jess can do better than that! I'll be taking the hunting contract for the town again this winter. I'll need new hunting clothes."

She wanted to leap from the bed and run to him and throw her arms about him. Yet she didn't want him to know that she had imagined he would be leaving her. She remained silent.

"Not that I was comparing you to an Oneida squaw, Jess. Course, if you can't do it, I'll get one of the women—maybe Haskell's wife. She sews well."

Controlling her voice, she answered: "You'll do no such thing, Tom. I can sew as well as she can. That's one thing I can do well."

"I know somethin' else you're pretty good at, too," he said softly.

"What, Tom?"

"You know what I'm talking about."

He *did* have a lot to drink, she thought. She laughed happily and reached her arms out to him as he came close, and then she remembered the others. She recalled how many squeaks and rattles there were in the big bed. "Wait, Tom. Where are your friends? They going to sleep in the loft?"

"They're out in the barn. Dead drunk and sound asleep."

"Oh, my darling," she whispered as she drew him close to her. "I love you. I love you."

"The most beautiful woman in the world," he said softly, as if to himself.

"Thank you," she whispered, holding him tightly. "Tom, if we have a baby, wouldn't he be the prettiest one you ever saw?"

"Couldn't help but be," he answered. "I've seen mostly Indian papooses, and they're no sight for sore eyes."

"Tom, let's have a baby."

"Been trying to right along," he answered. "The only way I know how. A man can't do more than try."

"All right," she told him. "Let's keep trying until we do."

Much later, when she rose from the bed to draw the curtain he had left open, she glanced out toward the barn. She thought she could hear someone snoring through the still night air.

He won't be going with you, she exulted. You'll go back to your war without him.

5

JUST AFTER DAWN the next morning, Tom said goodbye to Murph and Dave and watched them head north along the Deerkill. They said they were going to stay on this side of the mountains and pass through the towns before heading west for Schoharie, Cobleskill, and Lake Otsego.

"Too damn hot to be hoofing it through those mountains," said Dave. "Besides, we'll stop every now and then in a tavern to have a drink."

"There's a lot of taverns between here and Cobleskill, Dave," Tom remarked.

"Twenty-two of 'em, if you make sure to hit 'em all," Murphy said, grinning. "We won't miss any."

Since Tom had made it clear the night before that he wouldn't go with them no matter what they said, they spent no time that morning trying to persuade him.

"We'll see you, Tom," Murph said simply.

Tom nodded. "Sure, Murph."

"Good luck to you, Tom," Dave said. "Keep both eyes open."

"I will, Dave. Goodbye. God keep you both."

He watched them pick up the steady pace which seemed to be a walk, but which would exhaust any other men in a few hours. They could maintain that speed for days. He watched until they reached the brush-lined path on the banks of the Deerkill, waved once when they turned and looked back, and then started for his fields. He didn't see Jessica in the doorway. She felt happy and secure in her victory, but as she watched him, she wondered if it were only temporary.

Across the stream, the little settlement of Cedar Bush lay quietly in the first morning warmth of the July sun. The drowsiness of a midsummer day gave the cabins and the fields an air of tranquillity. Even the smaller children played their games beside the cabins without undue noise. Here and there

in the green fields the farmers and their sons were cultivating corn, cutting brush or building fences.

In the field nearest the Deerkill beyond the stone fort, Daniel Dunning and three of his boys were making their hay crop. It had been an early summer, and most of the others had their hay made and stacked, but Dunning was late, as usual. He was a pint-sized man, round and irascible, with a rabbity face and a fidgety manner. He had raised a slew of hulking sons, five of them, all twice his size and all inordinately lazy. He'd been able to catch only three of them this morning; the two eldest had probably tapped some unknown source of energy and had risen before he did to go fishing for bass along the Deerkill.

Occasionally a woman left one cabin or another to walk to Haskell's store, sometimes pausing to chat a few moments with a neighbor who might be encountered. Mrs. Youngblood was energetically washing the windows of the tavern's lower floor. She did this at least once every two weeks, seldom bothering with those on the second floor. By staying on the ground, she could stop working and talk to anyone who might pass. The first person she saw that morning was Lucy Quick, one of the newer arrivals in Cedar Bush, whose husband Gabriel worked even harder than did Tom Currie, with much less effect. It was Mrs. Youngblood's private opinion that the Quicks were shiftless, since theirs was the meanest cabin and poorest land in the settlement.

"Morning, Lucy," she said to Mrs. Quick. "Nice day, ain't it? Going to get hot, though. I said to Ike, I better get these windows done before the heat of the day sets in. How's your husband?"

"He's fine," said Lucy.

"Looked a little peaked last time I saw him. By the way, Haskell's got some new cloth in. Nice reds and blues. Thought you'd like to know. A piece of the blue would make you a nice dress. Blue would set off that blond hair of yours nice."

"Thank you," Mrs. Quick said softly. She didn't intend to stay there talking. She didn't like Mrs. Youngblood. Always giving herself airs and talking about people's business. She

knew Gabriel didn't have any money to send his wife to Haskell's for dress goods.

"These windows!" Mrs. Youngblood remarked, as she did to everyone who passed while she was washing them. "Take a sight more work than they're worth."

"I suppose," said Lucy. She didn't have any windows yet—just shutters and oiled paper.

"Hear about them scouts to Tom Currie's place?"

"Gabe told me they were there."

"They told Ike they think we'll have the Indians down on us. You never know. You ought to be careful, being across the river there."

"I will," Lucy said, nodding and hurrying off.

She didn't have to say that about the Indians, Mrs. Quick thought as she approached Haskell's. As if I wasn't scared enough already, with only us and the Curries and the Polhamuses across the river there. I'm going to ask Gabe again if he won't give up farming. He could go into a business maybe, in Highland Landing. He's smart enough. He just ain't cut out for a farmer. But it won't do no good for me to worry about Indians. I'll tell Gabe to take his gun to the field. And we have the dog. He's ready to bark at anything comes near. She didn't have to say that. I'll take the long way about when I go home, and then she won't be able to say anything else.

After Haskell had sold Mrs. Quick the salt and needles she wanted, and had shown her the new cloth which they both knew she wouldn't buy because Gabe wouldn't let her run a credit even if Haskell agreed to it, she started for home.

Haskell was the settlement's harness-maker as well as storekeeper, although there wasn't much call yet for harnesses because most of the farmers had oxen. He hoped that in a few years more, if they won the war, all the Cedar Bush families would have horses, and harness-making would be a profitable business. He did well enough, though, getting an order now and then. He had even made a few saddles, and sometimes someone would ask for a fireplace bellows or something like that.

That morning Haskell gathered his tools and his leather

and went outside the store to work in the open air. He stretched and looked around before starting to work. By gol, this village sure had grown. He could remember when he and the Sheperds and Bez Finch's father had started felling trees to build their cabins. Now they had sons and grandsons living here. If it kept growing, they'd have a regular big town like Gardinerville.

Down by the bridge there seemed to be some kind of commotion. Haskell saw three men coming across past the fort and heading up this way toward the tavern. One of them was leading a horse, while one was pushing the third man ahead of him. The man being pushed was turning and gesticulating angrily. They were still too far away to see who they were—Mr. Haskell's eyes weren't what they used to be. He didn't even recognize the horse. Then he saw Daniel Dunning in his hayfield running and heard him yelling at the three men. As they came closer Haskell saw that two of the men were Dunning's boys. That was why Daniel was yelling. But Haskell still couldn't make out who the other one was. Now Dunning had left his field, his other three sons behind him, and they all were passing the church, prodding the unknown man onward.

Ah! That's who it was, Haskell thought. James MacDonald, from up the mountain. Wonder what in thunder's going on?

James MacDonald was a man who had little to do with the settlers in Cedar Bush. He had a scrubby little farm high on the mountain slope, although he did little farming that anyone could see. Of course, Cedar Bush people seldom went up there. He and his wife were a pair—sullen to passersby, uncommunicative, downright unfriendly. Perhaps they had reason to be. MacDonald had long been known among the settlers as a King's man, and everyone believed that he maintained a way station for Tories slipping through the mountains toward Niagara and Canada. Not only that, it was considered a fact that various scouts for the Butlers had visited him from time to time. Someone said that his wife was a second cousin of Colonel John Butler. There weren't many people left around Highland County who were suspected Tories—most of

them had cut and run for Canada early in the war. But MacDonald was a Scotsman—stubborn, everybody said. It was his land and he'd stay there, by God!

Mr. Haskell remembered that when that Polish fellow, Count Pulaski, had been stationed in the valley last year, he and some of his men had paid a visit to MacDonald's place but hadn't found any Tories or Rangers, either. That didn't allay any supicions in Cedar Bush, however.

As the Dunnings and MacDonald reached the center of the hamlet, they drew the attention of the men and boys working in the fields within sight of the village. They left their work and came running. Women came to the doorways of their cabins and watched the procession, shielding their eyes from the sun with their hands. Mrs. Youngblood stopped washing windows. She called her husband. Ike came from the tavern and stood beside her, arms akimbo, watching and waiting. He could see some of the young lads leaving the procession and running to get their parents. He knew it was something important, whatever it was.

As soon as they were near enough, Ike called to Dunning.

"What's the trouble, Daniel?"

Above the hubbub he heard Dunning's answering shout: "My boys caught the Tory all right this time!"

"You bastards leave go of me!" MacDonald yelled in his high-pitched voice, sounding not so much frightened as angry. "I ain't done nothing I ain't got a right to do."

The Dunning boys dragged him, protesting and twisting, to the tavern door. The crowd, some thirty or forty of them by now, ringed around him, the men asking what the trouble was, the women trying to shoo their daughters and younger sons home, while the children crawled through legs and skirts to get a better look at the Tory. They'd heard the word "Tory" used for years as a threat when they were ill-behaved. They wanted to see what one looked like. They were disappointed. He was a tall skinny man with buck teeth, dressed as their fathers were, and there seemed to be nothing extraordinary about him except his snarl, which became worse as his anger heightened and now became touched by fear.

"Leave me go!" he screamed. "You got no right to do this to me! You goddam bastards—"

"Quiet down now," ordered Youngblood. "Here comes Bez Finch and Whittaker. They'll take charge. Let's find out what this is all about."

"You dirty bastards take your hands off me!" yelled MacDonald once more.

"Let him stand," Youngblood said. "He can't run. And watch your tongue, MacDonald. There's kids and women here."

"I'll say what I goddam please!"

The oldest Dunning boy, Ephraim, lifted a meaty fist and cuffed MacDonald aside the head. "Shut up when you're told!"

Finch and Ben Whittaker, lieutenant with Tom Currie in the militia, moved inside the circle. "What's going on here?" Whittaker asked.

"I was riding my horse along, minding my own business," MacDonald said, "when these two sons of bitches—"

Ephraim Dunning cuffed him again, much harder, making him reel and stumble. "Don't call me names, you Tory scum!"

MacDonald regained his footing and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. A swatch of blood spread across his cheek.

"Wait now," Whittaker exclaimed, stepping between the two men. "Don't hit him again. I want to hear what happened. Eph, you tell me. But first, one of you boys run get Tom Currie. You there, young Terwilleger. Tell him to come right away. All right, Eph. Go ahead."

"Sure. Well, me and my brother Dave went fishing down the Deerkill—"

"Cut off from work before I was up!" yelped their father.

"—and we was sitting there with our lines out, maybe a mile down from the bridge, when we heard a horse coming down that mountain trail that leads to the swamp. We wondered what anybody would be going into the swamp for, so we went to take a look."

"I wasn't going to the swamp!" MacDonald yelled. "I was

crossing down below to go to Gardinerville to my brother's."

"Your brother's been to Canada these four years," Bez Finch said. "I know. I helped run him out."

"His wife and kids are there. I was going to visit 'em."

"That's a long way around to get to Gardinerville," said Whittaker.

"I didn't want to come through your dirty little town."

"All right. We'll remember you said that. What happened, Eph? Get on with the story."

"Well, like I said, we saw him coming along, so we hailed him. He didn't want to stop. Acted scared. Told us to get the hell out of his way. I didn't like the way he said it, him being a Tory and all, so Dave and I held the horse. He got madder, and we thought he looked guilty about something, so we began wonderin' what was in the sack he had. When I tried to take it, he kicked me, so I hauled him off the horse."

"Where's the sack?" Finch asked.

"Dave's got it. Full of fresh venison. Just killed—maybe last evening."

"Nothing wrong with that," Youngblood said.

"I was taking it to my sister-in-law," MacDonald snarled. "You dirty rebels chased my brother and left his relatives to provision his family."

"Fresh meat in a sack all the way to Gardinerville?" asked Eph Dunning. "In this heat? I don't believe a story like that, Ben."

"It's a fool trick," Ben answered, "but it don't prove nothing."

"We got something that does," called Dave Dunning. "Tell him the rest of it, Eph. The most important thing of all."

Eph pulled a folded paper from his pocket. "We found this in his saddlebag. Take a look."

Whittaker unfolded the paper. He whistled. "Goddam! Well, what do you know about that?"

The crowd eddied behind him to look over his shoulder. Those who couldn't see asked others what it was.

"A map! A map of this here settlement!"

A chorus of exclamations arose, and many of the men as-

sumed knowing airs, nodding seriously. For the most part, however, the significance of MacDonald's possession of a map of Cedar Bush was lost on them.

The map was carefully drawn in ink, showing all the houses, with the names of their owners indicated, the sawmill and the gristmill, the church, the tavern, all of it. Whittaker studied it carefully for a few moments, with everyone who could get close enough peering over his shoulder. Eph Dunning held MacDonald's arm. The Tory stared defiantly at the crowd, his tongue licking the blood off his lip, broken by one of young Dunning's blows.

"Taking this to your brother's wife, too, MacDonald?" Whittaker asked.

"Yes. I wanted her to come up to live with us. That's to show her the way and to show her what your town looks like. She's never been here."

"Don't she know the way? Anybody in Gardinerville knows how to get to Cedar Bush. You just follow the road."

"Well, she don't know it."

"Lived there all her life and don't know how to get over here? You're a damned big fool if you expect us to believe that, MacDonald."

"I don't care whether you believe me or not."

"Tell me this. What for did you put in all our houses and our names and just leave an arrow pointing your place? An arrow pointing *down* from the mountain. And you got all the mountain trails marked. How many ways is she going to use getting to your place?"

"None of your goddam business. Just leave me go."

Whittaker turned to the crowd. "Colonel's coming over today, boys. Now it seems to me that this Tory was going to use this map some way, and we'd all like to know what it was. Don't any of you start getting any wild ideas until the colonel comes. We'll keep MacDonald here so Testing can talk to him. I don't want any of you to start organizing any hanging party. You're all in the militia, and that's an order. While we're waiting for Colonel Testing, we can talk this over and try to figure it out ourselves. Eph, you and Dave

take him over to the blacksmith shop and tie him up. Come on in the tavern, boys. I want to look this map over again."

They crowded the tavern door behind him. Daniel Dunning, looking around importantly, motioned his three younger sons to get back to work.

"Damn militia business takes all a man's time," he said. "Looks like I'll never make my hay crop this year."

"Dan, you're glad of the chance to spend a day drinking instead of working," said Abe Sheperd. "Hey, Ike! You might as well fix us something to eat out of all that venison that's going to spoil in the sun."

Ephraim and David Dunning took the Tory into Terwilleger's blacksmithing lean-to and closed the door behind them so the children wouldn't crowd in.

"Tell you what, Dave. Why wait for the colonel to make him talk? Let's get him to tell us who he was taking that map and that meat to."

"All right, Eph. But won't he yell? We don't want Whittaker over here. He said leave him alone."

"We'll gag him with his shirt, work on him a little, and then loose his mouth and ask if he's talking."

"It won't do you no good to hit me," cried MacDonald. "I was going to my brother's place. That's all I can tell you. Beating me ain't going to make me say any more."

"Tie up his mouth and hold him," Eph said. Dave ripped MacDonald's shirt away and tied it around his mouth. The Tory twisted and squirmed, tried to yell for help once, but was finally secured.

Dave held the man's arms from the back, pulling him to his feet.

"All right, MacDonald! You ready to talk?" Eph's voice broke a little; his beefy face was redder than usual.

"Who was the map and meat for?"

The Tory shook his head and tried to wrench away.

"Call me a son of a bitch!" Eph cried. He smashed his heavy fist into the man's stomach. MacDonald's face went white and he writhed and twisted.

"I'll teach you! Call me names, will you!" Eph grunted. He

drew back his fist and punched MacDonald in the jaw. Dunning stepped back and watched.

His next blow was low in the man's groin. MacDonald doubled over. He seemed to be choking beneath his gag.

"Better let be, Eph," Dave said. "You don't want to kill him."

"Why not?" asked Eph. "He's just a stinkin' Tory."

He hit MacDonald once more, on the side of the head. The man sagged. Eph's next blow broke his nose. Blood spurted over MacDonald's chest and some splashed on Eph's face.

"He's out, Eph. That's enough."

Dave lowered the Tory to the ground. He lay there without moving.

"You've done it! He's dead!"

"Just shamming," said Eph. "He'll come around, and maybe he'll talk before we give him some more."

The door of the lean-to opened. Ben Whittaker entered.

"What the hell's going on here?"

Eph stared defiantly at Whittaker. Dave stepped away from the man on the floor.

Whittaker looked at the Dunnings in disgust. "This man is probably going to hang as a spy. What did you want to do, kill him first? Go on. Get out of here."

"We caught him," Eph said. "He's our prisoner."

"Go on over to the tavern. Colonel Testing wants to talk to you. I'll take care of this man."

"I already took care of him," said Eph. "I fixed him good."

"Get the hell out of here!"

Whittaker unfastened the shirt from MacDonald's face. Blood and vomit had soaked it through. The man moved; he tried to sit up.

"Rest easy, MacDonald," Whittaker said. "Don't try to get up. They're gone. You won't be hit again, I promise it."

MacDonald tried to speak through his bloody, swollen mouth.

"Wait," Whittaker said. "Colonel Testing's at the tavern. He's a doctor, and that nose of yours looks busted. I'll get him to look at you."

Whittaker left the lean-to and walked across the road and down the fifty yards to the tavern. He met Tom Currie at the entrance. There wasn't room for all the people inside, and some were gathered on the steps and at the windows. Tom and Whittaker pushed their way through them to the taproom. The Dunnings were telling their story to Colonel Testing, a tall grave man in his middle thirties, who sat at a table with the map spread before him.

"He was heading for the swamp," Dave said. "No question about it. Some Tories hiding out in there, maybe. Or Butler's boys."

Just as Whittaker was about to interrupt, there were shouts from the steps and windows.

"He's getting away!" someone yelled.

Men erupted from the taproom and spilled into the road. Some of them began to run toward the fort and the river. Far down the road, almost to the bridge, James MacDonald could be seen clinging to his galloping horse. Hoofbeats sounded on the bridge and then he was gone, into the woods and up the mountain trail.

"Who let him loose?" yelled Ike Youngblood.

"Get horses!" Testing exclaimed. "Youngblood, you take some men and go after him."

Several men began to run for the meadow where five or six horses were grazing. Testing's horse was tied to the hitching post beside the tavern. Gabe Quick jumped into the saddle and galloped down the road. "Follow me," he yelled.

"Come back with that horse!" Testing shouted.

Gabe paid no attention, but clattered across the bridge and into the trees.

"Youngblood, you tell that man to bring my horse back as soon as you catch up with him. Where will the Tory go, Currie?"

"Home, most likely. His wife's up there."

"All right, Youngblood, you hunt around for him. And don't shoot him unless you have to. I want to talk to him. How'd he get away?"

"Ben Whittaker let him loose," Dave Dunning said. "He was supposed to be watching him."

"Shut up, Dave!" his father shouted. "Get on home and help with the haying. Sometimes I wonder if you got a grain of sense. Ben Whittaker wouldn't help no Tory."

"I helped him," Ben said. "Not to escape, but I untied him. I thought he couldn't move. The Dunnings almost killed him."

"Do you think it's going to do any good to chase him, Tom?" asked Colonel Testing.

"Not much. Too many trails up there that he knows. But if they look around his place they might find something."

"I doubt it. We've checked on him too many times already."

"I'm not so sorry that he got away," Tom said to Testing. "From what Ben told me as we came in, he had all the punishment he could stand, short of killing."

"We'd probably have hanged him. We will, if we can catch him."

"Hanged him for what?" Tom asked.

The colonel looked at Tom for a moment before replying. When he did speak his voice sounded weary. "Just because he's on the other side. You know that as well as I do."

Tom nodded. "I suppose I do."

"Besides, Currie, you haven't seen this map yet."

"I'll take a look at it." Holding the map in his hand, Tom looked once more at the forested mountain slope where MacDonald had vanished. "They won't get him. He'll be off to Canada now."

"I suppose. Come on inside and tell me what you think about this."

With the crowd dispersed from the taproom, Testing, Tom, and Whittaker gathered around a table while Tom studied the map. Finally he looked up.

"No question about it. They're fixing to jump us."

Testing nodded. "That's the only thing it could mean. But how many and how soon?"

Tom shrugged. "No way of telling from this. First thing we better do is check that swamp and see how many were

waiting for him—they may still be there. Most likely, though, they were watching the town, and when they saw MacDonald caught, they pulled foot. Sound right to you?"

Whittaker and Testing nodded assent.

"Second, I suppose we'd better send word through the county to watch for war parties and keep the militia ready."

"All right, Currie, but what about Cedar Bush? I'm inclined to call all the isolated people into the fort," Testing said.

"Not yet. No use in scaring 'em. Let me check the swamp first."

"Suppose they decide to attack right away?"

"I don't think they will. They couldn't get a big party into that swamp without danger of being seen. If they're around here in any force, then they're waiting up in the mountains for whoever was in the swamp. Another thing. Brant, if it is Brant, makes his plans way ahead of time. This map is part of his planning, and he won't do anything until he talks to MacDonald. That will take some time. And there's one more thing. They like to jump a town at dawn. I'm sure nothing will happen before tomorrow, and I'll be back this afternoon."

"I believe in safety first, Currie," Testing said. "I'd like to get everybody in close."

"I'll be leaving my own wife across that river, Colonel. I wouldn't do that if I thought they'd hit us today. Let's not worry the people until it's time."

"All right then. You know more about Indians than I do. How many of them will there be when they come? I'm going to send to Gardinerville for more men."

"Can't tell. There'll be enough. You'd be wise to get more men."

"All right. What time will you be back?"

"Before dark. I'm going to take one man with me in case anything happens to me. I'll take Bez Finch if that's all right with you. He's a good man in the woods."

"No, Tom. He's an officer," Whittaker interposed. "That

would leave only me and the colonel. Take James Taylor. He knows the swamp as well as Finch does."

"Sure," Tom said. "We better get started. Don't worry too much if we aren't back by nightfall. If there's nothing in the swamp, I may hunt around on the mountain a little tonight and tomorrow morning. I'll give you plenty of warning if they're laying up there."

"Good luck, Lieutenant," Testing said. "I have to start working also. I understand there's a new baby due any minute at the Wisners', and Haskell told me his wife's pretty sick. I'll be waiting anxiously for your report if you find anything important, Currie. If you find anything at all."

6

As soon as Tom had changed into his hunting clothes, he packed himself some food, checked his powderhorn, knife, tomahawk, and rifle, and was ready to go.

"I'll be back tonight or early tomorrow morning, Jess," he said. "Young Sam Terwilleger will be over to help you. Don't worry. If you should hear shooting or the churchbell, get to the fort. I doubt if there's any immediate danger. That's why I think you should stay here. You'll be all right?"

"I'll be fine, Tom, but how about you?"

"I've done this a thousand times."

"Do you think they might come, Tom?"

"Sooner or later, they will. Not right away. Murph and Dave didn't see anything on the way in. Too bad they went back north through the towns this morning, instead of over the mountains. If there was anybody up there, they'd have run across the sign."

"I'll worry about you, Tom."

"No need to," he smiled. "I know what to look for, but they don't know I'm coming."

She kissed him, and then he started back toward Cedar Bush to meet James Taylor. She thought he took this separa-

tion from her, brief as it would be, too lightheartedly. She watched him until he had crossed the river and she saw his tall figure swing out of sight along the east bank of the Deerkill.

Lord, keep him safe, she prayed.

The swamp for which Tom Currie and Jim Taylor headed began about four miles below Cedar Bush on the Deerkill. It was called Lost Indian Swamp, and local legend claimed that a Delaware girl had been lost there and had died, and that on stormy nights her spirit was heard moaning for release. It was really more forest than swamp, since there were only a few hundred acres under water, while most of it was a tangle of scrubby evergreens, brambles and brush of all kinds, with here and there a green island of high ground covered with tall pines and hemlocks. The Deerkill wound through this wilderness for some six miles. The swamp was about four miles wide.

The settlers never went into the swamp unless their stock strayed into it. They seldom had to venture beyond the periphery. Some of the farm boys trapped through it along the Deerkill in the winter. Tom knew it well. He had hunted and trapped it when he was a boy. He knew where all the pine islands were, and how to travel from one to another. He reasoned that anyone hiding in the swamp would be on one of the pine islands, since they were high and dry. Jim Taylor knew the place almost as well as Tom did. He was a silent, agreeable man about thirty years old, one of the few bachelors in Cedar Bush. His father was a Highland County magistrate who lived in Highland Landing, but Jim preferred the farm his father owned in Cedar Bush. He was slim, wiry and good-looking, and was a target for all mothers with unmarried daughters in the western part of the county. They had little chance of ever getting to the subject of marriage, however, because Jim usually confined his conversation to infrequent short remarks about crops or the weather. That morning he spoke to Tom a few times in the distance between Cedar Bush and the swamp, and said nothing at all after they pushed their way into the evergreen thickets.

Tom had taken a circuitous route, to avoid being seen by anyone in the swamp. They started on the east side, working south, traveling from one high place to the next, until they reached the edge of the tangle. Then they turned and worked generally north. From time to time Tom or Jim climbed high enough in a big hemlock or pine to look across the level land. Whoever was in here, if anyone was, might be foolish enough to show smoke from a fire.

Tom knew they'd have to be careful, and they were, but he really didn't think they'd find a camp over on this side. If MacDonald had intended to take that horse into the swamp, he would do it on the west side, nearest the mountains, where the brush was not so thick and where there were game trails to make the going easier. And it was logical that any enemy party would camp on the other side; either going to or coming from the mountains, they would have less trouble. However, Tom knew that he had to make a thorough scout, and that meant covering the entire swamp. Whoever might be there, if they hadn't been watching the town this morning, would still be there waiting for MacDonald. One thing in our favor, Tom thought, is that they won't be expecting anyone to approach from the deepest part of the swamp.

It was well into the afternoon before he and Jim waded the Deerkill in the center of the swamp, just below an old beaver dam. Tom hadn't seen any signs at all. From time to time they had startled deer ahead of them, and once he had seen a big wildcat bounding away through the thickets. He was enjoying himself; it was the first time he had been on a woods jaunt since last winter. He felt a twinge of guilt at the pleasure he took from this scout, because he knew that Jessica was worrying about him, although he knew there was no need. He was always cautious in the woods—had been all his life—but he knew out of long experience that there wasn't a Tory or Indian either from here to Canada who could surprise him if he took the proper care.

The myriads of mosquitoes and deerflies which rose at their passage plagued them, but Tom didn't mind them too much. However, he could have done without the querulous bluejays

which shrieked and screamed constantly at them from the trees. Jays making a racket was a sure sign to anyone who knew their ways that something was coming. They swooped and flittered from branch to branch, never ceasing the shrilling of their anger at the invasion of their woods. Tom knew they would quiet and lose interest if he and Jim should lie still for any length of time, but so long as they were moving the jays kept up their scolding. Once, at a bend in the river, he heard a pair of jays screaming from the river bank below and beyond his view. His first thought was that it was a canoe, because he couldn't hear anything. He motioned Jim into hiding and then he dropped behind a blackberry thicket and waited. He listened for the dip of paddles, even as he was telling himself that there was no purpose in bringing a canoe in here. The jays' screaming came closer, and then Tom laughed. A big black bear came lumbering along the opposite bank of the river. When Tom and Jim arose from their hiding places, the bear galloped off through the brush.

Long before sundown, they had covered more than two-thirds of the swamp. Now they moved very cautiously, watching every opening in the trees and using much care in approaching the pine islands.

As they neared one of the larger islands, Jim Taylor leaned forward and said, "I could use a pipe of tobacco, Tom."

"So could I. We'll look around over there, and maybe stop for one."

He thought it would be all right, since there had been no signs of any humans yet, although he knew the smell of tobacco smoke would carry a long way in the swamp. Maybe too far. He changed his mind and told Jim they'd better not smoke.

The times when a man wants a smoke most are just the ones when he knows he can't have it, Tom thought. It was that way at Valley Forge when we didn't have any tobacco.

He started to move again toward the large island when he noticed a flock of little birds in the branches and on the ground in the center of the island.

Feeding, he thought. Maybe camp scraps.

He motioned Jim into hiding and then lay prone behind a thicket and watched the island and the surrounding area. Jim remained silent somewhere behind him. Nothing moved on the island except the birds. Finally Tom rose and approached with caution, rifle ready. The birds flew to the higher branches of the trees. There were three jays which started screaming.

Shut your yapping, Tom thought. He motioned Jim to come on.

It had been a camp, all right. From the looks of the ashes, they'd been there three days, more or less, building little fires without smoke for cooking. They'd left this morning. They'd covered their fire and the ground underneath was still warm.

"Here's where they were," he said to Jim. "Only thing left is to see how many and who they were."

"I'll stay right here," Jim said. "You look around."

He knows what to do, Tom thought. Doesn't go blundering around until I look the place over. He studied the ground around the camp for a few minutes. Two white men and two Indians, he decided. Mohawks, the moccasins told him. He noticed some fresh blazes on a big pine beyond the camp site. They were narrow slits from which the pitch was seeping. They appeared to have been made by a small axe, although they were vertical instead of horizontal as they would have been had the axe been swung.

Somebody practicing with a tomahawk, Tom decided, stepping a few paces away from the tree to study the ground. He found the place where the man had been standing. It was one of the white men.

Casting around, he found a patch of brambles through which one of the white men had pushed to walk to the camp's latrine. Tom searched the bushes carefully. He was rewarded by finding a few bits of green thread and some others of black. He whistled soundlessly and took his find over to Jim.

"Butler's Rangers," he said. "At least one of them."

The Rangers wore green coats and black breeches mostly,

although often they masqueraded as Indians. The settlers called them "blue-eyed Injuns."

Jim Taylor looked quizzically at Tom. "Officer or soldier?" he asked.

Tom grinned at him. "I'm not that good, man. I know what you mean. What's the quality of the cloth these threads came from? Who knows? Maybe it was Butler himself. Both the white men wore good boots."

Tom returned to the ashes of the campfire and once more studied the footprints carefully. He was sure he knew one of those Indians. Finally he rose from his knees, nodding his head a little.

"All right," he said to Taylor. "I found what I wanted. We can stop looking and wondering."

"What is it?" Taylor asked.

"Joseph Brant," Tom answered. "I should have recognized that print as soon as I saw it. I know it well enough. But it's been a long time since I've seen it."

Taylor lifted his eyebrows. "The big Indian himself?"

Tom nodded without replying.

That's a horse of another color, he thought. Brant with another Indian away down here, and two of Butler's boys with him. But at least the town will be safe for a couple of days, because he has to go back into the mountains and pick up the war party, wherever they're waiting, and come down again. Sure enough it's a raid this time, and they had better be prepared in Cedar Bush. But there's still a way to stop it, maybe, if I can talk to him.

"Let's sit down and eat something, Jim. I want to think a minute or two."

"Sure. I'm always hungry."

Jim sat on a big flat rock beside Tom and ate silently. Tom knew what he had to do now, since it was Brant who was planning the attack on Cedar Bush. Maybe he'd even had it in mind when he'd asked for another man to accompany him on this scout. He would send Jim Taylor back to Cedar Bush to tell Testing to get everyone into the fort for safety.

They'd be inside the stockade by sunset. Certainly there wasn't any danger today from only four men.

When Jim Taylor was started back for the settlement, then he would start after Brant. If he traveled as fast as he could go, he would catch Brant, maybe sometime tonight. After all, they had only a few hours' start.

Tom meant to walk in to talk to Brant. Enemies or not, he knew that Brant would be glad to see him. And if Brant knew the settlement was prepared for an attack, he might change his mind.

There was a chance, of course, that they'd take him along back to Unadilla if he walked into their camp. But he thought he had known Brant too long and too well for that. Even so, he'd take the chance, because any kind of attack on Cedar Bush, surprise or not, would mean cabins burned and crops destroyed. If he walked in on them, the Rangers might be tough to handle, but he knew that Brant would be in command unless one of the others was John Butler himself. That wasn't very probable. Not away down here.

"Jim, I'm going to send you back to tell Testing. Tell him there are two Rangers and two Indians, and one of the Indians is Brant. Tell him I'm going to follow this trail up the mountain to see if I can come up with them. He'd better get everybody into the fort tonight, although I don't imagine we'll have any trouble until day after tomorrow. But they'd better all come in, just to be safe.

"I think the war party is camped somewhere back in the mountains, waiting for Brant. They probably won't travel tonight, and so maybe they won't attack until morning after next. Now, here's what'll happen. If I go in to talk, they won't let me go before they attack, in case I can't persuade Brant not to do it. I'll be all right, but don't be surprised if I don't show up. Matter of fact, if I'm not back by tomorrow afternoon, you can figure they'll be jumping you the next morning. Got it straight?"

"Sure," Taylor said. "But I think you're crazy."

"Maybe I am, but I'm going to try it."

"They'll kill you, Tom."

Tom shook his head. "Don't worry about that. Tell my wife not to worry. I know what I'm doing. You tell Testing to get as many men as he can from Gardinerville. That may keep the Indians off, if they won't listen to me."

"All right," Jim said, picking up his rifle. "Guess I'll be going. I'll tell your wife you'll be all right."

"Thanks. Keep an eye open. When you get out of the swamp, cut back to the Deerkill. It's easier traveling."

Jim nodded and walked away through the trees. Tom watched him go, and then picked up his own rifle and began to run along a game trail toward the mountains. He knew that Brant and his three men would use the trail leading west from MacDonald's place. Tom planned to look for signs of their passage there.

In the meantime, the faster he traveled now, the sooner he'd be talking to Joseph Brant.

7

JIM TAYLOR was a good woodsman, but he was neither as careful nor as observant as Tom Currie. When he started back for Cedar Bush, he took the easiest way, and his path paralleled and occasionally crossed that taken by Brant's party. If he had been watching the trail, he would have noticed, at those few crossing points, that there were only three of the enemy heading for the mountains. About a half mile from the camp in the swamp, where the trails met, he should have seen that the other Mohawk had left Brant and the two white men and had started through the swamp toward Cedar Bush. But Jim Taylor's only concern was in getting back to the settlement as swiftly as possible.

The lone Mohawk followed the Deerkill beyond the swamp until he reached the crest of a long rise on the west side of the stream. Here he could watch the hamlet without fear of being seen. For several hours he lay there, immobile, always

alert, invisible in the long grass above the stream bank. His only movements during the long afternoon were to twitch ants and flies from his near-naked body. To have discovered him, a passerby would have had to step on him.

His orders from Brant were to watch the village and report any signs of unusual activity. There had been none in the long hours he had spent. Under no circumstances whatever, Brant had said, was he to reveal himself to anyone from the village. The Mohawk wore no war paint. An unpainted Indian would not alarm the settlement if he were seen.

Therefore, when the Mohawk saw late in the afternoon a solitary figure trotting along the bank of the stream far below him, coming from the swamp, he was faced with a problem in interpreting his orders from Brant. This man approaching was going to Cedar Bush from the swamp. The Mohawk believed him to be a scout who had discovered the camp on the pine island. Therefore he should not be allowed to reach the village. However, Brant had warned him not to be seen. Suppose he attacked this scout and failed to kill him? Suppose the man escaped to warn the village?

On the other hand, the man was going to warn the village anyway. And, a consideration certainly not to be ignored, his scalp was worth eight dollars in Niagara. The Mohawk made up his mind. For the first time that afternoon, his face lost its immobility. He smiled.

Moving back cautiously from the edge of the rise of land, he slithered through the tall grass into a rocky gully which led down to the stream. There was a large boulder projecting onto the trail where the approaching man must pass. The Indian concealed himself and waited. One minute went by, two minutes. Then came the sound of footsteps coming up the trail. The Mohawk drew his knife and hatchet. His body tensed; his leg muscles quivered.

The white man was beside the rock; he was past it. The Indian dashed forward. The blow was struck. There was a thud and Jim Taylor seemed to cough once. His body pitched forward into a clump of alders on the bank. The branches of

the alders, bending under his weight, lowered him almost gently to the ground.

The Mohawk stepped forward and pulled the body away from the alders. He rolled Taylor over and looked at his face for a moment. Then his knife flashed briefly and there was a sound as of a bit of soft cloth tearing. He wiped his knife in the grass and stepped to the edge of the stream where he rinsed the blood from the scalp and attached it to his belt. Then, stripping the body of powderhorn, bullet pouch and knife, the Indian dragged it to the boulder in the gully. He stuffed it into the recess between the rock and the gravel bank. It took him a few moments to remove the blood from the stream bank and the path, and to hide the signs of scuffling in the gravel.

Then he picked up Taylor's rifle and his own musket and, with a last glance toward the town, quiet in the late afternoon heat, he started through the forest up the mountainside.

8

IT WAS almost midnight when Brant decided that they had approached close enough to the town, perhaps too close. They stopped on a small wooded plateau on the mountainside about two miles north of Dan's Point. Brant walked among the men, warning them not to light any fires and to hold to a minimum the noise of lopping spruce boughs for beds.

"We'll have fires aplenty in the morning," guffawed one of the Rangers.

"And meat to cook in 'em," said another, a husky bearded man. "I'm going to catch me a shoat and roast it in the first cabin we burn, and then I'm going to capture me a pretty little girl to carry it for me."

"Kill them all!" said his neighbor in a hoarse whisper. He was a slight man with wild eyes, who sat trying to read a small New Testament by the bright light of the moon. His

green and black uniform was filthy, his beard was matted, and to his mouth clung the remnants of his latest meal. "They have gone against the laws of God and the King. Wipe them out, I say!"

"Damn you, Benson!" exclaimed the husky man in anger. "I wish to God you'd quit that. You're worse than these here dirty Senecas. Jesus, when I seen what you done to that woman at Wyoming, and Butler never saying a word, Christ, I took sick from it."

"Don't blaspheme or the fire will destroy you!" cried Benson. "It is our sacred duty to destroy them and their settlements."

"Quiet, you men over there," called their officer from the edge of the plateau. "You, Benson. Shut your noise."

Most of the Rangers had fallen asleep as soon as Brant had halted the march. It had been a rough trip down the mountainside in the darkness after Brant had joined them at dusk. A few of the Indians were also curled up under the trees, although most of the Mohawks and some of the Senecas were grimacing into hand mirrors as they repaired or added to their war paint in the moonlight.

Joseph Brant, James MacDonald, Hiokatoo—leader of the Senecas—and Captain Desmond of the Rangers stood on the lip of the plateau where it dropped away to the valley below. Desmond was a tall handsome man with a careless attitude of arrogance. While he listened to the conversation between Brant and MacDonald, he absently flipped a red-lacquered trade tomahawk into the air so that it made one complete turn and the helve landed in the palm of his hand. Not once did he fumble it, its balance was so perfect.

MacDonald was pointing at the Deerkill far below in the moonlight gleaming like a huge burnished scimitar as it curved around the Cedar Bush farmland.

"If them bastards hadn't taken the map, you'd know just how it's laid out and just how you want the men spread out."

"I have a good idea from what I've seen and what you've told me," said Brant. "But you were careless to let yourself get caught. These people are not complete idiots, you know."

"Ah!" grunted MacDonald. "How was I to know they wouldn't all be out grubbing in their fields, same as always. If they wasn't lazy good-for-nothings, them Dunnings never would have caught me."

"Well, it was unfortunate," Brant said. "Now they are alert, although they may not realize we are so close. I'd feel better if I knew that Tom Currie were down there sleeping with the rest of them. For all we know—" He paused, and turned to gaze back into the dark hills outlined against the midnight sky. "At least," he continued after a moment, "that scout my warrior killed this afternoon didn't warn them."

He was silent for a while as he looked down into the valley again. "Go over it again for me, MacDonald," he said finally.

"Just remember that there's only three of 'em on this side of the river, so you can use most of your men in near the fort. And then down below the bridge there's only the Dunnings and, farther down and back from the river, is Finch's place. Beyond that you begin to hit the swampland."

"How close can we get to the bridge before there's a chance of them seeing us?"

"Maybe two hundred yards. Maybe closer."

"And you're sure they have no cannon in the fort?"

"Not a one," MacDonald answered. "And there's only five or six of them rifle guns in the whole village. The rest of 'em couldn't hit the inside of a closed barn door with a shovelful of beans."

"You make it sound easy, MacDonald," said Brant with a slight smile.

"It will be easy," the Tory answered grimly. "They're big fat farmers who think they own the whole damn world and nobody can touch 'em."

"All right," Brant said. "I'd better assign the men. Captain Desmond."

"Sir?" responded Desmond laconically, flipping his hatchet.

"You take the three farms on this side of the river. Use ten of your Rangers, and perhaps as many of the Senecas. Now the most important part of this attack is that my orders be obeyed exactly. Gather the cattle and horses in one place,

fairly close to that bridge, and pen them in. Don't let your men or the Senecas kill any children. Take that man Benson with you and keep an eye on him. Don't kill any women unless they're firing at you. I don't want to have another Wyoming to be blamed for. When we attack the settlement itself, you can start burning the barns and cabins. You must not be discovered, or fire a shot, until we're at that bridge. Is that understood?"

"Sure," Desmond answered softly.

Brant studied the Ranger's face carefully for a moment. "You do understand me, Captain? Keep your men in hand. The women are not to be molested on any account. Take any prisoners you think can cross the mountains with us, but no harm is to come to them."

Desmond glanced casually at the Mohawk. "I'll handle my men, Colonel." There was a touch of sarcasm in the "Colonel." Desmond smiled as he spoke again. "What am I supposed to do with the Senecas? Nobody is going to keep their scalping knives in their belts."

"They will obey," said Brant shortly. "All right, then," he continued. "I do not make war on women and children, nor do my people. Two things more. Don't take any old women or young children or any sick people as prisoners. Let them go into the fort. And second, don't let the Senecas carry any useless plunder. I think every lodge in the Seneca nation got a clock after Cherry Valley. Make them take provisions, grain, blankets."

Brant turned to Hiokatoo. The Seneca chief was staring at the valley below. He was a big man, towering over the Mohawk chief. His hard round belly bulged over the thong supporting his clout, his arms were folded, and his seamed face was stoic under the brilliant stripes of war paint.

"Hiokatoo, my brother," said Brant in the Seneca tongue.

"Brother," the Seneca answered.

"When the sun comes over the valley, you will give ten of your braves to the Ranger Desmond. You and the rest should come with me to the settlement. I ask you because I need the best and bravest men with me."

Hiokatoo nodded gravely.

"My brother," said Brant once more. "You will remember that from Niagara Colonel Bolton has given orders to us that the women and children are not to be harmed. He wished me to tell you that once more. You will tell your braves in the morning."

Hiokatoo turned his gaze from the valley. He nodded once more.

"My brother Thayendanegea speaks well," he replied. "He has always spoken so, and his brothers the Senecas have listened and been pleased with his words. But has my brother forgotten the rebel armies in the west? They are gathering, as my brother knows well, to enter the Long House through its western door, the country of the Senecas. Those armies will burn and kill. They will destroy the farms and homes of my people, driving them into Canada to face the long cold winter. Has Colonel Bolton enough food for my people? Has he enough food to spare for all the people of the Long House who are being driven from their country? My brother Thayendanegea knows he has not. But my brother knows that Colonel Bolton still is paying eight dollars for every scalp my braves bring to him. That money will help my people next winter when they have lost their homes. My warriors know that. It is why they have come through these mountains so far from the danger which threatens their homes. They will take scalps."

"Not of the women and children," Brant said.

Hiokatoo gazed steadily at him. "Colonel Bolton may talk to my brother Thayendanegea about women and children, but when the time comes to pay for scalps, he does not ask the Senecas whether these are women's scalps or children's scalps. He pays. He asks no questions."

"You will tell your warriors in the morning," Brant repeated.

"I will not tell them. You do it. Who knows? They may listen to you. They may not. The armies of the settlers burn and kill my people. So my warriors will burn and kill and take scalps in their turn."

Brant said nothing for a moment or two. "I will speak to them," he said finally.

Hiokatoo nodded still again, and turned to his study of the moonlit silent valley.

"What was that all about?" asked Desmond.

"It surprises me, Captain," answered Brant, "that you have been on the warpath with the Senecas for two years and can not yet speak their language."

"Walter Butler speaks for me, Brant."

"Yes," the Indian said. "But Butler isn't here now."

"I know you're in command, Colonel," Desmond replied, again emphasizing the "Colonel" too strongly. "But it seems to me that you're not helping to win the war by sparing rebels. I agree, I'm afraid, with poor crazy Benson over there. Kill them all, or at least carry them off."

"We're here for food, clothing and equipment, and to harass the country behind Clinton and Sullivan. That's all there is to this expedition. I've brought just enough men to carry everything we can get."

"Why did you leave the rest of the men over at Double Peak Mountain? Suppose this town is ready for us. We'll never get into that fort with only eighty-odd men. I can't figure it."

"I wouldn't bring three hundred men down here. The town would know by now that we were coming. Their boys are up in these hills all the time. Besides, a smaller number travels faster. We'll strike and run. I don't wish to fight their militia."

Brant turned away from the Ranger officer. "MacDonald," he called.

The Tory grunted in reply. He was smoothing a salve on his bruised and broken lips.

"You'll come with me in the morning," Brant said.

"Sure thing," replied MacDonald. "I want to be sure of something, though. I want to get those sons of bitches who beat me. Those Dunnings! Do I get 'em?"

"You can try," Brant said. "I'll give you five of my Mohawks to help you. How is your nose?"

"Christ! It hurts."

"I hope you get them."

"I will, if it takes the rest of my life."

Joseph Brant walked away from the rest of them and stood on the far edge of the plateau, leaning on a rock shelf. He was a moderately tall man of firm build, thirty-seven years old. He had a strong-featured face, rather handsome as Indians are judged by white men's standards. He was dressed in a green cord jacket trimmed with silver, somewhat similar to that which Desmond wore as an officer of Butler's Rangers. Brant, however, wore fringed buckskin leggings and Mohawk moccasins. Attached to the leather belt at his waist were tomahawk, knife, and pistol.

Brant was worried about this raid. He had never come this far with so large a force. He didn't look forward to the prospect of retreating after it was done, traveling slowly by necessity with plunder and captives for many miles before he joined his main force at Double Peak. MacDonald had told him that Highland County could muster several hundred militiamen in a day or so. If his Indians and these Rangers tarried on the trail back, they might have to fight to return to Oghwaga. And one could never tell what the Indians were going to do in any kind of pitched battle. When they decided they'd had enough, they ran. He didn't like it, but it had to be done now. Too bad that MacDonald had been discovered. That would probably mean trouble.

He glanced at the ledges above and at the forest beyond on both sides. There were sentries up there, but that didn't mean a thing. Not with Tom Currie down in Cedar Bush. Only he's not there any longer, Brant thought. He's up in here somewhere. He must be, after that business with the map.

If he doesn't strike our trail until he reaches the main camp back at Double Peak, then it will be too late, Brant thought. He and that other man probably scouted that swamp we hid in while we were waiting for MacDonald. Then Tom probably sent the other man back to the town, while he followed us to MacDonald's place and then on up toward the middle of the mountains. There's a good chance that he won't pick up this trail until dawn, and then he'll be too late.

I wish Desmond had stayed with Butler, Brant thought. He resents me, and he knows I know it. I wanted Rangers on this trip but I didn't want him to command them. Maybe Butler knew that. That's probably why he sent him.

The Mohawk turned to watch Desmond a few rods away. The Ranger had stepped off ten or twelve paces from a bare-trunked spruce and was flipping the tomahawk into it. A couple of Senecas stood by, watching without expression. Brant could see the red-helved hatchet fly swiftly again and again to the trunk of the spruce and sink deeply with a dull thunking sound. Each time Desmond strode methodically forward, withdrew the weapon, paced back, and threw it again.

He's good with it, Brant thought. Better than most white men. Better than some of my Mohawks. Although with us, throwing a tomahawk at a tree is a child's game. I wonder if those Senecas are laughing at him. You never can tell. Well, I just wish Butler had kept him. Maybe I ought to bring him with me in the morning, instead of giving him this side of the river to work on. But that wouldn't do any good either, because I'll have to watch Hiokatoo. I can't watch both of them at once. I don't know which of them is the worst. I'll probably have the most trouble keeping the Senecas in hand, once the shooting starts. Every time it's the same way. If it isn't the Senecas, it's the Rangers. My Mohawks don't always like to do what they're told, but they do it. The Rangers won't, even if I stand over them. They must resent an Indian in command, all of them. I'm sorry for that, because it reduces their efficiency. But until the British decide they've found a better man to lead these border raids, they'll have to put up with me. I'm a better soldier at this kind of warfare than any of them, and that includes the Butlers. If they get a few more reports about me such as the one this Desmond will probably give them when this is over, then I will be replaced. No, they won't do that! Because they know I'll take the Mohawks with me. They need me, I suppose.

They call my Mohawks savages, Brant thought. These white men are more savage. That Benson! Crazy as a coot. I suppose there's reason enough for it. His wife and children

all dead in a week that winter when they tried to get through the snow to Niagara.

I wonder when it will be over, he thought. Soon now. Sullivan and Clinton will burn out the Long House. I never thought in the old days with Johnson that I would live to see my people driven from our land. Sir William always said that it was ours forever. Had he lived—I wonder? The end of the Long House! The confederacy finished! It is difficult to believe it, yet I am as sure of it as I know that the sun will rise this morning and that men will be killed. Well, we did our best, and we must keep on. I may be wrong. There's a chance that I am. Not much of a chance, but it's there. We'll fight until the end.

Now in the morning, we'll burn yet another town, and we'll kill some of them and carry others off to the north, and soon enough the stories will come through the lines to me, telling how they call me "Brant the Monster." That's what they all call me, I guess, except for a few like Tom Currie who know better. I wonder what the people I came to know so well in London think of that. Romney, for example. As he painted my portrait, did he see the eyes of a monster? Or did he see in me exactly what I am and what I hope I always will be—the leader of my people. I think that is what he saw. They are my people, and I will continue to lead them, and we will fight in the only way we know.

He sighed softly, and stepped once more to the edge of the plateau to look down at the valley. Hiokatoo was standing in the same place, motionless, inscrutable, seeming to charge the air with some implacable and yet almost serene emanation of violence and hatred for that quiet land below.

"In the morning, my brother," said Joseph Brant.

"In the morning, Thayendanegea," answered the Seneca chief.

"We have traveled many warpaths together, my brother."

"Many," answered Hiokatoo.

"Let this not be the last," said Brant.

"May it not."

They stood there for a few moments more, before Hiokatoo

turned to roll in his blanket among his warriors. Brant walked beyond the periphery of the plateau to check his sentries.

Tom Currie may cause trouble, Brant thought as he walked. I must give orders that he and his people are not to be killed. If he's down there. He's probably in back of us in these hills. I don't think he'll pick up the trail in time to warn them. In the old days, I never thought I'd be looking forward to danger from Tom Currie. We were such good friends then.

9

When Tom Currie reached MacDonald's place, a small cabin and barn in a clearing high in the mountains above Cedar Bush, it was almost midnight. The building showed evidence of having been abandoned hastily. There was clothing scattered here and there on the floor and the remains of a meal were on the table. In the moonlight, Tom saw blood-stained rags and a pan of bloody water in the kitchen, where Mrs. MacDonald had treated her husband's face.

Tom found no sign that Brant and his companions from the swamp had been there, although he saw that Ike Youngblood and the militiamen from Cedar Bush had visited the cabin and then had returned to town. He reasoned that MacDonald had ridden up, had his wounds tended by his wife, and then the two of them had fled into the mountains just ahead of Youngblood and the rest.

He found the tracks of MacDonald's horse heading up the mountain, with a man's footprints beside them.

She must be riding the horse, Tom thought. MacDonald can't be hurt so bad if he's walking.

Somewhere up there ahead of him the Tory and his wife would meet Brant.

The thing for me to do, Tom told himself, is to follow them right now. They must have stopped for the night some-

place. Tomorrow, probably, Brant will pick up his raiding party and come back down. That's what I have to try to stop. Jim Taylor has warned Testing, and the town is ready for them, and maybe I can convince Brant it would be foolish to attack now. I'll have to try.

He remembered that he'd promised Jessica that he'd return that evening or early in the morning. She'd worry about him. Well, she was safe in the fort by now. And it was important that he keep going until he came up with Brant.

That thought didn't salve his conscience too much, however. He knew that his pursuit into the mountains was really intended to satisfy his hope of talking with his old friend Thayendanegea. Well, it wasn't a crime. Jim Taylor had warned the settlement.

He started once more on the trail. Now his guilty feeling seemed to add speed to his legs. Or perhaps he was conscious of the ever-increasing distance he was putting between himself and Cedar Bush—and Jessica.

MacDonald and his wife had been traveling at a fast pace after they left the cabin. They knew Youngblood was chasing him, Tom imagined. I'd better be careful. If they met Brant, he might have sent that other Indian to watch their back trail.

Less than three miles from the cabin, he found the place where Brant's party had met MacDonald and the woman. They all headed west together. In the unsatisfactory light of the moon, Tom couldn't be sure how many men were in Brant's party. He took increasing care that he not be trapped as he followed them.

He started to swing wide of the trail most of the time, taking such short cuts as he could—there were many of them, since he was far more familiar with these mountains than any of the party he followed, including MacDonald. He avoided the trail wherever it swept under any vantage point where a watcher might be waiting.

By doing this, at one o'clock in the morning he started to cross another game trail a short distance from the one Brant was following, a trail which also led down the mountain to-

ward Cedar Bush and which curved slightly north instead of directly east. As he stepped onto the trail from the forest, he stopped and stood motionless, staring down at the soft dark loam of the path, which at this point bordered a tiny mountain brook.

I should have known he wouldn't waste any time in these mountains, Tom thought. I *did* know, but I thought it would be at least another day.

There on the trail before him were the prints of several score men, traveling fast in single file and heading toward Cedar Bush. Indians and white men. Tom crouched and studied the trail. Almost a hundred of them, he thought.

They must have been camped up ahead, waiting for Brant, he told himself. And Brant came back to get them. They went through here sometime early tonight. That means that if they keep up their speed, they'll be there long before morning. They'll lay up in the hills until dawn and then they'll go in.

They had crossed the brook a few hundred yards from the point where he had discovered the trail. In the soft earth near the stream, somewhat apart from the main body of men, he found Brant's prints and those of the Ranger who had been practicing with his tomahawk back in the swamp. There were no hoofprints. They must have sent Mrs. MacDonald and the horse to their camp, wherever it is. From the prints at the crossing, Tom saw that there were between eighty and ninety of them. More than two-thirds of them were Indians, mostly Senecas.

Tom started to run. It was a long loping stride which he could maintain for many hours, despite the darkness of the forest in the many places where the heavily leaved trees prevented the moonlight's penetration. He'd make Cedar Bush long before dawn if he didn't stop. Maybe he'd even have time to stop at his place and remove some of the smaller things. His cabin would be the first to burn.

He grinned wryly. I've been thinking all along that Jess doesn't like that house so much. All right, now she can have a new one, with thanks to my old friend, Thayendanegea. It saddened him, however, to think that his father's house was

going to be burned in a few hours. There would be time to organize the militia to protect the houses closest to the fort, but those across the Deerkill were surely lost. The Cedar Bush militia could muster forty men, and that wasn't enough to venture very far from the fort against almost a hundred of the enemy. There hadn't been time yet to expect any reinforcements from Gardinerville.

The miles dropped behind him steadily, and in an hour or so he was starting down the long gradual slope of the mountains. Far ahead he could occasionally see the darker shape of the valley below. At times he thought he could see lights in the valley, but he knew it was his imagination.

He figured that he had plenty of time. He had to be cautious now, since Brant and his men were somewhere in the forest ahead of him. Most likely, however, the war party was on the heights just above the town. There wouldn't really be any danger until he was at the edge of the valley. He figured that Brant would lay out near Dan's Point, where the rough slopes and thick forest would make discovery less likely, even though the town lay directly below.

At four in the morning, he crossed a ridge at the highest point of the foothills above the northern end of the valley. Once down the rough face of the ridge, he would have easy traveling the rest of the way, and only a few miles to go. Before he tried clambering down the rocks, he made his way to a curve in the slope of the ridge, where it faced almost southwest. This had been a favorite spot of his boyhood, when he had climbed all over it and had explored the caves and recesses of the rocks. He started down. It was rough work. Sometimes he had to let his rifle down ahead of him to the next ledge and then let himself down with his feet dangling, feeling for a foothold. It was a hot night, and that didn't help any. Already he was soaking wet with perspiration from his run. Under his hands the rocks had not lost all the heat of the sun from the day before. He began to wonder if he shouldn't have disregarded caution and taken the easiest way out of the mountains. If he'd done that, however, he might have run smack into the war party.

Finally he was about forty feet from the bottom of the ridge face. Below him in the darkness were footholds, but he'd have to be careful. Standing on a small ledge, he removed his hunting shirt and wrapped his rifle in it, taking care to pad the lock and trigger guard. There were a few small cedars growing in a clump below and to the right. Every other bit of ground was covered with shale and sizable rocks. With a gentle motion, he tossed the rifle into the clump of cedars. It caught, held for a moment, then slipped easily to the ground.

All right, he thought. Now I go.

He took a good grip on the firm rock of the ledge and then let his legs slide over and down. There was a larger ledge just below which wandered all the way down the face of the little cliff to the level ground. If he reached that now, he'd be all right. Practically home.

He was dangling now at full length, his toes reaching for the shelf below. Then he heard a harsh whirring, like dry beans being shaken in a gourd. It was repeated immediately. He didn't dare take time to look down. He knew the shelf was just below him and instantly he pictured the rattlesnake coiled there, head raised, rattles humming.

He might miss once, Tom thought. That's all. Once. He's ready. Now!

He twisted his legs violently and, as he did so, felt something brush against his right legging. Without time for conscious thought, Tom knew the snake would be coiled again, head up, even before Tom's weight had started to swing his legs back in the natural pendulum he had created. He held them up as far as he could, knees bent. For a moment he knew he was out of the snake's striking range—just a few inches. But he was slipping.

He won't miss this time, Tom thought. He'll move in a second. He'll come closer. Only one thing. Drop!

He shoved outward and let go just as the rattler struck again. He landed heavily in a crouch, legs still twisted, and staggered back on the shale. His heel caught between two rocks and he went over backwards. His head struck a boulder and he lay there unconscious.

10

JESSICA WOKE UP early that morning, long before dawn. She hadn't slept well last night with Tom away. It was going to be another hot day, she thought, just like yesterday. She opened the door and looked out at the stars still shining. There wasn't yet any hint of day in the eastern sky. She was apprehensive because of the vast silence. There really wasn't anything to worry about. Ben Whittaker had been around last night, saying that since there hadn't been any word from Tom and Jim Taylor, there couldn't be any danger of an Indian attack. Still, he'd given her Colonel Testing's suggestion that if she or the Quicks or the Polhamuses were worried, they should come into the fort. The others hadn't gone, and she wasn't that frightened that she should run for sanctuary at the mention of Indians. Tom was up there in the hills, watching. It would be all right. Whittaker also said that there would be patrols out around the village. Of course, there wouldn't be any warning if they did come, but Ben didn't think there was any danger.

Jessica fixed her breakfast and ate hurriedly. That young Sam Terwilleger was a great help to her with Tom gone, but he stuck so close to her! He wanted to talk all the time about being a hunter and scout like Tom, and she also noticed that, although the boy was only fifteen, there was something close to adoration for her in his eyes. It embarrassed her to feel him watching her every minute of the day. And he stayed so late yesterday. And had promised to come so early this morning. Yesterday after Tom left, she and Sam had worked all day in the cornfield under the hot sun, and she had wanted to go down to the Deerkill for a swim in the early evening, as she and Tom had done nearly every hot day this summer, but young Sam had stayed for supper, and then had stayed to talk until it was long past his bedtime and hers.

This morning she had debated going down to the Deerkill to bathe, but she was afraid Sam would come early and perhaps follow her down there. So she decided to bring some water into the house and take a bath in the big wooden washtub. She'd close the door. If he came, he certainly wouldn't walk in without knocking. He had used to do that a couple of months ago when he'd come over to talk to Tom in the evenings, and Tom had reprimanded him for it.

She filled her biggest kettle with water, and swung it on the chimney crane over the fire to take the chill from it. When it was ready, she poured it into her washtub. Then she discarded her nightgown and stepped into the tub. In a few moments she felt fresh and light and clean. She started to sing softly. Tom would come home today. She'd had more opportunity to think last night when he had been gone and she'd been lonely. She had resolved to make a new effort to enjoy this rough life out here and make them both completely happy once more. Some of it was becoming better already. At first the everlasting solitude had depressed and frightened her, but now she realized that she was beginning to appreciate the peace and tranquillity of the valley. If it lasted!

Jessica wondered what her cousin Bess Bellnap would say if she could see her standing without a stitch on in this big wooden tub, washing the dust of a cornfield from her body. Or later this morning, when she would be out in the garden patch, picking bugs from the potato plants and snapping their brittle shells with her fingernails. Bess would probably become sick at the sight. Jessica knew she would have herself at one time. Yes, she thought, I'm getting used to it, and I'll be a better wife to him from now on.

She reached to the nail on the wall beside her and pulled down her toweling cloth. She noticed that light was beginning to filter through the curtains of the east window. It was almost dawn, and Sam Terwilleger would be knocking at the door soon enough. She'd better dry herself and dress. But she wished Tom would come in that door! She wouldn't worry about dressing or Sam Terwilleger either. She'd run to Tom

just like this, as naked as she'd been born, and he'd carry her into the bedroom.

She felt a draft on her body and started, thinking instantly that Tom had indeed come home. Then before she even turned around, she decided the door had blown open, although there was little breeze this morning.

She cried out in alarm. A tall man with sun-darkened sardonic features stood leaning against the doorjamb. He held a musket leveled at her.

"Don't scream," he said softly. He moved the musket and smiled. "I don't want to shoot."

She had covered herself with the cotton toweling. She tried to hide her fear as she spoke. It was difficult to force the words out. "What do you want? Get out of here!"

"What do I want?" he smiled. "You. Now that I've seen you. Just don't scream and you'll be all right. We know you're alone, so it wouldn't do any good."

Beyond his shoulder she could see a nightmarish face which was really no face at all, but streaks of yellow and white and vermilion, topped by a tuft of black hair and a slanted feather. She saw another hideous mask of color at the west window.

She stood there in the tub waiting for him to move. She didn't have to ask who he was, what he was doing there. She'd heard about that green and black uniform. She forced herself to speak again. "Will you let me dress?"

"Certainly. Go ahead."

"Will you go outside?"

He shook his head and smiled again. "You can go in the other room."

He watched her cross the room, wrapped in the cloth. "Beautiful," he said softly. "I am amazed. I never expected to find anything like you here in this sinkhole of a town."

As she hurried into the bedroom, he called after her: "Put on your walking shoes. You've got a long trip ahead."

She began dressing, and then the fright which had struck so suddenly began to take effect. Her hands began to shake, and she could scarcely assemble her clothes. Without realizing

it, she began to sob. She could hear him talking in the kitchen, and others answering, and occasionally there were short phrases in the language Tom and Murphy had used the other night. She heard kettles banging and chairs being upset and the tinkle of glass as her china closet was smashed.

Maybe they didn't intend to kill her. He'd said a long trip. What did that mean? Were they going to take her with them? Where was Tom?

Some of her fear abated. She realized that it hadn't been real terror, not even in those first few seconds. It had seemed so unnatural, so unreal, that she hadn't yet realized what it meant.

The door opened and she turned swiftly, covering herself with her dress. An Indian, painted and hideous, clad only in a clout and carrying a musket in one hand and a tomahawk in the other, stepped into the room and looked around. Another followed. Neither of them paid any attention to her. The first one walked to the bed and lifted the mattress. The other began pulling the drawers from the chest and throwing them on the floor. She slipped her dress over her head and fastened it. By that time her clothes and Tom's were all over the floor. One of the Indians had picked up Tom's watch and was listening to it tick. He grunted and the other turned to him. The first Indian said a few words and the second took the watch and listened to it. Then he turned it around and around. He handed it back and returned to upsetting the room. The Indian with the watch tucked it somewhere into his breechclout and looked at Jessica. He said something in what Jessica thought was English.

"I don't understand," she said.

He repeated it. She held up her hands to signify that she still didn't understand. His face twisted, becoming more horrible than before, and he lifted his tomahawk menacingly.

He spoke the word again, slower this time. "Mon-ey."

"He wants your money," said a voice behind her. It was the tall man in the doorway. "Better give it to him. We're going to burn the place anyway. These are Senecas, Mrs. Currie. They're like children one moment and devils the

next. Don't make them mad. They'd kill their grandmothers for plunder."

Tom kept their money in a small cedarwood box in the chest of drawers. It was lying on the floor near her feet, unnoticed by the Indians. She pushed it forward with her foot. Both Indians grabbed for it, but the one who had spoken to her pulled it away. The other stood by, waiting. The one with the box raised his hatchet and smashed the top panel. Coins and paper money spilled out on the floor. Now both Indians were scooping it up. They looked curiously at the paper money. They held it up for the tall white man to see.

"Continental," he said. "Throw it away."

"No good?" asked the second Indian.

"No good," said the tall man, smiling. "Burn it."

He turned to Jessica. "Take a bundle of things you'll need. It's a long hard trip. Take extra shoes, if you have them. Don't take any more stuff than you can carry all day without stopping to rest. When we get to Niagara I'll buy you anything you want. Hurry up, now. We're going to fire this place in a few minutes, as soon as we hear shots from the fort."

"Why are you taking me?" she asked. She raised her eyes to his. She wasn't going to be afraid! "I thought you killed everyone you caught."

He shook his head. "Not at all. What would be the sense in killing a beautiful woman like you? You don't belong in this hogpen. I'm taking you to Canada with me, to put every woman there in her place. You'll be the belle of Niagara when we get there."

"Suppose I refuse to go?"

"You'll go, Mrs. Currie. You'd better get started."

"How did you know my name?"

"We knew all about this place before we came down."

"Then you've heard of my husband. And you think you can force me to go with you to Niagara, or any place else?"

"I've heard of your famous husband, madam. I've heard the Indians talk of him, and I'm sick of hearing Brant talk about him. Your husband has his fame, but I have these." He gestured toward the Indians and behind him to a small gaunt

Ranger who had stepped into the doorway. He spoke to the man. "Get ready to burn it. Fire the barns as soon as you hear them start shooting, and the house as soon as we're out of it."

The other paid no heed to the command. He stared at Jessica wildly and his short hurried breathing was clearly audible. His right hand, holding a scalping knife, twitched erratically, as if the knife blade were hacking at some invisible substance. He began to move forward.

"Get out," he breathed aside to the officer. "I'll take care of the rebel bitch."

"Benson!" said the officer sharply, his hand touching the red-helved hatchet at his waist. "Get the fires started."

"I'll fix her!" said Benson harshly. "I'll fix her so she won't whelp any rebel pups. I'll cut the rotten parts of her away. I'll slice off the bitch's tits so she can never give suck to her litter!"

The officer grabbed him by both arms and shook him violently. "Benson! Get the hell out of here and get ready to fire the barns."

Jessica had retreated to the edge of the big bed. She could go no farther. She stood there watching the insane eyes and the slavering mouth. The two Indians seemed indifferent; their painted faces were immobile.

The officer turned Benson around and shoved him roughly into the kitchen. Then he shut the door.

"He'll be all right now. Poor fellow. Crazy as a tick. Thinks the Lord has ordained him to offer sacrifices of rebels. He likes to go after the women and girls, but we don't often let him out of our sight on a raid. It becomes messy if he's allowed to run free. There's a lot like him, although not quite so bad. I hope he gets shot pretty soon. He's getting uncontrollable. Yes, there are many like him. I'm a little that way myself in the heat of a raid. Come, now. Get your things. Hurry."

Jessica stared at him in horror. "Are you beasts, all of you?"

"Not by a long shot. There's a little timber wolf in every man. It comes to the fore on such duty as this. If we were regulars, we'd just kill other soldiers. By the way, I haven't

introduced myself, have I? William Desmond, madam, captain in Butler's Rangers. Now, let's go. Hurry it up!"

"You can't force me to leave!"

"No, Mrs. Currie. By the way, what's your first name? Well, no matter. You'll tell me soon enough. No, I can't force you. But I can give you a choice. You're a beautiful woman. You know that. I haven't seen any to match you since I was last in London, years ago. I'm taking you with me because I want you. But if you won't come, I surely don't intend to carry you. I haven't the time. And Brant wouldn't let me detail a couple of men to do it for me. All right. Let's assume you won't move. Then I'll give you to these two Senecas here. That lovely long hair is worth eight dollars in Niagara. Or I might call Benson back. Which will it be?"

He means it, she thought. He wouldn't hesitate at all. If I go, Tom will come after me. He'll find me.

"All right," she said. "I'll be ready in a moment."

11

JUST BEFORE DAWN, Mathias Finch crouched on the bank of the Hollow Creek and looked across at the dark water of the long pool where it flowed deep and serene under the cut bank. It was still too early to see anything in the clear water of the pool, but Matt knew from experience just where the trout were lying above the gravel bed of the stream. They would be holding themselves steady against the current close to the far bank. They'd be just below the riffle.

Matt moved back from the stream cautiously and searched the long fronds of meadow grass. Suddenly his hand moved and plucked a medium-sized brown grasshopper from the dew-laden grass. He hooked the insect carefully and then crept back to the bank. He cast, holding the line and its braided horsehair leader in one hand, the short supple ash pole in the other. The grasshopper landed above the riffle

and floated down near the far bank, kicking frantically. It passed over the spot where Matt thought the trout were lying. Nothing happened.

A little deeper and he'll get some action, Matt thought. If they won't come up, I'll send the hopper down to them.

He retrieved his line carefully and pinched a tiny bit of lead to the horsehair leader. This time he cast farther upstream. The grasshopper disappeared under the surface and the line passed through the riffle. Then it was into the pool. Instantly the line twitched and Matt brought the tip of his rod up. He was fast to a good trout.

Matt played him carefully, leading him to the head of the pool where he could be landed on a small sandbar. It took about three minutes to work the trout ashore. Matt held him up. Fifteen inches. Not bad at all. A couple more like that and the kids and he and Pa would have trout for breakfast. And catching this one hadn't disturbed the others, he thought. He might take two more right out of this pool and then he could cut for home.

Only thing about going home, Matt thought, is that first thing this morning Pa is going to start again, or I am. Pa's got no right to act like that about it, he thought as he took his knife from its sheath, killed the trout, and began to clean it. It seems he don't even want to listen to what I say. Just thinks about that everlasting farm. I'm almost a man grown, and he ought to know it. It's up to me to decide what I'm going to do. But he won't listen.

Last night they'd gone at it tooth and nail. Pa had come back from Cedar Bush, worrying about whether the Indians were going to come down on them. Probably that had been a bad time to bring up the subject of the army again.

"Matt," his father had said, "you and me had better finish with stacking the hay in the morning."

"Pa, I figured that maybe—" Matt began. "Well, Pa, I was thinking that this would be as good a time as any to go."

"Are you at that again? Now, listen to me, boy! You're as big as I am," said Bezaleel Finch, "and maybe you're as strong as I am, but I can still give you a good hiding when

you need it. Now you quit talking about the army. You're going to stay right here in Cedar Bush and help me with this farm."

"You and the kids can make out without me, Pa. You know you can. And the army needs every man it can get."

"You're in the militia where I can keep an eye on you. Ain't that enough? I fought in this war for two years before your mother passed on. Now I have to stay home and I need you here. I can't care for the kids and for the farm, too. Now that's enough out of you, boy. I won't hear another word."

"Militia!" Matt had scoffed. "Drilling up and down in front of the fort. Who's the militia ever going to fight?"

"Son," his father said seriously, "you're going to have a bellyful of fighting. I told you what happened with that Tory today. We're out here so far from the fort, we're going to have to keep both eyes open."

"You don't know for sure, Pa. And there's fighting got to be done in the army."

"That's enough, Matt!"

So this morning, long before Pa and the kids were up, Matt had taken his rod and line and walked up here to the Hollow Creek. He could think better when he was fishing.

When he'd finished cleaning the trout, instead of trying for another, Matt stretched out on the bank, his chin cupped in his hands, watching the Hollow Creek flow down to the Deerkill a hundred yards below. The early morning light was beginning to filter across the land. Almost a mile away across the stream he could just begin to see the scattered cabins of Cedar Bush and the big stone fort above the Deerkill with the white church just beyond it.

Cedar Bush, Matt thought. Highland County, state of New York. Where nothing ever happens. All those grown men playing soldier in the militia, when the army needs 'em. They all talk about liberty down at that tavern, but they stay right here in safe old Cedar Bush.

"I'm going," he said aloud. "Pa, I'm going and don't try to stop me."

He pictured himself in a blue and buff uniform, marching

along with the Continental Line, rough veterans of many campaigns in these four years. He could see the imposing figure of General Washington riding ahead on a great white horse.

"I'm going, Pa. That's all there is to it."

He knew that this time he'd made up his mind for good. All he had to do now was to go home and tell his father. He wouldn't stay here another day. He'd be eighteen come October. Then he'd be a full-grown man. He already was, when you came down to it, because birthdays weren't important.

He was about to leap to his feet and start for home when a movement in the brush along the Deerkill made him pause. He watched, sure he'd seen something. Maybe a deer or a bear. He waited. Nothing moved. Well, if there had been anything, it wasn't there now. He pushed himself upward and then stopped instantly in a half-crouching position.

Men trotting beside the stream! He'd had just a glimpse of them through the brush. There was a clearing about thirty yards downstream. They would pass through it. He waited.

Then he saw them. Indians! Five of them! He didn't dare to move, for fear they'd see him. They were painted, and all of them carried guns. As they went through the clearing, one of them glanced up along the banks of the Hollow Creek. Matt wanted to drop to the ground, but he knew he must not move at all. He didn't see how the Indian could miss him, but somehow he did. The five of them passed out of sight into the brush.

Matt waited one minute, two minutes, before leaving the high grass. While he crouched there, he had time to make a decision. If he ran for Cedar Bush to get the militia to go after the Indians, that would leave Pa and the kids without any knowledge that painted Indians were near. If it was a raid, a big raid, then these five were heading for the Finch farm. He had just about enough time to beat them there. Let Cedar Bush look out for itself!

He jumped to his feet and started to run.

He slowed at the edge of the Deerkill to avoid too much noise. He waded until the water was over his hips and then

he swam thirty yards until he touched bottom again. It took him about three minutes to cross the stream. It would take the Indians longer, because they would look for a fording place.

Reaching the east bank, Matt ran as fast as he could go. The brush whipped his face, ripping the flesh. His foot caught in a creeping vine and he fell heavily. It knocked the wind from him for a moment, but then he was up and running again. He hoped desperately that the Indians couldn't hear the noise of his passage. Bluejays screamed at him from the trees above. He pushed his way through a mucky area of swampland and then across a small stream which fed the Deerkill. It was only a quarter mile now. The Indians would still be looking for a place to cross the Deerkill, if they were coming at all.

First time I ever saw a painted Indian, Matt thought as he ran. Wish I could have told what they were. Mohawks or Senecas, most likely. I hope Pa hasn't left the cabin yet.

He reached the edge of the forest and raced onto the cleared land of his father's farm. Far across the meadow he could see the cabin and the barn, looking quiet and peaceful. He saw Davey and Lucy playing near the cabin under the big apple tree. Pa and Nathaniel were already at work stacking hay beside the barn.

Matt glanced along the line of forest which hid the Deerkill. They weren't in sight yet. Maybe they were laying in the trees. It hardly seemed likely that they were headed any place else. Matt looked north toward Cedar Bush. He saw it right away. A black column of smoke rising high in the thin air. One of the places on the other side of the river, he could tell that much. Then it was a raid!

He wanted to stop and yell to his father, but the Indians would hear him. It was only a hundred and fifty yards now, but still he didn't dare yell. Then he saw his father look up and stand there watching him. Matt waved his arms wildly toward the house, and then pointed behind him at the Deerkill. His father stood where he was. Matt again waved desperately.

Suddenly Bez Finch ran for the cabin. Nathaniel ran behind him, looking back at Matt.

Davey's voice lifted in a small boy's shrill yell. "What you running for, Matt?"

He was almost there now. His father came to the cabin door, carrying two rifles. He held one out as Matt ran up.

Bez Finch said only one word. "Injuns?"

Matt, panting so hard he couldn't talk, nodded violently and pointed at the smoke upriver.

"How many, Matt?"

"Five," gasped Matt. "Coming here. Don't know how many up there."

Bez Finch kept his eyes on the meadow between the cabin and the Deerkill, but he spoke rapidly to Nathaniel. "Natty, take your brother and sister through the woods to the fort. Run as fast as you can. If you see any Indians, lay low until they've gone. Don't try to get through to the fort if there's Indians in sight. Wait for me and Matt at the big rock on the edge of the woods if you can't make it. Run, now. Don't let the kids cry. Run, boy, run!"

Nathaniel, who was fourteen, took ten-year-old Davey and eight-year-old Lucy and raced away through the cornfield, heading for the woods which lay between the Finch farm and Cedar Bush.

"Inside, Matt! Get inside!"

"We going to fight, Pa?"

"No! Get powder, ball, knife and hatchet, and then we'll cover the kids. We can maybe keep five of 'em off."

"Can't we do it better here, Pa?"

"Not on your life! They'd hole us up and burn us out."

In a few seconds Matt was ready. His father took a little longer, getting the money from the stone crock above the fireplace, and rummaging through a chest of drawers in the bedroom.

"Hurry, Pa! What you doing?"

"Looking for your mother's locket. Here it is. All right, Matt. Let's go!"

Bez Finch took one backward look as they reached the

edge of the cornfield. He gripped his son's arm. "That was a good home, boy."

"Maybe they won't burn it, Pa, they'll be so busy chasing us."

"They'll leave a man to burn it. Let's run!"

"Here they come, Pa!" Matt exclaimed. As they headed into the rows of tall corn, he'd seen a movement down by the stream.

"All right, boy. Fast as we can go. Try not to shake the corn. It may take 'em a few minutes to find our trail."

The broad fronds of the cornstalks rattled and clashed as they ran crouching between the tall rows. They were almost through the field when they heard a shrill whooping from the cabin.

"They've found we're gone," Bez Finch gasped.

There was no sound nor sign of pursuit after they left the cornfield and ran into the woods. But both of them knew that the Indians would be coming.

Bez Finch slowed his pace for a few seconds. "Matt," he panted, "listen to me. Have to get the kids to the fort."

"Yeah, Pa."

"Nothing else counts. Not you, not me."

"We'll get 'em in, Pa."

"Good boy, Matt." Finch gripped his son's arm. "Let's go." They started to run again.

12

IT HAD BEEN almost full dawn when Brant led his men to the edge of the forest on the west side of the Deerkill. Desmond had already taken his small party of Rangers and Indians toward the three farms lying north of the bridge.

Apparently most of the settlement was at breakfast. Here and there a woman would come to the door of a cabin and toss a kettle of water over a flower bed. A few children played

around the cabins. None of the men were yet in the fields.

Brant and Hiokatoo and MacDonald lay prone in the brush and grass at the edge of the forest, watching the cabins. The rest of the war party was well hidden in the trees.

"They got no sentries on the stockade of the fort," MacDonald whispered.

"They may be hiding and watching through the loopholes," Brant answered.

"Not them farmers," MacDonald said contemptuously. "They would be stretching and scratching their behinds and spitting over the stockade and acting like dumb farmers generally if they were there."

"You told me this colonel of militia was a smart man."

"He is," MacDonald said. "Testing's all right. But not in a military way. If they were on that stockade, they wouldn't pay his orders no mind. Don't worry about sentries. If they had any, you'd see 'em now."

"All right then. We'll try to make the bridge before they spot us." Brant spoke to Hiokatoo. "Brother. Tell your braves to spread out and crawl through the grass toward the bridge. You and I will go first. If we get to the bridge without being seen, we'll get up and run. Your braves will follow. If we are seen before we reach the bridge, then all will run for the cabins. Understood?"

Hiokatoo nodded.

"I'll give the sign to the Mohawks and Rangers," Brant said, turning and hunching back through the brush, while Hiokatoo spoke in low tones to the waiting Senecas.

When Brant returned, he looked at Hiokatoo and then at MacDonald. He smiled slightly. "MacDonald, how is your nose?"

"Feels better already," the Tory whispered. "That first cabin on the right is Dunning's. I'm heading for it."

"Five of my men are waiting to go with you," Brant told him. "Good luck, and remember—the women didn't beat you."

"No," breathed MacDonald, "but they whelped the dogs who did."

Brant looked at him in silence for a moment. Then he said, "All right. Let's go."

MacDonald had been wrong about the sentries. On each side of the stockade two sentries were lying prone on the firing platform. Despite the fact that Tom Currie had not reported, Colonel Testing had ordered the Cedar Bush militia to stand guard duty, eight men at a time to stand a tour of eight hours. The men were somewhat disgusted with the colonel's order. Most of them took little stock in the danger of an attack. If Testing had been really worried, wouldn't he have ordered the families on the far side of the Deerkill into the fort?

Quick and Polhamus were the two men on the side of the stockade which faced the bridge and their own farms. Polhamus had been silently fretting since he'd come on guard at midnight. He'd be of more use back home guarding his own family. Testing just wanted things to be military. That's why he'd ordered this guard on the stockade.

Gabriel Quick, a thin nervous man who would have been handsome had it not been for his sullen face, was lying on his back on the log platform, gazing at the cotton-ball puffs of clouds above in the brightening sky.

"Yessir, Oscar," he said to Polhamus. "Next year I'm going to get me a team of jackasses, and the year after that I'm going to build me a bigger barn."

Polhamus grunted noncommittally. He was lying with his face to the loophole, studying Dunning's half-mown hay meadow.

"You want a team of jackasses, I can get them for you at a good price, Oscar. I told you my brother-in-law's a horse trader over to Kingston."

"Oxen'll do me," said Polhamus. "I'm going to build me a good house first, with mill lumber."

"You got a house, Oscar."

"And you got a barn."

"But it ain't big enough."

"That's what's wrong with my house. It's a one-room cabin, and the kids are getting bigger, specially the girl, and my

woman says they ought to lay in their own room. Kids get to be a problem."

"Not for us," Quick grinned. "We ain't made any yet. I don't know what's wrong with my wife. That ground just won't take seed. And it ain't for lack of plowing and planting, either."

Polhamus didn't answer. He was a man of scruples and he didn't think Quick's comments were fit talk for neighbors. He continued to watch the meadows, wishing that Quick would stop talking or talk about something worth while like crops or cattle or hogs. He'd never taken much to Quick.

He looked at the bridge. They'd better put a new one in, come fall. Some of the timbers were rotten, he'd noticed the other day. His gaze traveled toward the woods beyond the bridge. He reached for his musket.

"Gabe!"

"What?"

"Take a look at the edge of the woods."

Quick rolled over and stared through his loophole.

"Don't see nothing, Oscar."

"There! The whole woods is moving. And look at the meadow. Injuns!"

"I see 'em! Christ, my wife! My house!"

Polhamus pulled his musket along his body and shoved it through the loophole. His breathing changed to spasmodic moaning gasps. Without even aiming, he pulled the trigger of his musket. Quick fired a couple of seconds later. Polhamus jumped to his feet and raced for the stockade ladder. He was weeping now. A phlegmatic man by nature, the one beauty in his entire life was his relationship with his wife. She was no lovely woman—indeed, she was rather plain and inclined to plumpness—but for him no other woman ever had or ever would exist. Now at the thought of the Indians on the other side of the river with her, his mind grasped, released, and then seized again the knowledge of the horror she would undergo.

"Emma," he sobbed. "Oh, my God! Come here, Emma. Don't get caught. Emma! My Jesus, Emma!"

The other men on the stockade were firing now. From most of the cabins people were streaming, halting for a moment to look, and then racing for the stockade.

Beyond the Deerkill, a long line of screaming Indians raced for the bridge. They were firing at the cabins as they ran. The Rangers didn't shoot and didn't scream. They just ran.

The stockade gate swung open. The church bell began to clang. From all the cabins now came women and children, some milling for a moment about the cabin doorways, but soon racing for the gate. The babies were carried; the young children were dragged. Fifteen to twenty men had formed a line between the women and children and the bridge. They knelt, fired, reloaded and fired again. Dogs raced frantically everywhere. Some of them dashed toward the raiders and then back again, barking furiously.

Before the war party had even reached the bridge, almost all the cabins were empty. Beyond the tavern, the two families farthest from the fort to the east stood in a group for a few seconds, undecided. They might be cut off by that line of Indians before they could reach the fort. There were twelve or fourteen people. Six of them, two boys and two girls and a man and a woman, suddenly ran for the fort. The others headed for the woods and the eastern edge of the valley. Those who headed for the fort made it in good time. The others vanished into the forest.

Oscar Polhamus, sobbing and cursing and praying insanely, with his mind screaming the knowledge of Emma's fate—seeing her lying scalped and naked on the threshold of his cabin with his children beside her—raced out of the fort through the open gate. He had a knife in his right hand. As fast as his sturdy farmer's legs could carry him, he headed straight for the bridge. Rangers and Indians were already streaming across it. Foremost in the line were Brant and Hiokatoo. Brant ran silently, head up, watching the stream of settlers. Hiokatoo was whooping and brandishing his tomahawk. MacDonald veered south at the bridge and five Mohawks followed him toward the Dunning cabin.

Polhamus ran straight at Hiokatoo. The big Indian slowed,

crouched, then leaped as the farmer lunged at him. The Seneca struck with the tomahawk, but Polhamus' left arm deflected it. They grappled and swayed back and forth. The tomahawk dropped, and they fought for the knife. Polhamus kept screaming his wife's name. The Seneca fought silently. He bent Polhamus' arms back, farther back. Then his knee came up into the settler's groin. Polhamus gasped and relaxed. Instantly Hiokatoo had the knife and plunged it into Polhamus' throat. A stream of blood shot out. Hiokatoo dropped him and the knife he had taken from him, seized Polhamus' hair, and with his scalping knife made one quick motion. He pulled. Whooping, he held up the dripping scalp and shook it at the fort. Then he raced forward.

Down at Dunning's place, they had all been sleeping save Daniel. He had started to prepare breakfast for them all, mumbling about the ill luck which had bedeviled him with five lazy sons. His wife was feeling poorly; he didn't so much mind *her* lying abed. But those five big lunkies. Just like so many hogs.

The first shot stupefied him; the second sped him into action. He grabbed his musket; yelled for his wife and sons and ran to the door. Far across the bridge he saw the war party.

"Come on!" he screamed. "Injuns!"

In a matter of seconds the boys were down the ladder from the loft and his wife was beside him in her night dress. Two of the boys were naked. The others had their breeches on.

"What'll we do, Pa?" Eph asked.

"Run for it! Grab your guns and come on!"

"Get the money, Daniel," cried his wife. "I'll get my clothes."

"Goddam the money! Run!" Daniel screamed at her. "You boys, spread out. Don't give 'em a target. Fire once and then run like hell."

MacDonald and the five Mohawks were halfway across the meadow when the Dunnings left the cabin. Immediately the Tory and the Indians veered sharply to cut them off. Eph and

Dave were running last, with their father just ahead. The mother was being pulled along by the younger boys, both of them still naked. Dave Dunning turned and fired. He missed. So did Eph, a moment later. The father kept going. Eph gauged the distance between his mother and the fort; then he looked back at their pursuers. His next words to Dave were not so much a result of courage as they were of conceit, contempt for the enemy, and faith in his own strength.

"Dave," he gasped. "Go on. I'll hold them."

"No! Come on. We'll make it."

"Never. Get the fort to cover me when I run for it."

Dave hesitated a moment and then kept running. Eph halted and turned to face the enemy. Dave ran on about forty yards and then stopped and looked back. So did his father. MacDonald and two of the Indians were only a few yards from Eph. Dave yelled and started to return to his brother, but Daniel grabbed him.

"Come on, son. He's saving us. Come on. Run!"

They ran on, although Dave kept looking back.

Eph waited until the foremost Indian was almost on him and then he swung his musket. The Mohawk fended it off with his tomahawk and leaped in. Eph grappled with him.

"Get away!" MacDonald yelled at the Indian. "Get away!"

With a great shove, Eph pushed the Mohawk sprawling. MacDonald jumped then, his bony hands clawing for Eph's throat. Dunning's big fist pounded into the Tory's broken nose. MacDonald screamed and fell back, and then leaped again. Eph pushed him away easily. The Mohawks had been closing in with upraised tomahawks. Now Eph turned, burst through the Mohawks and raced again for the stockade. MacDonald went after him, yelling crazily at the Mohawks to catch him. Four of them were right behind Eph, but the fifth raced to the side, stopped and raised his arm. The tomahawk crashed against the back of Eph Dunning's skull. He sprawled on the ground. The Mohawks leaped for him, but MacDonald tore them aside.

"He's mine. Get away."

The Indian who had felled Eph seemed for a moment in-

clined to resist. He lifted his bloody tomahawk. MacDonald paid no attention. He pulled the knife from his belt. The Mohawk stayed his hand, then grunted and stepped away. MacDonald jumped astride Eph Dunning's back and scalped him.

"There! You dirty rebel bastard. You rotten son of a bitch."

The taking of the scalp seemed to quiet the Tory. He wiped his knife blade on the grass and stood looking at the scalp. The Mohawks were alternately gazing impassively at him and at the Dunnings, who had now reached the stockade.

"All right," MacDonald panted. He held out the scalp to the Indian who had claimed it. "Here. Eight dollars in Niagara." The Indian hesitated a moment, then shrugged and took the scalp.

"Let's go," MacDonald said. "Burn that rat's nest." He pointed at the Dunning cabin. "Burn the stink out of it."

13

When Tom Currie returned to consciousness, the dawn had already started to brighten the valley. He rose slowly, laboriously, to his knees, then to his feet. His head throbbed fiercely. The blow had opened a long slash along the back of his skull. His movements now started the blood flowing again.

If it isn't cracked, I'll make it to the settlement, he told himself. If it's broken, I won't get very far. Whichever it is, I'll be lucky if I get to the fort. They'll be starting any time now.

Clumsily, with much pain, he walked to the cedar clump where his rifle lay. He unwrapped it from his hunting shirt and slipped the shirt over his bloody head. He checked his rifle to see that it was undamaged, and then started for Cedar Bush.

For a while every step sent the pain leaping through his body. It was so bad that he was sure his skull was cracked.

He pushed himself along, however, yard by painful yard, using his rifle to help him cross the rough spots without falling. He was hungry. As he faltered along, his hand would reach out and strip a sprig of huckleberries. He didn't stop to pick a bush clean. The berries weren't nourishing, but they might help him keep going.

Soon he noticed that he was moving faster, with less difficulty. The pain was less severe.

All right, he thought. It's not broken. So now all I have to do is keep going until I get there.

He came to the west bank of the Deerkill. He lay down and thrust his head under the water. The gash on his head started to throb again. He arose and started south along the bank.

He seemed to be floating along somehow. He felt stronger and now it was much easier to travel. While actually he was stumbling and reeling, he thought he was trotting at a good pace. The rifle bothered him. Without looking at it, he thought it was a stick he'd picked up. He wanted to throw it away. The first time he fell he blamed it on the darkness. He thought he'd keep the stick awhile. It would help him, maybe, when he stumbled in the darkness.

Man shouldn't walk in the woods at night, he thought. Always falling down. I should be home, anyway. Jessica will be worried.

The next time he fell, he lay there. Just take a little rest, he told himself. He seemed to drop off to sleep.

When he woke, his head was clear again. He thought instantly that he'd been there for hours. Then he realized it had been only a few minutes.

I'll have to go slower, he thought. I can't do that again. I even forgot why I had to get back.

But he didn't travel any slower. Instead he concentrated on his thoughts, so that he'd be warned if he started to get light-headed again. Twice he stopped to rest for a few moments.

Then he had only one mile to go. Now he used extreme care. His brain forced his body to co-operate. Weak as he

was, he now moved through the forest without stumbling, without making any noise, although he continued to move slowly. He saw the first light of dawn through the trees on the east bank of the river.

He began watching the sky downstream and listening. There was nothing to see or hear. As the light grew brighter he heard the birds in the forest around him begin to chatter and sing.

He passed a bend in the Deerkill which was only a half mile north of his cabin. Still there was no sign of anything wrong. He could see the rim of the sun now. It was going to be a hot day. Far ahead he heard a cock crow—once, twice.

That's mine, he thought. I'd know him anywhere. And I haven't heard Quick's dog yet, or Polhamus' either. So it's still all right. Maybe they figure to wait a day. Or maybe they won't go in at dawn. They might wait until the men get separated in the fields.

Then came the sound for which he had been listening. A flat sharp snap, as of a branch breaking some distance away, and then another, and then a series of them.

He began to run, stumbling, falling.

The snappings continued, sometimes intermittently, sometimes a volley of them. In a minute or so he heard the church-bell pealing frantically.

No use in running, he told himself. Won't be able to do anything when I get there. And she's in the fort. They all are.

He slowed his pace and watched the sky ahead. They're slow, he thought. I ought to see it by now.

Then he did see it. First it was the smoke, a thick column seeming to burst upwards into the clear sky. Then came the tips of the flames leaping above the treetops ahead.

That's mine. Quick would be off to the right, and Polhamus even farther.

There goes Quick's place now. And there's Polhamus's. Well, there aren't any shots from over there, so they're all in the fort, too. They must have left their dog, though.

For some time he had been hearing the shrill yapping of a dog over toward Quick's. It stopped for a moment, then

started again. Five seconds later the yapping became a short sharp scream, and then it stopped.

Another hundred yards now and he would be on the edge of his clearing. He could see the flames now that the trees were beginning to thin. The closest fire, straight ahead, was the house. A little to the right the barns were burning. He could hear the whooping very distinctly over the crackle of the fires.

Senecas, he thought. Thank God she's in the fort.

From tree to tree he advanced, rifle ready, to the very edge of the clearing. The flames were soaring high into the air now. The house was a huge gout of fire. The barn already was starting to crumble and fall.

Two Rangers were leaning on their muskets near the house, watching it burn. A pile of blankets and food sacks was lying before them. There were three Senecas on the far side of the house, poking with their musket barrels into a collection of household goods. One of them put on Jessica's best bonnet and began to dance and whoop. Away over toward Quick's, Tom saw some Rangers herding cows toward the woods. At Quick's place, Tom could see another group of figures near the burning house. He couldn't see Polhamus's buildings, but they too were burning fiercely, if the smoke were sign enough.

Neither the Rangers nor the Senecas at his place had any fresh scalps at their belts. No scalps with long auburn hair.

Tom watched the Seneca with the bonnet pick up Jessica's curtains and toss them into the burning grass near the house. Every time one of them vanished in a puff of flame the Indian would whoop and pick up another. The other Indians stared impassively.

They got little enough to do, Tom thought. The bastards!

He realized with an odd sense of guilt that this was the first time in his life that he had ever felt anger and hatred toward the Indians.

That's because this time it's my place. Before it was always somebody else that got burnt out, and it wasn't any skin off my nose. I used to figure they were asking for it, moving into Indian country. But this isn't Indian country. That's my

father's house that's burning. All right. It's burning. Nothing I can do about it. Jess is in the fort. Now all I have to do is get in there myself.

Cautiously he edged away from the clearing, taking a final look at the flaming shell of the home his father had built so many years before. When he reached the river, he could see all of the settlement. Much of it was in flames. There was only a pile of smoking timbers where the tavern had been, the church was beginning to tumble, and only those few cabins close to the fort had not yet been fired.

The Indians and Rangers were scattered on the open land near the river, out of range of the muskets in the fort. Most of the green-coated Rangers were carrying plunder across the bridge to the west bank of the Deerkill. A group of Indians were launching fire arrows at the cabins which had not yet been burned.

Tom counted the war party. About sixty there, and maybe twenty-five on this side of the river. He saw Brant near the bridge, directing the men who were carrying the provisions across. Among the Indians with the fire arrows Tom could make out a tall heavy Indian with a three-cornered hat perched over his scalplock. He was leaping and screaming, and each time an arrow sailed in a stream of smoke and flame, he shook his musket at the fort.

Old Hiokatoo, Tom thought. Now all we need is Walter Butler.

The fort was about five hundred yards down the river from the spot where Tom stood. He would have to cross the river, keep to the woods for two hundred yards, and then cross three hundred yards of open land, most of it rocky and stump-filled, before he could get into the fort. His only advantage would be surprise. They wouldn't be expecting anyone to try to get through their lines into the fort. However, he realized how weak he was from all the blood he'd lost, and how tired he was from yesterday's running. He'd need luck. With a little luck, he'd make it. He thought that perhaps this morning all the Curries' luck had been used up, since Jessica

was safe. Well, he'd have to try it. He'd be of no use to anyone hiding out here.

Clambering down the river bank out of sight of the Indians and Rangers at his cabin, he waded into the river, holding his rifle just above the surface. He moved slowly to avoid splashing and sudden movements. It was unlikely that they'd notice him if he didn't do anything to attract attention. The river was about fifty yards wide. He managed to wade about fifteen yards, and then he had to swim with one arm and hold the rifle evenly above the water with the other. Very slowly he swam until his feet touched gravel once more. After a step or two, he stepped into a hole. His head went under, but he didn't flounder or splash. He held the rifle steadily and took another step. His head came up. A few more yards and he was across. They hadn't seen him.

He moved carefully through the trees and brush for about a hundred and fifty yards. Another fifty yards and he'd be ready to make his run. Then he heard a floundering in the brush ahead. He jumped behind a big hickory and stood there motionless while the threshing continued. Then he heard a frightened bawling moan and realized that it was a cow. She bawled again.

That will bring them right here, he thought. They're herding all the stock. It's a question of me or her, and I'd sooner they caught her.

He pulled out his knife and cut a long switch in the brush. Then he moved forward. He could see her black-and-white bulk coming toward him. When she was a few yards away, he said softly: "So, Boss. So, Bossie."

She bawled once more.

"Now shut your noise," he whispered. "You want those Indians over here? Hush, now."

He moved up to her, whispering to her. She moaned again, and he walked to her side.

"Come on, now," he said. "This way. Out of these woods, now."

A little prodding with the butt of his rifle started her ahead of him. She kept turning her head to watch him, and

he whispered reassurance to her. They were a few yards from the last of the trees.

"Now this is going to scare you, Boss, more than it's going to hurt. And you're going to run like hell, because if you don't, we'll both get caught."

He lifted the switch high in the air and brought it down as hard as he could across her rump. She bawled in fright and started to run. He gave her another good one before she was out of the brush. Away she went across the plain, bawling in fear, as fast as she could go with her knock-kneed gallop. She headed toward the river and the bridge.

Immediately most of the Indians began to whoop and scream. They raced toward her, waving their muskets and some of them shooting into the air. The cow swerved, bawled, saw more of her screaming enemies coming from the other side, and ran straight ahead again. A few of the Rangers joined the chase.

Just like children, Tom thought as he watched. They don't even stop to wonder what made her come out of the woods. All right. Just take 'em a little ways farther, Boss. A little more. All right. Now!

He raced into the clearing, rifle in his left hand, hatchet in his right, running as fast as his weary aching legs could go. The fort was more than three hundred yards; the nearest Indian about two hundred diagonally from the fort; the nearest Ranger, burdened with a bag of grain, about one hundred and fifty.

He had crossed almost a hundred yards before they saw him. He didn't look aside; he heard the whooping and the shouts of the Rangers, the volley of shots, the whistling of the balls around him. One hit the hatchet and sent it spinning from his hand. He forced himself to run even faster. The pain in his head was terrific. It felt as if it were going to burst and send all the blood in his body spilling out on the ground. He looked to the right, toward the river and the bridge. There was a stream of runners trying to cut him off. They'd get close, he thought, but not close enough. Unless he fell. If he fell, he'd be done.

They can cover me from the fort. Why don't they fire?

Then he saw spurts of smoke from the stockade. And he heard an increase in the whining of musket balls around him.

"Goddam you," he gasped. "Not at me!"

Then the firing from the stockade stopped for a moment. He looked around again. There were two Indians running all out, driving with all their strength, about fifty yards behind and to the right. The rest had stopped running and were watching or reloading. A couple of Rangers were kneeling and taking aim at him. He dodged a couple of times to throw them off. Then a volley of shots came from the stockade again. One of the Indians chasing him sprawled on his face. The other veered away. Then he heard a full carrying voice shouting from the river.

"Cease fire!" The command was repeated in the Mohawk language.

Brant, Tom thought. He recognized me.

Tom lifted his rifle and waved it once. Then he was at the stockade. The firing from both sides had stopped. Someone was fumbling with the tiny door in the massive log gate. It swung open and he tumbled in.

He fell to the ground and lay there gasping for breath. Youngblood and Ben Whittaker picked him up and supported his arms.

"He's hurt and bleeding. Get Colonel Testing."

There was a crowd around him—men, women, and children.

"What did you idiots shoot at me for?" he gasped, while his gaze searched the crowd.

"Thought it was a trick, Tom. We didn't see it was you," Whittaker answered. "Where's Jim Taylor?"

Tom didn't comprehend the question immediately. He continued to look at the faces around him. He couldn't focus his eyes. The faces were hazy and seemed to dance in the bright sunlight.

"Taylor?" he said finally. "He's here with you."

Whittaker shook his head.

"Where's my wife?" Tom said. "Where's Jess?"

"Why, Tom," Whittaker said slowly, "she ain't here."

"Inside?" Tom asked. "Hurt?"

Again Whittaker shook his head.

"Didn't Taylor warn you? Didn't you get everybody inside?"

"We haven't seen him since he left with you. And we don't know where Jess is, either."

Tom Currie shook their hands from his arms. He turned and stumbled toward the gate.

"Where are you going, Tom?" Youngblood asked.

"Out to get my wife," he said. His legs wouldn't work. He stumbled once more and fell prone. He lay there and they picked him up and carried him into the stone fort.

14

MATT FINCH and his father crouched in the shelter of a huge boulder at the edge of the forest, directly opposite the fort. At this point the broad expanse of cleared land around Cedar Bush narrowed on both sides, giving the effect of a great funnel, with the fort and the village at the neck. The children were beside them. Davey was crying with fear and exhaustion, while Lucy and Nathaniel tried to quiet him.

"They'll be coming, Pa," Matt said.

"We can't run for it," Bez Finch said. "There's too many of them in front of the fort."

He pointed at the Rangers and the howling Indians who were spread across the meadow between the fort and the river.

"We can't stay here," Matt told him. "These five behind us will be here any minute, and then we'll be cut off in every direction. The kids can't run fast enough to get away."

"I'm trying to think, son! I just can't see any way but running for the fort, and they'll get us sure."

"I can't keep him quiet, Pa!" called Nathaniel urgently.

"Do your best, Natty."

"You have to help me, Pa."

Matt studied the meadow. There was an alder-lined gully about thirty yards away which crossed the meadow in a tortuous strip of green, passing the fort not far from the small back gate. That would do it, if the five Indians weren't coming up behind them. The first thing they would do would be to investigate that gully. There was only a thin trickle of water in it now. In the spring the rains formed a small brook which flowed past the fort and the cabins and reached the Deerkill opposite Tom Currie's farm. Now the bottom was covered with soft mud. It would take the Indians only a few seconds to spot their tracks in the mud and then they would race along the banks of the gully in a few seconds, whereas it would take the Finches perhaps ten minutes to creep through the alders along the winding brook. They'd be caught long before they reached the fort.

His father was hugging Davey to him, whispering to him, and the boy had quieted. Matt made the decision for them.

"Pa!" he called softly. His father looked up.

"Start along the brook with the kids," Matt said. "Keep out of sight and you can get to the fort before they see you."

"Haven't got enough time," his father said. "Let's run for it."

"No, Pa. I'll cover you. Now, get going."

"I won't let you do it, Matt. Five against one. No!"

"Go ahead, Pa! I've got an idea."

"You go with the kids. I'll stay here, son."

"It wouldn't work, Pa! Davey would cry again. Now, go ahead! I'll be all right. They won't get any of us. You said only the kids count. You can get 'em to the fort. I can't."

Bez Finch thought for an instant as he hugged Davey. He glanced at the fort, along the brook, and back through the forest.

"All right," he said, his face twisted with despair. "No time left. Goodbye, son. Run for it if you can." He reached out his arms as if to hug Matt, but the boy gave him a push and grinned at him.

"Go, Pa."

"God bless you, boy."

Matt watched them creep away through the brush toward the brook. Then he began to watch the forest through which they would come. Nothing moved. There was sporadic firing from the fort and from the war party. The yelling of the Indians continued unabated. Matt glanced frequently at the brook and at the members of the war party nearest the fort. None of them were on this side of the stockade, although there were many of them dancing and yelling around the burning cabins on the edge of the village beyond the fort.

One minute, then two minutes passed. There was no sign of pursuit. Occasionally a bird flitted across the path in the forest, and Matt started. He had his own musket ready and his father's beside him. With luck, he'd reduce the odds somewhat. He hadn't had time yet to be frightened. Now, however, there began to seep into his mind thoughts of what would happen if they caught him. He tensed his hands and gritted his teeth. They wouldn't catch him!

Suddenly he relaxed. His finger curled around the trigger of the musket. Something had moved. He waited, entirely hidden by the boulder. Then he saw a form flit between two trees along the path. One! He saw another movement farther along. Two! And there was the third! And fourth! He waited. That was all. Now the first Indian was moving again. He was crawling through the brush toward the rock. Another followed him. They were both away from any cover but the shrubs of the forest floor. Matt moved his musket barrel imperceptibly to cover the first dark gleaming body. Clearly he saw the vermilion and white stripes across the face and chest. Now! He squeezed the trigger.

While the smoke still mushroomed from the barrel, Matt dropped the musket and grabbed the other. The first Indian writhed on the ground. The second was up and running for the rock. Matt snapped a shot and the Indian pitched headlong. Dropping the musket, Matt pulled his knife and began to run. There were savage yells behind him.

Now came the test. He was the best runner in Cedar Bush, man or boy, but was he as good as these Indians? He leaped

across the brook in one stride and raced eastward across the meadow. He couldn't head for the fort—that would attract Indians and Rangers from the main party, and would endanger his father and the children. He had to head for the Gardinerville road and keep going.

He prayed that no Indians from the main party were near enough to intercept him. He looked over his shoulder. The two braves were about one hundred and fifty yards behind him. He noticed that only one of them looked like a runner. He was tall and slim; the other was stocky and looked fat. Even as Matt looked back, the tall Indian grabbed the other's musket and stopped running. He leveled his own gun and fired at Matt. Then he fired the second musket. Matt heard that ball whistle by his head. He looked back once more. The taller Indian had given up the chase; he was headed back for the main party. Matt had been wrong; the stocky, fat Indian was the runner. And he was a good one. The distance between them had narrowed slightly—only a bit, but the Indian was closer. Matt decided not to look back any more. He'd just keep running.

He left the meadow and reached the Gardinerville road. Thank God it wasn't springtime, or he'd sure break an ankle in the ruts! Now the road was quite smooth, with a layer of powdered yellow dust over its surface. His feet caused the dust to spurt in all directions. It was almost like running through shallow water. He was running at his top speed and he knew he'd have to reduce his pace if the chase continued. How fast was that Indian? Matt glanced back. The Indian had just reached the road. He was perhaps a hundred yards behind. Slowly he was closing the gap. He was running with his body low, his legs moving in amazing strides for a man so short. In that quick glance, Matt knew the man would catch him long before he reached the safety of the roadside farms near Gardinerville. Even before the realization of what that meant came to him, Matt felt a sense of disappointment that he was going to be beaten in a race. He'd never lost a running race before.

All right, he thought. If he catches me, I'm done for. So

I can't let him catch me. I'll have to trick him somehow.

As his right hand came up to undo the buttons of his linen shirt, Matt's mind traveled across the road ahead. The first farm near the road was about five miles. He couldn't make that. Unless he met someone coming this way, maybe a couple of men with rifles, he was done for. And there wasn't a chance in a hundred of that.

Wait a minute, he thought as he stripped off the linen shirt without breaking his stride. He cast the shirt aside. Wait a minute, he told himself again. There is a chance!

He started to sprint. Running with all his reserve, he put his pace up a notch, and again faster, until he knew that he was running with more speed than he ever had before. After a few seconds he looked back. The Indian hadn't increased his pace. He was looking up now from time to time. The distance between them lengthened.

Probably thinks I'm getting desperate, Matt thought. Well, I am. But I ain't scared like he thinks. He knows I can't keep this up, and he's going to get me in another mile. All right. Let him think it.

The road here was lined with brush and trees which were almost impenetrable with their thick summer foliage. Matt couldn't try to lose the Indian by dashing into the undergrowth. That would be the Indian's own game. But far ahead, Matt could see a sharp turn in the road where it twisted around a high bluff. That was the spot Matt was trying to reach. Right at the turn was a huge cleft rock. It was known as Devil's Rock. Fathers traveling the Gardinerville road with their families always showed their children the inner surface of the cleft where the stone was strangely blackened, telling them that the black surface had been scorched by the Devil's breathing as he waited for unwary travelers.

Once more Matt turned his head as he approached the bend in the road. The Indian had dropped back still farther. He was keeping his steady pace, legs pumping methodically, head low, watching the road just ahead of him.

He thinks he's got me, Matt thought. Well, he's got another think coming.

Matt reached the turn and swung around it. He ran a few steps more, to leave a trail, and then leaped into the brush at the side of the road. He hurried back to the rock and slid into the darkness of the cleft. He pulled his tomahawk from his belt. He tried to stop panting by drawing deep breaths through his nostrils, holding his mouth closed. His chest pained him and his legs and arms quivered.

He was less than an arm's length from the edge of the road. He had about ten seconds left. He lifted the hatchet and crouched to spring. Now he could hear the rapid *pat-pat-pat* of the Indian's moccasins in the dust. Closer! Closer! Now!

Just as the dark gleaming body swung around the turn, Matt leaped and struck. The Indian went down. Blood spurted into the dust. The Indian rolled over and pushed himself up to his knees. He stared up at Matt, but his face was only a mask of red and yellow streaks. As Matt stood over him, watching the bright red blood spurting from the gaping wound in the man's neck, the Indian's left hand went slowly, painfully to the knife at his belt. Awkwardly he tried to free the knife. Then Matt struck again. The Indian tumbled forward and lay face down in the dust.

The tomahawk slid from Matt's fingers. He stood there looking down. Now that it was over, he was scared. He began to tremble. He scrambled back a few steps. The Indian lay motionless.

"I'll be goddamned!" Matt whispered. "I did it!"

The thought came to him of what Pa would do if he heard him swearing. Instantly the trembling stopped. What would Pa do? He wouldn't do anything at all. Not a thing. Because Matt Finch wasn't a boy any longer. Not by a long sight. Right now he was the only man in Cedar Bush who had ever killed three Indians all by himself, without any help from anybody. Outside of Tom Currie, and he didn't count, because he was a regular scout. No sir! Pa wouldn't say a word if he ever heard him cussing.

He stepped forward to the dead body, picked up his tomahawk, put it in his belt, and then drew his knife. He hesitated a moment and then bent down. He grabbed the Indian's

scalplock and slashed with his knife. Then he pulled and the scalp came away. He wiped the blood off the scalp and the knife in the grass beside the road. Then, fixing them both at his belt, he stepped around the body and started for Gardinerville at a fast trot. He'd have to bring the militia back to Cedar Bush.

15

CAPTAIN DESMOND led Jessica to the little clearing near the edge of the forest where Polhamus had his springhouse. There were four green-jacketed Rangers there herding the score of cows and the five horses which the raiders had caught. Two Indians had slaughtered a heifer near the springhouse. Over a huge fire, they were searing great slices of the meat.

When Desmond halted to speak to one of the Rangers, Jessica looked back through the trees. Smoke billowed and surged and flames jumped high over the tops of the trees. Tears came to her eyes.

Poor Tom, she thought. He worked so hard to make the house comfortable for me. All those months out here alone, working on it. Now it's gone.

Several hundred yards away there was another tall column of smoke where Quick's place had been, and here at the far side of this clearing the Polhamus house had already tumbled, although it was still recognizable as a house. The chimney had not fallen. It stood high above the receding flames, tribute to Oscar Polhamus' craftsmanship.

Seated on the boulders near the springhouse were Mrs. Quick and Mrs. Polhamus with her two children. Neither Rangers nor Indians were paying any attention to them. Mrs. Quick, her pinched pretty face showing her horror, was staring at the Indians cooking the meat. Mrs. Polhamus watched her children playing in the tall grass. Every few seconds her head would turn and she would stare impassively at the ruins

of her home. Then her gaze would return again to the children. Her round pleasant features remained composed and expressionless. The elder child, a girl five years old, was teaching her little brother to catch grasshoppers. Finally he caught one. He held it for a moment and then marched over to the fire and tossed it in. One of the Indians spoke to him. Mrs. Polhamus, who was six months along in pregnancy, moved with ungainly haste, grabbed her son by the neck, and hauled him back to the boulders.

"You go near them again and I'll tan your hide," she told him.

Desmond spoke to Jessica as they approached the springhouse. "Stay with them until I return. Don't try to run, and don't rile the Indians. They're Senecas, and they're touchy. Leave them alone and they'll leave you alone."

"You expect me to go with you peaceably?"

"You'll go," Desmond said. "One way or another."

"You can't take her with you," Jessica said, gesturing toward Mrs. Polhamus. "Not with the children, and her condition. Let her go into the fort."

Desmond shrugged. "She's not my prisoner," he said. "Probably belongs to one of those Indians. A man's prisoners are his own concern, as long as they don't interfere with the war party."

"But she won't be able to keep up," Jessica protested.

Desmond shrugged again. "She'll have to."

"Don't you have any human kindness at all?"

"She's lucky she's not dead already," he answered. "The Seneca must have taken a shine to the children. Only reason he brought her was to take care of them for him." He glanced over at his Rangers. "I'm not entirely devoid of humanity, Mrs. Currie. I'll see what I can do. MacLeod!" he called. "Who does the woman with the children belong to?"

A heavy-set bearded man replied, "Those two Senecas took her, Captain. Old Pot-Belly there says he's going to make her his squaw. He likes 'em strong and fat. That pretty little woman with the blond hair is mine."

"All right," Desmond said. "Keep an eye on Benson if he

comes around here." He turned again to Jessica. "I can't do anything about it. She belongs to that Indian. No use trying. Maybe Brant can do something. You can ask him when he comes."

He left her then and returned toward the bridge with one of the Rangers. Jessica walked over to Lucy Quick and Emma Polhamus.

"Oh, Mis' Currie," moaned Lucy. "When are they going to kill us and scalp us?"

"Shut up, you idiot," exclaimed Mrs. Polhamus. "What did he tell you, Jess? Who is he? Looks like one of the officers."

"He is," Jessica answered. "He's the leader of the Rangers. He told me he's taking me to Niagara. He said not to try to run or these Indians will kill us."

"I couldn't run if I tried," said Emma.

Several volleys of musket shots sounded from the fort across the river, and the Indians' whooping rose in volume and then receded.

"Wonder what's happening over there?" Emma said. "I hope everybody's safe in the fort. Poor Oscar! He'll worry himself sick over us."

"You think they'll come after us?" Lucy asked.

Jessica shook her head slowly. "Not until they get more men from Gardinerville. Our militia couldn't fight this many. One hope we have is Tom. He's out in these hills somewhere, but I doubt if he can do anything."

"Where do you think they'll take me?" Lucy asked tearfully.

"Probably you'll go to Niagara, too."

"They're not going to turn me over to the Injuns?"

"I suppose not. That Ranger with the beard said you belonged to him."

Lucy Quick fluttered her hands through her hair and straightened her dress. "Least he's better than those dirty Indians."

"And what about me and the kids?" asked Emma.

Jessica shook her head.

"You don't have to make out you don't know," Emma told

her. "I heard that Ranger say we belong to one of those devils there," she said, nodding at the Senecas. "And I heard what he said about me being a squaw." Her face flushed as she looked up at Jessica. "Ain't no man ever been near me except Oscar Polhamus, and I don't expect I'll start with a dirty stinkin' Indian!"

"Maybe you'll be turned over to the British as prisoners," Jessica suggested.

"No," Emma replied. "These two caught us. We were eating breakfast when the two of them came into the cabin. We'll go to one of their towns, all right. Well, I hear they treat the children good enough. They adopt them into the tribe."

"Maybe it won't do any good," Jessica said, "but I'm going to ask Joseph Brant to let us go. He's been Tom's friend for many years. But that officer, Desmond, said Brant couldn't do anything."

"I can't travel very fast," said Emma matter-of-factly.

"You'll be all right, Emma," Jessica reassured her.

"No. I won't last very long. If you can, Jess, will you try to take my kids with you? I don't want them to grow up Indians. And when you get free, you'll bring them home to Oscar, won't you?"

"You'll be all right, Emma. I'll speak to Brant."

"Won't do any good, I know. Promise me you'll try to get the kids away from those Indians."

"I will, Emma."

"Good. That will make me rest better."

"Don't give up before we've started, Emma."

Mrs. Polhamus shook her head. "This belly of mine is too heavy for me to carry. I know. And the veins in my legs are all puffed up. Been that way since I carried him." She pointed to her son. "If I can't keep up, they'll tomahawk me."

"I'll help you."

"Thank you, Jess, but I'd take it more kindly if you'd help the kids. That way we might make out."

Lucy Quick had been sobbing while the others had been talking, but now she spoke to Jessica.

"I'm afraid of those Indians. I'm scared of what they're going to do to us."

"They won't do anything to you," said Emma. "Didn't you hear that bearded man say you belonged to him?"

"But suppose at night we're sleeping and these Indians come up and— You know what I mean. Oh, I'm scared!"

"They won't harm you," Jessica told her.

"No, they won't," Emma said. "I've heard Indians will never touch a white woman that way. Not unless they take her into the tribe and marry her."

"I don't believe it. I don't like the way they been looking at me."

"You probably ain't even appetizing to them. A scrawny little thing like you. Their squaws are nice and greasy and have a lot of meat on their bones. You're skinny as a picked pullet. You just worry about that man with the beard."

Lucy Quick glanced over at the bearded Ranger. He happened to be looking her way and waved his hand. He yelled something they couldn't hear. His companions laughed.

"That officer called him MacLeod," Lucy said. "That means he's a Scotsman. That's where my folks came from."

"It don't matter where he comes from," Emma remarked. "He's one of Butler's Rangers, and that's enough for me."

"He wasn't mean to me when he came in the cabin. I wasn't even dressed yet, with Gabe on duty in the fort and all, and he turned his back while I got dressed."

"Real polite of him," Emma said.

"I wonder what his face looks like under that beard," Lucy remarked. "I don't like beards so much. I'd never let Gabe wear a beard."

"Seems to me you're making a pretty quick recovery from being so scared," commented Emma.

"I reckon he'll protect me from the Indians," Mrs. Quick said.

"Sure he will. And who's going to protect you from him?"

"I can take care of myself," sniffed Lucy.

"Well, it ain't none of my business if you can or if you can't," remarked Emma. "I got my own worries to tend to."

"I wonder what's happening at the fort?" said Jessica. "The shooting has slowed up."

"The Injuns are still yelling their ugly heads off," said Emma. "I expect the militia is holding a meeting to decide what to do. The colonel will say one thing and the officers another and the men will say something else. Then they'll decide the officers don't know anything, and they'll have an election for new officers, and then they'll have another meeting, and finally they'll send for help, and by the time they take out after us, we'll be halfway to Canada."

"Tom will come after us," Jessica said. Her certainty that he wouldn't allow her to be carried off without attempting to rescue her had sustained her since the moment Desmond had opened the door of the cabin. She was curiously unafraid now. There was no doubt in her mind of Desmond's intentions, but she knew he was a vain man. She was sure that she could play upon his vanity to keep him from attempting anything until Tom had had a chance to attempt a rescue.

"Yes, your Tom is about the only one in the bunch of them with any brains in his head," Emma remarked. "He's all right and Testing's all right, but I wouldn't give two pennies for the sense of all the rest of them put together, even my Oscar."

She was silent a moment. "Well, Jess," she said finally, "I guess it's all gone, over there in Cedar Bush. Everybody worked so hard and now it's gone up in smoke. If I was to turn around again, I could look at our place, but if I look once more it'll make me sick. Well, at least the chimney is left. Oscar can start putting another cabin around it. And you had so many pretty things in your house. Now they're all gone."

"We'll start again, Emma."

Emma nodded. "Everybody will, I guess. We're that kind of people—awful stubborn. But it's going to be hard scratching again for a few years."

Now a line of Rangers and Indians was beginning to come into the clearing, all of them laden with provisions and other plunder. They dumped everything in a heap in the

middle of the clearing and turned back toward the bridge.

"Looks like they're getting ready to leave," Emma said.

"I thought they'd attack the fort," Jessica answered. "Maybe they already have."

"I guess not. They might do it at night, but I'll bet they don't want to hang around too long."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lucy. "Some of those Indians have blood all over them. What are those bloody things hanging— Oh, my God!"

"Yes," Emma said. "Scalps!"

She started to count them. "There's one. And another over there—" She stopped suddenly. After a brief moment she said: "Oh, my Jesus! Oh, dear God!" She covered her face with her two hands and rocked with sudden violent sobs.

"What is it, Emma?" asked Jessica softly, moving to the woman's side and putting her arms about her.

"Oscar!" Emma whispered. "That big Indian over there has it. Oscar's dead!"

Her children had stared at her in alarm for a second or two, and then they ran to her and buried their faces in her skirt. They began to wail in fright. She held them to her now and bowed her head, sobbing and whispering: "Jesus, protect us now! My little lost children. Oh, dear God, help us now!"

Jessica helped her to a seat on one of the boulders and sat beside her, keeping her arms around Emma's shoulders. She consoled her with soft words for a while, as Lucy Quick looked on helplessly.

"What am I going to do without him?" Emma moaned. "The finest man— I loved him so. My God, poor Oscar."

After a long time, Emma raised her head and wiped her tears away with the hem of her skirt. She even managed a smile.

"Crying won't do him nor these kids any good, will it?" she said.

"Go ahead and cry all you want, Emma. It may help you bear it," Jessica told her.

"No, I'm done with it for now. There'll be times ahead

when I'll cry. There'll be times when I'll remember how good he was, how kind— I've got to get ready to travel and try to stay alive. I'm all they've got now."

"You weren't mistaken, Emma?" Jessica asked gently.

"No." She looked around, but the big Indian, Hiokatoo, had already gone back to the bridge. "I knew it right away. Wasn't anyone else in the settlement had hair that funny reddish-yellow color. He was a good man, Jess. A good husband and a good father."

"I know he was, Emma."

"All right," Emma said. "What's done is done, hard as it is to bear it. We've got a hard road ahead of us."

Jessica nodded. "Yes, a long way to go."

16

IT'S GOING WELL, Joseph Brant thought as he stood at the bridge watching the raiders carry the plunder up into the forest. They will not be able to talk with any justice about monsters this time. This is no Wyoming or Cherry Valley massacre. They must have had some warning that we were coming in force, and yet the capture of MacDonald wasn't enough. Perhaps these four years of war have given them an instinctive caution. They were all in their fort before we were barely across the bridge. Just like woodchucks, scurrying into their holes at the approach of danger. Only they're a lot more lethal than woodchucks. At least three of my Mohawks dead and two Senecas. I told them to stay out of range of those rifles. But as I grow older and perhaps wiser, I find that I can't tell these Indians anything and be sure that they are listening and will obey me.

A grin passed across Brant's face as that thought came to him.

I guess that's the way the British and the Butlers and all the rest of them feel about me, he told himself. I stand there

appearing to listen to them, but they never know if I am or not. What was it Sir William used to say to me? "Goddamit, Joseph! Don't stand there like an Indian!" Then he'd laugh and remark how often it was that he forgot I was an Indian. He was a good man. I miss him more each year.

If we had any discipline at all, we'd sweep these people right out to the sea. If there were any system to this kind of warfare, they couldn't hang on the way they do. Here we are, burning this town, destroying everything they have, and next year they'll be farming and building again. Some of them will even stick it out this winter, living in that fort of theirs, and when it becomes warm enough, putting up cabins for the next year. How can you drive out people like that? Our fathers and their fathers before them should have kept the settlers out. They should have known that land treaties mean nothing to these white men. But if the old people had fought them for every acre of land, I suppose the end of the Iroquois would have come sooner. The white men would have arrived in greater numbers with warships and cannon and their diseases—more soldiers than all the Six Nations and the Western tribes and the Canadian Indians could have mustered together. We might have done it, had we united. Pontiac knew what to do, but he failed, just as we are failing now. Well, it's too late, but not many of my people know it.

Brant watched Hiokatoo approach across the plain, the old Indian running effortlessly with leonine grace.

One of the old ones, Brant thought. Out of the olden times. The great warrior of the Senecas. It must hurt him to know that the end is coming for us all. If he knows it. I've never been able to tell exactly what he's thinking. I wonder if he resents me, too. I hope not, because I have always liked and admired him. Maybe he thinks he should be the war chief of the Iroquois. Maybe he should be, at that. His ferocity might be the only thing left for us. I have learned too many of the white man's ways. But I won't give up. I am the leader of my people, and I am doing as well for them as any man can now.

"Brother, how does it go?" asked Brant.

"Well," answered the Seneca. "But my braves want scalps. Will we try the fort?"

"It's much too strong. We would have no chance. We would lose many men and it would be useless. There has been enough mourning in the Long House already during this war, without adding to it for no reason."

"Wait until the night and use ladders. The Rangers took ladders from the barns."

"No, we can't wait. We must be far into the mountains by nightfall. There are many soldiers in the towns between here and the Hudson River. Some of them may already be on the way."

Hiokatoo nodded. "Some of the people got away through the woods. They will bring the soldiers."

"We must start soon," Brant said. Then he spoke in English, smiling a little. "You once were the fastest runner in the Seneca nation. Why didn't you catch Tom Currie when he ran for the fort?"

"I am no longer a young man, Joseph. And, years ago, before the war, Currie won a foot race in my village against the best of our young men. Besides, Joseph, you know very well that you didn't want him caught."

Brant laughed. "No, I hope I never have to catch him. He is a good man and a good friend. All right, let's get started. Gather your braves and the rest of the plunder."

"My young men want scalps. They won't want to leave."

"They'll have the soldiers after them soon. If they catch us, there will be many scalps for the taking—on both sides. Let us see then if the young men are so eager for them."

"The soldiers are fools in the woods. Like children."

"Remember Oriskany?" Brant asked. "We will see. Let's go."

The Mohawk chief called in his warriors and told them to get ready to leave. Hiokatoo did the same with the Senecas. There was some grumbling, but Brant knew that none of them wanted an open battle with the militia.

He walked along with his men as far as the springhouse clearing. Captain Desmond was directing the distribution of

the plunder. Much of it was being strapped on the horses—there were seven now—and on a pair of mules which MacDonald had brought from Dunning's place. They weren't bothering with the oxen—they were too slow. All over the plain before the fort lay the bodies of the oxen which the Mohawks and Senecas had slaughtered.

Brant noticed that two of the horses were saddle mounts. He called to Desmond. "Did you get saddles for these two?"

"Yes. One for you and one for me."

"All right. Have them saddled. How many prisoners do we have?"

He was already gazing at the little group by the springhouse. "Only five. And two of them children." He paused. "And one of them pregnant." He turned to Desmond. "Who captured them?"

"The one with the red hair is mine. The blonde is MacLeod's. The woman with the two children belongs to those two Senecas over there."

"What are you going to do with the red-haired woman?"

"Take her to Niagara."

Brant grunted. "As you wish. But leave her strictly alone during the march, Desmond. Keep away from her. I don't want any woman trouble."

"There won't be any."

"Tell MacLeod the same thing."

"He knows what to do."

"All right. Let the one with the children go to the fort. She can't march with us. Send a couple of your men with her as far as the bridge, so Benson or the Senecas won't bother her."

"If you want that done," Desmond told him, "you'd better tell those two Senecas yourself. That fat one says he's going to make her his squaw. If he wants her, I'm not going to take her away from him. He'd just as soon sink a hatchet in my head as not."

"I could order you to take them back to the fort, Desmond."

"Sure, but I don't think you will. You know better than to take prisoners away from the Senecas."

Brant grunted but didn't reply for a moment. Then he said, "All right, but if they can't keep up, they'll be sent back."

Brant turned away and began to walk around the clearing, hurrying the men. The unfortunate truth of what Desmond said rankled. The only real control he had over captives, even though he commanded the war party, was to see that they didn't hold up the march. If they did, they were usually tomahawked and left beside the trail. But he knew as well as Desmond did that he couldn't afford to alienate the Senecas by taking their prisoners from them. Well, if the women and the children couldn't keep up, that wasn't his fault. He had nothing to do with their living in a frontier settlement. They had known what to expect. At least, if they did falter and hold up the line of march he'd probably be able to have them turned back without harm. He'd use his influence that much, anyway. He couldn't do more without causing trouble. Even some of his Mohawks were still sulking from the Cherry Valley raid, when the settlement had been surprised and Brant had raced around putting his mark on the clothing of women and children to save them from the tomahawk and knife. Rangers, Mohawks and Senecas all had resented being robbed of so many scalps and captives. He couldn't afford to do any more.

Now he approached the prisoners. He noted that the one with the auburn hair was very beautiful. She stood calmly watching him, as if waiting until he was close enough to speak. He turned aside from her, however, and spoke to the pregnant woman.

"You'll have to keep up," he said. "It will be hard going, because we'll be moving fast."

"I'll make it," she said shortly.

"I hope you do. Give me the little boy and he can ride with me on my horse."

"He'll stay with me."

Brant shook his head. "He won't be able to walk. You'll

have to carry him, and it's plain you can't do that very far. You'd better let me take him."

"Neither him nor me will accept a favor from the monster that killed his father!"

There it is again, Brant thought. As if I'd done it with my own hands. Well, I guess she's right. All of the responsibility rests with me.

"Your husband is dead?" he said. "I'm sorry, madam."

"You dirty Indian. You killed him!"

Brant bowed and turned away. Then the woman with the auburn hair spoke to him.

"You're Joseph Brant?"

He nodded.

"I am Jessica Currie. My husband has told me you are his friend."

He smiled and bowed gracefully. "Of many years, Mrs. Currie. I am very pleased to meet you, although I wish it were under happier circumstances. You are Captain Desmond's prisoner?"

"Yes. I hope you will give orders that we are all to be set free and allowed to go to the fort."

"I can't do that," Brant answered. "I never interfere with prisoners."

"My husband talked so much about you that I thought you were like brothers. I see that I was wrong."

"You weren't wrong," said the Mohawk. "I am very fond of Tom Currie, and his friendship means a great deal to me. I won't forget it. Don't worry about yourself. If you can keep up with my men, you'll be all right. Desmond won't harm you while I'm around. Be patient for a while. Here comes Desmond now. Don't tell him that I've promised you my help."

"You asked him if you could return to the fort?" the Ranger asked Jessica.

"Yes."

"And he refused?"

"I refused, Captain," Brant said. "You knew I would."

Desmond nodded. "All right, then. We'd better start. The men are ready."

If he wasn't such a good friend of the Butlers and Johnsons, I'd send her back right now, thought Brant. But he could cause a great deal of trouble. If I've learned one thing about dealing with these people, it's patience.

"In a moment, Desmond," Brant said. "First, I'd like to tell Mrs. Currie that her husband reached the fort through our lines about an hour ago, after the attack started."

Jessica smiled her thanks to him, and said softly: "Thank God!"

"And I have something to tell you, Captain Desmond," Brant continued, "about Mrs. Currie's husband. Have you ever heard of him?"

"Of course. He's supposed to be another Tim Murphy. To me he's just another rebel."

"Don't fool yourself, Desmond. You had better treat Mrs. Currie well. You may think you're going to carry her off to Canada without any difficulty, but you're wrong. I know Tom Currie, and I am advising you not to sleep at night, any night, nor to fall behind the line of march for any reason, nor to stop and rest when, or if, you reach Niagara. As a matter of fact, the best advice I can give you is to travel right through to the St. Lawrence as fast as you can go and take the next ship to England. Don't ever come back."

Desmond laughed briefly. "You can't frighten me with talk of a Morgan rifleman. I'm no Indian."

"The Indians have good reason to respect men like Tom Currie and Tim Murphy," Brant told him. "You'll find out why. I'm warning you."

Desmond laughed again. "Let's go, Brant, before we have the militia on us."

"Just one thing more," said Brant with a slight smile. "I'd like to warn you that my Mohawks know of my affection for Tom Currie, and they would deeply resent any injury to his wife, particularly if I told them how much such an injury would offend me. So be careful. I wouldn't want to write in the report of this expedition that Captain William Desmond

was found one morning tomahawked and scalped by a person or persons unknown. Is that clear, Captain?"

"You wouldn't dare!"

The Indian shrugged. "You know how impetuous we Indians are, Desmond. The life of one Ranger, *after he's dead,* is not enough to balance the value of keeping the Long House friendly to His Majesty's cause. Your high-placed friends would forget all about you *once you were dead* if any investigation meant trouble with the Mohawks. I'll ask you once more. Will you send Mrs. Currie back to the fort?"

"No!"

"All right. It's your scalp. Let's get started."

With a reassuring smile at Jessica, the Mohawk chief strode to his horse and mounted. He rode to the beginning of the trail up the mountain while the Indians and Rangers, all of them laden with plunder, fell in behind him. Her two Seneca captors spoke some words which Emma Polhamus didn't understand, but there was no mistaking their gestures to join the line ahead of them. Lucy Quick picked up her bundle and walked ahead without a word to join the Ranger MacLeod.

"No sense in your walking," Desmond said to Jessica. "You can ride with me."

"I'll walk and be glad to," she answered.

She hurried ahead to join Emma, taking little Oscar from his mother's arms and putting him astride her shoulders where he shouted with glee and exhorted the Indians to greater speed. Mary Polhamus walked beside her mother, holding her hand tightly. As they reached the perimeter of the thick meadow grass at the edge of the forest, Emma Polhamus looked back at the smoking ruins of her cabin. Tears flowed down her cheeks. One of the Senecas poked her with his musket barrel. She held her daughter's hand tightly and walked ahead.

Soon they were into the shadowed forest, and there was no sound but the shuffling of feet, the thudding hooves of the captured stock, and the occasional "Hup, hup!" or "Get along there!" from the Rangers who were driving them.

17

THE STOCKADE and fort were in continual uproar that morning. Children raced every which-way, crying and screaming and fighting. Harried mothers chased after them, stopped to exchange distraught commentaries on the raid with a neighbor, then raced on after the children. Every now and then a group of dogs which normally played and hunted together all day would revolve in a snarling yipping kaleidoscope of dust. The older children had to be watched all the time, because they climbed the stockade at every opportunity to watch the Indians. The only semblance of order and discipline was on the stockade itself, where the militia under Ben Whittaker's command kept up a sporadic fire on the raiders.

In the huge low-ceilinged barracks room of the fort, which Colonel Testing was using as a hospital, there was some escape from the uproar without.

Mrs. Haskell, the storekeeper's wife, lay moaning on one mattress on the floor. Tom Currie lay on another, still unconscious, while Nathaniel Wisner's wife lay on the third. She was white and drawn and her hands were twisting the blanket which covered her swollen body. Testing was talking to her, trying to soothe her and to dispel her terror of the Indians, when Ben Whittaker came running in.

"Colonel Testing! Looks like they're getting ready to pull out. Most of 'em have already gone across the bridge."

"All right, Whittaker. I'll be out directly. Don't let anyone out of the gate. It may be a trick."

He looked down at Mrs. Wisner.

"You'll be all right for another two, three hours. You just hang on when it starts to hurt. I'll send your husband in to see you, and I'll be back in a little while. Mrs. Haskell, you try to be quiet now and don't fret Mrs. Wisner."

The answer was a loud self-pitying moan from Mrs. Has-

kell's mattress. Testing walked over and looked down for a moment at Tom Currie, called to him softly, waited, and then started to leave the room. The only other person there was Jonas Dunning, fifteen years old, who was squatting near the door nursing a bandaged arm. He'd caught a musket ball during the dash for the fort. He still wasn't wearing any clothing, but someone had given him a ragged blanket to wrap around himself.

"You sit right there, boy," Testing said. "You're more scared than hurt, anyway."

Outside the building, Testing threaded his way through the crowd of women, children and dogs to the stockade. He climbed the ladder to the platform and stood among the men, watching the departure of the war party. Several of the men were loading and firing methodically in the direction of the bridge, which was out of range of their muskets, but the rest of them stood quietly leaning on their muskets. An occasional derisive remark was directed at the marksmen.

"Stop that nonsense!" Testing ordered sharply. "You're wasting powder and ball."

Whittaker pointed to ten or twelve Indians who stood on the edge of the forest, waving their muskets and whooping. "That's the last of them," he said.

"Looks like it is," Testing said. "But you can't tell for sure. Don't open the gates. They may hang around for a while to see if anyone comes out." He watched for a few moments, and then turned to the crowd within the stockade. He held up his hands and called for silence. "Quiet down, everybody! Quiet, now."

The noise subsided gradually, and soon all that was heard was the soft sobbing of Mrs. Dunning, who was huddled on the ground in one corner of the area with a group of women around her. Several dogs suddenly erupted in another fight, but the children separated them. Testing waited until it was quiet and then spoke to the Reverend Mr. Wait. "Do you have your list, Mr. Wait?"

The minister nodded and handed several sheets of white paper to Testing.

"Let's keep it quiet now," the colonel called, "while I read this list. First, is everyone here in front of me?"

"All here that came in," said Youngblood. "There's some didn't come in, some sick, some dead, some carried off."

"No need to call out names, Colonel," called Abraham Sheperd. "We can tell you who was killed and who was took."

"We'll be sure this way," Testing said. "Now, Reverend Wait. Is this list correct?"

"Yes, sir. Every family with all members is there," the minister said. He was a slim young man about twenty-five years old.

"Then let's get it done. First is Mathias Baker."

"Here," answered a man from the platform.

"You have a wife and six children. All here?"

"Yes. My father and mother, too."

"Samuel Carpenter and wife. No children."

"Here."

"Thomas Currie and wife. No children. Tom is inside. Where's his wife? Is she here?"

"She was over the river," said Whittaker. "No telling whether she was killed or carried off."

Testing wrote "missing" on the sheet opposite Jessica's name. For a pencil he used a piece of lead the minister gave him.

"Next is Daniel Dunning. Wife and five children."

"One killed," called Dunning in a broken voice. There was a loud wail from his wife. Dunning continued after a pause. "My boy Ephraim. And one wounded. Jonas. Rest of us are here, thank God."

"Moses Embler," called Testing. "Wife and three children. His brother, Samuel Embler, and two sisters, Molly and Jennie Embler."

"They were with us," Whittaker said. "We run for the fort, but they cut for the woods. Yelled they would head for Gardinerville. I didn't see no Indians take after them."

"All right. All Emblers unaccounted for. Next is Finch."

"All here but my boy Matt," called out Bezaleel Finch.

"He covered us when we came in, and then he run for it."

"Which way did he go?" Testing asked.

Finch silently gestured in the direction of Gardinerville.

"They go after him?"

Finch nodded. "Yeah, but he can run, Doc. Anybody here will tell you that."

"I'm sure he made it," Testing said. "Jacob Haskell and wife."

"I'm here," Haskell called. "How's my wife, Doc?"

"Sick," said Testing shortly. "Next is John Haskell and wife. No children."

"Here."

"Eleazer Mastin and wife. Two children."

"Here."

"Oscar Polhamus and wife. Two children."

"Polhamus is dead," said Whittaker. "He's the one who was scalped out there. No sign of his wife and kids. Either killed or carried off."

Testing made notations and continued. "Gabriel Quick and wife. No children."

"I'm here," Quick answered. "But Lucy's been taken or killed. When we going after them, Colonel?"

Testing didn't answer, but wrote "Captured or Killed" after Lucy Quick's name.

"They'll get a big start on us," Quick said. "I'm going after them, whether the rest of you come or not."

"Don't be such a damn fool, Gabe!" Whittaker yelled. "Be quiet now."

"Jonathan Sheperd and wife. Five children."

"All here," Sheperd called. "But my boys ain't children, Doc. They're all men grown, and we all side with Quick. We're wasting time here with all this calling out names."

"James Taylor." Testing looked around and then remarked, as if to himself: "He didn't come back from the scout."

"Joel Tyler and wife. Two children."

"Here."

"Moses Terwilleger. Wife and five children and brother."

"All here but my brother, Colonel. I think he's still out

there. He was in the smithy with Joe, my nigger. I didn't see neither of them after the Injuns come. You know they say Injuns won't touch a nigger, and they didn't burn the smithy. I figure my brother Sam hid in there somehow. He's probably still there. I'm going out to look."

"Stay right here until I say that gate can be opened!" Testing exclaimed. "Next is Stephen Townsend and wife and four sons."

"We're all here," called Townsend.

"Abraham Vail, widower. Four children."

"Here."

"Reverend Wait and Mrs. Wait. Three children."

"All here, sir," said the minister.

"Benjamin Whittaker, wife, four children."

"Here, sir."

"Nathaniel Wisner and wife. Five children. Brother, Sam Wisner."

"We're here, Doc, but I thought there'd be six kids by now."

"In a couple of hours, Wisner. You'll have to wait." Colonel Testing looked at his sheets of paper, running the point of his piece of lead over the names. "This is the total. Two killed, one wounded, sixteen unaccounted for, one slave missing."

"We got five or six of them Injuns," yelled John Sheperd. "Let's go get the rest!"

"That's what I say," shouted Gabriel Quick. "We can get Lucy and the rest back even if the Injuns won't stand and fight!"

There was a general hubbub as the men began to argue about pursuit of the war party. Most of them favored some action, since they seemed to think that Brant would not turn back to fight. The Indians' taste for fighting without benefit of surprise was notoriously unpredictable, and certainly there was a chance that pursuit would liberate whatever captives they had, and, more important to some of them, free the stock which the raiders had driven off.

Testing motioned for silence, and when he finally had it,

he called for a volunteer to go to Gardinerville for reinforcements.

"It'll take too long," Abe Sheperd exclaimed.

"You men listen to me!" Testing shouted angrily. "I'm in command of this fort, and I'll decide what's to be done. Gardinerville is only fifteen miles. Now who wants to try it?"

John Sheperd stepped forward. "Long as you want to send somebody, it might as well be me."

"Can you run?"

"Fast enough to stay ahead of them dog-eatin' Indians," Sheperd said.

Testing turned to Abe Sheperd. "All right with you?"

"Sure. He won't get caught. He's got him a girl over to Gardinerville. That's why he wants to go."

"All right, then. Don't go visiting your girl first. Go straight to Colonel Hayworth in Gardinerville. Tell him we'll need as many men as he can get together in a hurry. Tell him I'll wait for him before we do anything."

"Waste of time," said Quick.

"I'm still in command here," said Testing. "Now if any of you men want to change that, then arrange an election. I'll step down if you want to elect somebody else. Otherwise, keep your mouth to yourself. Now, young Sheperd. Go over the back wall of the fort, so if there's any of them in the woods yonder by the bridge, you can keep the stockade between you and them. If we see any of them take after you, we'll fire three times to warn you. Then you run like hell. Understand?"

"Sure. I'm ready."

"All right. Good luck and God keep you. Go ahead."

"We'll pray for you, John," the minister said.

"Better not, Reverend," John said with a grin. "'Cause if I get to Gardinerville, I'm going to see that girl and I'm going to commit me a great big sin!"

Mr. Wait flushed and didn't answer.

"Show some respect for the cloth, you young devil," cried Abe Sheperd, but his eyes revealed his amusement and his admiration for his son.

When young Sheperd had reached the woods without any sign of pursuit, Testing called Whittaker, Finch, and Youngblood, who was sergeant in the militia, into the fort. The others sat down in the barracks room while Testing went behind a blanket curtain which some of the women had rigged before Mrs. Wisner. The Dunning boy stared at the curtain. He seemed to start at every slight sound that came from the enclosure. There were a few cries and moans from Mrs. Wisner, and once a series of sobbing wails.

"Stop it!" Testing commanded. "Stop it, now. You've had five and you're not having any trouble with this one. Take hold now and stop the noise."

Youngblood glanced over at young Jonas Dunning and nudged the other men. He smiled, half amusedly, half gently. "They have it hard, boy," he said to Jonas. The boy flushed and looked down at his feet.

"You'll find out how hard it is, some day," Youngblood continued. "First time you put one of 'em in a fix like that, you'll sweat blood."

"Leave him alone, Ike," Finch whispered.

There were more cries and moans from Mrs. Wisner, and in about twenty minutes they heard a baby's wail from behind the curtain. Soon Testing reappeared.

"Wisner has another boy," he smiled. "You there! Young Dunning. Go get Mr. Wisner and bring him in to see his son."

When the colonel turned around, he saw Tom Currie on his feet, slipping his hunting shirt over his bandaged head.

"Tom, you'd better spend the rest of the day on that mattress. You're not hurt badly, but you got a good crack, and you're exhausted."

"Can't do it, Colonel."

"You'll have to, man!"

"I'm going after my wife."

"You can't go alone."

"Why not? What time is it? How much of a start did they get on me?"

"You wouldn't have a chance in a thousand of coming back."

"Taking anybody with me would give me no chance at all."

"You're on militia duty, Currie. My orders are to remain here."

"All right. I resign from the militia. I'm going after my wife."

"I'll have you held if necessary."

"Try it!"

"Listen to me, Tom. Let's not get angry. Probably we'll be starting after them as soon as we get reinforcements. That depends on Hayworth. We'll need you and your knowledge of the Indians and the woods. When we come up with them, we can free your wife and the other prisoners as well. You can't think of yourself alone."

"It's my fault they've got her. If I'd come right back here, everybody would have been in the fort when they hit us. I'm the one who's to blame. So I've got to go and get her back."

"How do you expect to do it?"

"Walk in and get her and bring her back."

"You're crazy, man. They'd kill you on sight."

Tom shook his head. "Not Brant."

Testing waved his hands impatiently. "Tom, you're relying too much on an old friendship. Remember, he's an Indian and an enemy. If you're right, why did they take her in the first place? And what about any other prisoners they may have?"

Tom Currie shrugged.

"If you're to blame for their capturing your wife, Tom, as you say you are, then aren't you just as much responsible for the others?"

"Maybe. At any rate, I'm going. Don't try to stop me."

"Just a minute, Tom. Listen to me, now. We need you with us. We'll be starting after them in a few hours, as soon as Hayworth gets here with more men. I'll tell you what I can promise you. When we come up with them, if you want

to walk into their lines after your wife, I'll let you do it. I think it would be suicide, but that's your lookout. If you think you can get away with it, why, maybe you can. You know Indians better than I do. Now that's fair enough, isn't it? Any time we come in sight of them, you can go ahead. I won't let you go alone now, because we need you. If necessary, I'll arrest you and tie you up."

"What's going to keep me from going ahead as soon as we get into the woods?"

"Your word, Tom. I want your word that you'll guide us until we come up with them."

"And suppose Hayworth says he doesn't want to chase them?"

"Then you can go alone, or with as many men as want to go with you."

Tom Currie stared at him for a few moments. Then he spoke. "Tell me this, Colonel. If I stay with you until we catch them, will you order the men to hold fire until I get a chance to talk with Brant? Maybe I can get them all back, besides Jessica. It would cost some money."

"Any amount we have," the colonel said. Finch, Whittaker and Youngblood nodded.

"There's not much left after the fires, though," Finch remarked.

"How much stock did they take? Probably talking wouldn't do any good in getting the animals back."

"Twenty or thirty head," Finch answered.

"All right," Currie said. "You've got to promise that if I talk with Brant, there won't be any fighting. We'll buy the captives back and come on home."

"Of course."

"Another thing. When I ran for the fort, I counted eighty—ninety of them. How many men will we have?"

"Maybe forty from here, as you know," Testing told him. "Hayworth should bring a hundred or so."

Tom shook his head dubiously. "That's not enough to take chances with. Brant didn't come all the way down here with only ninety men. He's got more sitting somewhere up in

those hills. I didn't follow the war party's back trail, but they've got a camp somewhere up in the mountains, and I'll bet there's a couple hundred there."

"What makes you think so?"

"For one thing, that's the way they've operated for the past year or so. They use only as many on a raid as they'll need, and leave the rest of them waiting. Tim Murphy told me they've been hitting settlements in Tryon County with as many as four and five hundred, when they could get up close with that many. They knew exactly how many they would need for Cedar Bush, because Brant was down in that swamp for a few days. But that doesn't mean they only brought that many from Unadilla. A bigger party might have been noticed when it got up close to Cedar Bush. I know they've got a camp up there somewhere, because Mrs. MacDonald went up there with her husband; and she didn't come back."

"Good," said Testing. "You can explain that to Hayworth when he comes. Now you get some more rest. If you won't lie down, then sit at a table. Your head got a good thumping, but you'll be all right with some rest."

"We'd better be ready to go when Hayworth gets here," Tom told him. "We don't want to let them get too far ahead, because then we'll be the ones to get cut off."

"How many do you imagine they have, Tom?" Whittaker asked.

"Maybe two, maybe three hundred."

"We can lick that many," Youngblood said.

"Not if they're looking for a fight," Tom said.

"You think they are?"

"You never can tell about Indians," Tom said.

18

IT WASN'T too difficult at first. Brant set a steady pace, but the stock would not be hurried, so Jessica and Mrs. Polhamus and Mary had little trouble keeping up. After a few miles, however, Mary complained often about being tired, and then Mrs. Polhamus would take little Oscar and Jessica would hoist the girl to her shoulders for a half mile or so. Around noontime, after three hours of traveling, Jessica's feet began to get sore from stumbling on roots and stones. Her shoulders ached from carrying one or the other of the children, and she frequently shifted their positions.

Oscar cried that he was hungry, but they couldn't stop to feed him even if they had anything to give him. Once Mrs. Polhamus stepped a few paces forward and asked one of her captors for some of the meat they had cooked back at the clearing, but he paid no attention.

"Can't talk a civilized tongue," Mrs. Polhamus remarked to Jessica.

"If Oscar keeps fretting, I'm going to ask Desmond for some food," Jessica said.

"Don't you do any such thing. You don't want nothing to do with that man, and don't go asking him any favors on our account. These Indians have got to feed us sometime."

"Maybe we'll stop to eat soon."

"They won't stop. Not as long as we're this close to Cedar Bush. Maybe they'll begin eating as we go, and then those two dirty scalawags up ahead will give me some of that meat."

Lucy Quick was trotting along a few paces ahead of them, beside the Ranger MacLeod. From time to time he talked to her, and they could see his head turning toward her occasionally as he shifted his burden. Once they saw her smiling.

"She don't take it hard," Emma said. "I always thought she was a natural-born trollop, and now I'm sure of it."

"She's just making the best of a bad thing," Jessica said. "It wouldn't do her any good to sulk."

"No, but she don't have to laugh. No shame at all, and no thought for her husband, even if he never did seem to me to be much better than she is—always making jokes before women that no good man would think of, and making free with his hands at housewarmings and such."

"One thing in her favor, Emma—I think she's better off than we are. That Ranger seems cheerful enough."

"All of 'em are murdering thieves." Emma lapsed into silence, and after a moment Jessica looked over at her. She saw tears running down Emma's cheeks.

"Don't think about it now, Emma. We have to care for the children and keep them as happy as possible."

"I can't help it, Jess. Every time I look up there at that big Indian, I can see what he has at his belt. He was such a good man, Oscar was. I can't help myself. I know I oughtn't think about it. I'm going to try to forget."

"If we can concentrate on keeping up with them, we're going to be all right. Sooner or later, Tom will come for us."

"You think he'll be able to do anything against so many?"

"I don't know what he'll do, but it'll be something."

The war party traveled in a loose column, sometimes single file and sometimes two or three abreast, depending on the width of the trail. There were flankers ahead, to the rear, and on both sides. Brant and Desmond rode in the lead, with Hiokatoo walking beside or just ahead of them. Most of the Rangers, each laden with plunder, made up the next section of the column. The Senecas followed, then the Mohawks. The stock was being driven by a few of the Rangers.

The mountains above them were densely forested, and from an occasional rise of ground as Jessica looked ahead, all she could see was more mountain country, seeming more impenetrable than that which they were passing through. Sometimes she had an opportunity to glance back at the green valleys and slopes they had left behind as they moved upward. She thought she was beginning to understand that

mysterious quality which entered Tom's voice when he spoke of the old times in the woods. It had troubled her; given her a feeling almost of jealousy. Yet she gained from these uninhabited mountains that same quality of vast loneliness and forbidding grandeur.

Not once did the war party stop all day. Several times the children cried to go to the "outhouse." They wailed each time Emma said there wasn't any. Emma wondered what on earth she would do if they dirtied their clothes. They had no others.

"I'll have to do something about it, Jess."

"Let's just stop and see what happens. Take them into the trees a little way."

When they stepped out of line, the two Senecas made threatening gestures and came after them.

"What'll I say, Jess?"

"Let me."

Jessica smiled at the Senecas and held up her hands in a helpless gesture. She pointed to the little boy's breeches and then at the ground. One of the Indians nodded and said something to another. They stood waiting while the women took the children into the brush. They had to run to return to their place in line.

When she regained her breath, Emma said: "That was easy enough to make them understand, but I'm not going to do that when I have to go."

"If we have to, we have to," Jessica said. "I guess we're not ladies any more, Emma. We're just enemy captives."

The first few times the Indians near her stepped out of line on such occasions, Jessica was embarrassed and turned her head away as she passed. But she was soon used to it, although when the Rangers didn't go into the bushes, she could feel her face reddening. She didn't think white men should act that way.

That's a silly attitude, she reflected. It's perfectly natural, and they can't afford to waste any time, but I suppose I just can't cast off the habits of a lifetime in a few hours.

Once Brant rode back along the line of march. He stopped

to ask how they were getting along, saying that he was sorry they had to travel so fast. Then he moved on.

"I must say, now—he ain't so bad for an Indian at that," Emma remarked. "Leastways, he ain't half as bad as I've always heard tell. You'd think he was a white man, if it wasn't for his skin."

"I have an idea that he'll see that no real harm comes to us."

"Maybe so, but I wouldn't put my bond on it. You'll have to take care of yourself when it comes to that Desmond."

Whenever the trail was wide enough in the little valleys they passed through, the Ranger captain rode back beside them, dismounted, and walked with Jessica. He talked about garrison life in Niagara, about Montreal, London, about the people he knew at court. She answered his remarks with monosyllables, but she couldn't help thinking that had she met this man in Highland Landing before the war, she would have been much impressed.

Desmond offered to let Emma and the children ride the horse. Jessica wanted to accept the offer, because she knew the children couldn't keep going indefinitely. And Emma was already showing signs of exhaustion. It was painful to watch her struggle with one child or the other through the bush-grown path, across the rock-strewn beds of dry creeks, up and down the mountain ledges which grew more precipitous as the war party penetrated farther into the Catskills. Emma wouldn't accept Desmond's horse, however.

"I'll walk and keep walking," she said. "I wouldn't accept favors from such as you."

"As you please, Mrs. Polhamus," Desmond smiled. "But we've got a long way to go. Maybe you'll change your mind before we get there. I'd like to make the going as easy for you all as I can. Isn't there anything I can do for you?"

"Get us some food, if you will," Jessica answered.

"That's easy enough," he said. "Anything else?"

"Send us back to Cedar Bush," said Emma.

Desmond laughed and shook his head. "I wouldn't do that if I could. You'll have to keep on as best you can. After

we get beyond range of your gallant militia, we'll go a bit slower, although it isn't likely they'll catch us at all."

"You take too much for granted," Jessica told him.

"Thinking of your husband, Mrs. Currie? What can he do against all these?"

"Wait," Jessica said. "Just wait and you'll find out."

It seemed such a childish, ineffectual answer, and Desmond laughed again as he mounted his horse and rode away. After all, however, she hadn't the faintest idea of what Tom could do. All she knew was that he would do something to rescue her.

After Desmond rode forward, the thin ugly man with the swollen, misshapen nose who Emma said was James MacDonald, the Tory, came back to them with some meat and corn. He handed it to Emma with a few words about that being all there was to eat. The children ceased their whimpering and gnawed contentedly on the food. MacDonald walked beside the women in silence for a few moments. Finally he looked at Jessica.

"You're Mrs. Currie," he said in his harsh, angry-sounding voice.

"That's right."

He didn't say anything else for a while. Then he nodded. "I know your husband pretty well. Hunted with him more than once. Too bad he's on the wrong side. He's a good man."

"Thank you," she said.

There was another period of silence. He looked at her once more. "Your husband come on me one day when I cut my foot with an axe a few winters ago. My wife was away, and I would have died. But he fixed me up and took care of me till I was able to get around. I don't forget a thing like that."

"He didn't tell me about that."

"Probably wasn't important to him. It was to me, and I ain't forgot it. But that's neither here nor there. Brant was talking to me a while ago." He lapsed into silence again, but

apparently he had more to say. He muttered something she couldn't hear, and she asked him to repeat it.

"Thought I'd keep an eye on you, all of you, especially at night. Have to keep that crazy Benson away from you."

"That's good of you, Mr. MacDonald."

"Don't like that Captain Desmond, either. Just a Mohawk Valley farmer, but he's been to London and thinks he's got to act like a Britisher. Friend of the Butlers, he is. Don't trust 'em as far as I can throw 'em." His voice dropped to a whisper. "Take a few steps more and stumble. I'll grab you and help you up. While I'm doing it, I'll slip my knife to you. You might need it. Keep it hid, and don't use it unless you have to."

She did as he said, stumbling and going to one knee. She slipped the knife he gave her into the folds of her skirt, and managed to put it inside her dress as she rearranged her clothing. She looked at him with a thankful smile.

He nodded and walked along in silence a while longer.

"My wife's up ahead a ways at the camp. I'll tell her to stick close to you. Desmond ain't likely to bother you on the march if my wife's around. Not that Brant would let him, anyway." He began to whisper again. "My wife will tell you when to cut and run for it. Brant will fix it with the Indians so they won't stop you, and I'll take care of the Rangers. They don't like Desmond much, either."

"I'll never forget your kindness, Mr. MacDonald."

"Never mind that. I don't like any kind of rebels. I'm a King's man and always was, but I'd be dead now, likely, if your husband hadn't helped me that time."

"Can you do anything for Mrs. Polhamus and the children?"

He shook his head. "They have to take their chances. Them Senecas are bad ones to fool with. I leave 'em alone. Her and the kids will be all right if they can keep up. Tell you what I will do, though. I'll go back and get one of those work horses, fix him up with a couple of blankets, and they all can ride."

He brought the horse up in a few minutes and helped

Mrs. Polhamus to mount him. Then he handed up the children. They were delighted.

"I thank you," said Emma. "I couldn't have gone much farther."

He gave her a dour look. "That don't matter to me, woman. You're a rebel like the rest of them. I'm doing this because Mrs. Currie asked me. You'll get sick of that horse, too," he told her. "We've got a long ways to go, and you ain't in the best shape for traveling." He turned again to Jessica. "Keep that knife out of sight, and like I say, don't use it unless you have to. And when my wife gives you the word from me later on, you cut and run as fast as you can go."

The long slim length of the scalping knife felt reassuring to Jessica. She need not fear Desmond so long as she had it, and soon she would have her chance to escape. She could not visualize a situation which would allow her to flee from the middle of all these Indians and Rangers, but MacDonald had promised that they wouldn't stop her. If she evaded Desmond, she'd be all right. If she could only take Emma and the children with her!

All the long afternoon they marched through the mountain valleys and across the ridges, bearing always westward. Jessica's clothing was torn by brush and briers, her shoes were scratched and ripped, and her feet were so sore that at times she wondered if she could continue to put one after the other. Her mind dwelt constantly upon her fatigue and upon her ability to endure it, so she tried to concentrate upon senseless things, like watching the scalplock of the Indian ahead of her bob up and down above the pack he had slung across his shoulders. She noticed that the war paint of the Indians, so carefully applied, was streaking and running on their faces because of the heat.

Several times they crossed streams, and she tried to stop and bathe her aching feet, but the Indians wouldn't let her. If she didn't keep going, one of them would poke her with a musket barrel. Sometimes, later in the day, she stumbled and fell. If she didn't rise immediately, one of them would

lift his musket as if to strike her with it. This happened during one of Desmond's excursions back, and he yelled at the Indian in anger. The Indian gazed stoically back at him until Desmond had finished. Then he made a sweeping gesture forward with his gun. He turned and pointed back along the trail.

"Move fast," he grunted. "Soldiers come."

"Let her alone," said Desmond. "Understand?"

"Move," the Indian repeated.

"I'll take care of myself," Jessica said wearily. "Just leave me alone."

"All right," Desmond said angrily. "Keep on your feet and keep going."

On and on they went, until Jessica thought that she had indeed reached the limit of her endurance. She had been trying not to think too much about Tom, because she realized that if she kept him on her mind all the time, she might become frantic as time went by and he did not come. She had only to keep going, and eventually he'd be there. She refused to admit to herself that away inside, hidden, lurking in the background of her mind, was the knowledge that he might not come at all. He might not be able to do anything. She would have to escape without his help. Try as she might to avoid it, her mind kept touching that possibility as the tongue keeps seeking a sore tooth.

She began unconsciously to pray as the afternoon grew long, not praying to the deity as she had always done, but to chance, good fortune, or to some shadowy supernaturalism which governed these mountains and these forests.

Her legs kept moving somehow in tortured rhythm, and unconsciously she began to count the cadence until the numbers had suddenly changed to her husband's name and she was repeating endlessly: "Tom. Tom. Tom. Tom." Then she started guiltily, looking up to see if anyone had heard her. All the rest were marching along steadily. She wondered how long they could keep going without rest. The two children were fast asleep against Emma's body, rolling with the motion of the horse. Tears were flowing down Emma's

cheeks and she was groaning with pain. Jessica was too tired to try to cheer her up.

She glanced away through the trees, and started as she imagined she could see her husband's tall buckskin-clad figure come striding toward her. She halted to stare, and was about to call to him when she saw it was only one of the flanking scouts, a tall Indian with a hideously painted face. One of the Senecas behind her touched her with his musket, and she started walking ahead once more.

19

A FEW MINUTES after young John Sheperd had vanished into the forest toward Gardinerville, the militiamen on the stockade set up a shout and called to those below: "Open the gate!"

From the smithy, one of the few unburned buildings in the settlement, two figures were running toward the fort. They were recognized as Sam Terwilleger and the Terwillegers' slave, Joseph.

Inside the gate, everyone crowded around Sam, slapping him on the back and asking him how he got away from the Indians. Sam was a round, red-faced man about fifty, very popular with the men of Cedar Bush, although he didn't set so well with the women because of his drinking. He was a bachelor with no apparent reason for never having married (another justification for the disapproval of the women), and he spent all of his evenings in the tavern, coming home at closing time, scarcely able to roll.

"Wait a minute, now!" he exclaimed in answer to the jumble of questions from the crowd around him. "I want to tell you all one thing. I give any man his due, and if it hadn't been for old Joe here, I'd be laying out there without my hair."

"What happened, Sam?" his brother asked. "How come they didn't find you?"

"Wait'll I tell you, Mose."

"Well, go ahead and tell it."

"Gimme a chance. This is the way it was. You check me if I get any of it wrong, Joe."

"Yessir, Mister Sam."

"There I was, out in the smithy, seeing that Joe got a good start at the forge this morning."

"Keeps a jug out there," Moses Terwilleger nodded agreeably. "Ruth won't let him drink in the house."

"Now that ain't so, Mose."

"Mister Sam," interposed Joe. "Them Mohawkers got the jug."

"The devil they did! The bastards!"

"Get on with the story," someone said.

"All right. Well, there I was, with Joe, when I heard the first and second shots. I asked Joe what it was, and—"

"Tole him it was somebody bangin' at a woodchuck or somethin'," said Joe.

"Shut up and let me tell the story. Well, we didn't pay much attention, and then there was a whole slew of shots. We knew what it was then, all right, but I just couldn't seem to make my legs move. When I did get to the door, I see them Injuns running for the cabins. I didn't know what to do, and then the church bell starts to ring, and one thing and another, and I got a little flustered."

"He means we was scared," said Joe.

"Well, next thing I knew, I looked out again and saw I couldn't make the fort. Then I remembered how Tom Currie and others has always said that Injuns won't touch a black man or hurt him, so long as he don't cross 'em. So I figured I'd be all right if Joe stayed in the smithy and I hid someplace in there."

"I tole him to go up the chimney," Joe said.

"He sure did and up I went. She wasn't very hot, and I got myself braced up in there far enough over that little fire so's I wouldn't get burned. Then them Mohawks come

into the smithy. They was yippin' a mile a minute. Ever pour oil in a rat hole and light it and see the rat come out? Well, that's what I figured they'd do, with me playing the part of the rat. But they started talking to Joe, even if he couldn't get what they were saying. I know some Mohawk talk from my years up to Cobleskill, so I could tell what they were saying to Joe. They were asking him to join up with them and kill the white men. Some of them had some English but you could hardly make it out."

"I tole 'em nothin' doin'," Joe said.

"Tell what happened then, Joe. After all, I was up the chimney."

"They begins to push me and shove me, and I tole 'em to stop. I tole 'em I had work to do. Then they laughed and pushed me some more. There was four of 'em. I picked up a horseshoe and began bangin' it with a hammer, just like they wasn't even there. So they paid me no more mind. They found Mister Sam's jug and emptied it down their gullets in two shakes. Then they begins to whoop it up again, and tear the place apart, and I tole 'em stop. One of them tossed his hatchet at me, but I think he was just scarin' me. It stuck in the wall and he laughed. So I let 'em be, after that, until one of 'em picked up the bellows."

"Here's where the story gets hot," said Sam.

"He took that bellows to the fire and started pumpin' and yellin' and laughin'. The ole flames begin to go up the chimney. That Mohawker just kept pumpin' and the fire kept jumpin'. I tole him stop, but he never paid no mind. I thought Mister Sam sure was going to roast like a turkey."

"Hotter'n the hinges of hell up there," said Sam.

"He kept it up with that bellows until I grabbed it away from him," said Joe. "I thought he was goin' to bang me with that hatchet, but he didn't. I tole him he'd roon everythin' in the smithy. So I gave him the bellows and tole him to git, and he did. They all did. Just up and left."

"I got blisters on my bottom, Mose," Sam exclaimed.

"You still got your hair," said his brother. "Be thankful

for that. Joe, we're not going to forget what you did for Sam."

"Didn't do nothin' but get scared," said Joe. "That Injun took the bellows, Mister Mose."

"Damn the bellows! Joe, I been thinking. I never did need a slave, anyway. Don't believe in it, for one thing. Never did seem right to me. I'm going to get you your papers, Joe."

"My free papers, Mister Mose?"

Terwilleger nodded.

"What'll I do when I'm free?"

"I'd like to have you go right on working for me," Moses Terwilleger told him. "Sam and me and the boys will work the farm. I'll pay you wages in the smithy. Is that all right?"

"I sure thank you. Reckon when I'm free I can join the militia?"

"Join 'er right now, by God!" Sam exclaimed. "Let's go find Testing and you can sign up."

"Do I get me a musket?"

"Hell, yes. You can have two. I'll let you carry mine."

Someone up on the stockade yelled down to them: "Here comes another one. It's a girl. Open up the gate."

"Get that gate open!" shouted Quick, running toward it. "Maybe it's Lucy."

"No, it ain't your wife, Quick," called the man from the stockade. "It's Molly Embler, looks like."

"Thought the Emblers cut and run," said one of the Sheperds.

"Maybe she come back, or maybe the rest of them got caught."

The Embler girl was white and trembling, and almost witless with fear, but a few minutes with the crowd in the stockade calmed her down. The Emblers had been living at Wyoming the year before when the Butlers had ravaged the town. The memory of that massacre had been stamped on her mind.

"Where's my ma and pa?" she cried. "Where's my brothers?"

"They got off all right through the woods, Molly," Mrs.

Whittaker told her. "We thought that you was with them."

"You sure they got away? The Injuns didn't get them?"

"They got away, all right. They'll be in any time now."

"I should have gone with them, but I got scared. I started to hide when Pa yelled for us to run. First I went under the bed, and then I remembered they would burn the house. So I ran outside and jumped into the potato pit. I pulled the boards across and hid under the straw."

"That was a smart trick," Sam Terwilleger said. "That was better than my chimney."

"After I got in there, I think I was more scared of rats and snakes than of the Injuns. I heard 'em yellin' and I heard the house burnin' and then one them walked on the boards over my head. I stayed under the straw, and then he lifted up one of the boards and looked down. He was so close I could smell him! I didn't even breathe. Then he dropped the board and went away. When everything was quiet for a long time, I came in."

"Come along, Molly," Mrs. Whittaker said. "We'll clean you up and give you some food."

The crowd dispersed then as Colonel Testing came out of the fort to announce that he would open the gate and allow search parties with guards to go out to the cabins to see what could be salvaged from the still-flaming ruins and to gather any stock that the Indians hadn't killed or driven off. This activity kept the people busy for an hour or so, and kept grumblers like Quick and the Sheperds from haranguing the crowd about the necessity for chasing the war party immediately.

Isaac Youngblood took his loss harder than most. The rest had their land and most of them still had all their crops except the hay. They had lost cabins and barns and furniture and stock. But they all had something left. Not so he and Haskell, although Haskell could live with his son John if he didn't go back to storekeeping. Youngblood stood with his arm about his wife's shoulders, both of them staring at the pile of ashes and embers which had been his tavern.

Their son Matthew, nineteen, and daughter, Mary, sixteen, stood beside them.

"Well, Edna," said Youngblood finally, sighing. "We'll have to start over. That's a hard thing for a man my age. Twenty years right here, happy and prosperous, and now—nothing. I don't want to do it all over again—I don't know if I can make it. Get it built, and the goddam war will still go on, and them dirty red bastards will come and burn it."

"We have to start again, Ike," she said gently. "We have to think of Matt and Mary. We like it here in Cedar Bush. The Indians won't ever come back."

"I'll help, Pa," said Matthew. "We'll build the best-looking tavern in Highland County."

"I don't know," Youngblood sighed again, shaking his head. "Seems like I don't have the gumption to start. I just look at this mess and I—I wish I'd done like Polhamus. Only I'd of taken a couple of them with me."

"Don't worry about it, Pa," his son told him. "You just wait. Come October, we'll be living in the new tavern, and then we'll finish her next spring."

"Maybe so, Matt. Maybe we'll give it a try. But I'll tell you one thing for sure. Before I think about putting up a building here again, I'm going after the bastards that burned this one. I'm going to send a few of them to hell. And if Testing don't get started soon, I'll get Quick and some of the others and we'll go after them together."

"We'll all go after 'em, Pa. I'll be right 'longside you."

Just after noon, the people in Cedar Bush heard the distant rhythmic tattoo of a drum beating. In a few minutes, from the forest on the east side of the settlement, marched a column of militia led by two mounted officers in uniform. A solitary drummer marched behind the officers' horses at the head of the column, his sticks flashing in the sunlight as he rolled out the step. The militia moved into the open in a ragged column of fours, and the watchers on the stockade began to make out details.

"There's young Matt Finch up front. Hey, Bez, there's your boy!"

"And the Emblers! I see your folks, Molly!"

"That's Hayworth on the white horse."

"There's Bookstaver with the fancy hat."

"There's close to a hundred of 'em, I'd say."

"They must of been coming already. John Sheperd never ran that fast."

"Now we'll get started," Quick exclaimed. "We'll catch up with the Injuns in the morning."

As the column twisted across the meadow toward the main gate, the watchers from the fort could see Major Bookstaver ride along its length, snapping commands. "Dress up that line. Steady, men. Keep your step. Come on, now—hup, two, three, four!"

"What the hell does he think he's doing?" sneered Bill Sheperd. "Parading in front of Congress or something?"

"Hey, Major!" yelled Abe Sheperd. "Where'd you get that hat?"

Major Bookstaver's hat was a joke among all the militiamen in Highland County. He'd gone to the best store in Highland Landing that spring and asked to see some officers' hats. Mr. Torrington, the proprietor, had brought out a handsome tricorn with a plume.

"That's a nice hat, Major. That hat will cost you five dollars."

"Very nice indeed, Mr. Torrington, but haven't you one in a little better price range?"

"Well, sure, Major. I got some for three dollars, but they ain't as nice."

"No, no! I mean something just a little better."

"Why—I guess I have at that, Major. Just a moment."

Mr. Torrington took the five-dollar hat into the back room, brushed it up, changed the plume, and brought it back.

"Now, that there's a little better hat, Major. Have to get ten dollars for that hat."

"Just what I wanted, Mr. Torrington. I'll take it. It's a handsome piece of headgear."

"It sure is, Major. You ask for quality, you get it in Torrington's."

When the column reached the stockade, Colonel Hayworth turned in his saddle and called to Bookstaver to dismiss the men. They milled about, inspecting the ruins and talking excitedly to the Cedar Bush people, most of whom had relatives among the newcomers.

Bezaleel Finch rushed forward to meet his son, who was striding confidently forward. "You made it all right, son!"

"Sure I did, Pa. Got three of them Injuns, too!" Matt gestured carelessly to the fresh scalp hanging at his belt. "Only had a chance to lift the hair on one of 'em, though."

Bez Finch stared at the scalp for a moment. Then he looked at Matt. "What'd you do that for? Take his scalp? White men don't take scalps, boy!"

"Scouts do, Pa. I ain't changed my mind any. I'm going off to the army. I reckon I'll be a scout like Tom Currie and Tim Murphy."

"I told you before, Matt! I won't let—" Bez Finch stopped talking suddenly, seeming about to fly into a rage. Then he relaxed, and an odd little smile touched his mouth. After a moment, he nodded. "All right, Matt. Guess a man who kills three Indians has a right to make up his mind for himself. You'd go anyway if I was to say no, and I don't want you to go without my good word."

"That's right, Pa."

Bez Finch put his arm around his son's shoulders. "Come on inside, Matt. Folks will want you to tell about how you got those red devils. I want to hear it myself."

The several officers of the militia, led by Hayworth and Bookstaver, entered the fort where they were greeted by Colonel Testing.

"A boy over toward Tomkins Ridge saw the smoke this morning, Doctor," Hayworth said to Testing. "He ran all the way to tell us, and since it was muster day, we were already started when Finch arrived with the news. We met Sheperd on the way."

"They jumped us just after dawn, James. It was pretty

bad. James Taylor was coming in to warn us yesterday, but I think they got him. We had two killed—Polhamus and Ephraim Dunning—and five of the people across the Deerkill are missing. Tom Currie just took a party across the creek to look for them, and he found signs where they had three women and two children with them. That accounts for the five."

"Young Sheperd said it was Brant. That right?"

Testing nodded. "He had a bunch of Rangers and Senecas, and some Mohawks."

"How many were there?"

"Between eighty and ninety. We made it about sixty Indians, and about twenty-five or thirty Rangers."

"Well, then. If we get right after 'em, we can give 'em a good lesson."

"Tom Currie says there's apt to be more up in the mountains."

"What makes him say that?"

"He's right here. Let him answer for himself. Go ahead, Tom. Tell him what you told me."

Tom told his views on the war party once more. He noticed as he spoke that Bookstaver and some of the other officers from Gardinerville and Tomkins Ridge were shaking their heads in disbelief.

When Tom had finished, Hayworth nodded and mused a moment. "Sounds pretty reasonable. Look here, Currie. You know more about Indians than any of us. What do you say we ought to do?"

"Let me go after them alone, sir. I can walk into their camp and come back with the captives. My wife is among them, sir. I know what to do. It will cost a lot of money, and I won't be able to do anything about the plunder or the stock. That's what they came for, and they won't give it up. But I'm pretty certain I can bring back my wife and the rest."

"I have already told him, James," Testing interposed, "that I think he's presuming too much upon an old friendship. Brant would take him with the war party."

"Of course he would!" exclaimed Bookstaver. "That's utter nonsense. One man against that many! I don't believe there are three hundred of them, but certainly there are almost a hundred."

"I know Indians, Major. They'll give up the captives if they're paid for them."

"And if they won't, Currie?" asked Colonel Hayworth.

"If they won't," Bookstaver broke in, "then the Indians will be so far across the mountains that we'll never catch them. Let's get after them at once. We have almost twice as many men."

Tom lost his temper. "Major, you don't know one damn thing about fighting Indians. I'm telling you that if you chase 'em far enough they'll turn, and then you'll get a bellyful. Even a hundred of them could whip us if they had the chance to pick the spot."

"Now, Lieutenant," sneered Bookstaver. "You know Indians won't fight an organized body of troops. Hell, anybody knows that! All they're good for is raiding and burning. They didn't fight at Saratoga, did they? They didn't fight at Oriskany, did they?"

"They didn't! Were you there, Major?"

"Of course not! But I heard all about it from some of the officers who were. If you press the battle to the Indians, they'll run. And when they're disorganized, we can pursue them and regain the captives. I say no more talk! Let's get after them."

"Now, wait a minute," Hayworth said. "I'd like your opinion, Doctor."

"I say follow them with caution. When we come close, let Tom Currie go ahead to talk with Brant. Maybe he can do what he says he can. That way we can come home without further bloodshed. All the animals and goods they've stolen are not worth the life of one of our men. And Tom is right about one thing. Let them pick the ground to fight on, and we'll be in trouble."

"I'm inclined to agree with you, Doctor," said Hayworth.

"Are you willing to follow Colonel Testing's plan, Lieutenant Currie?"

Tom nodded reluctantly. "I'd sooner go alone right now, but if those are the orders, I'll follow them. But I'll tell you right now, Colonel, that the safety of my wife is my main thought. I'll go to Canada if I have to. I want you to know that. And I want to be free to make any kind of deal I can with Brant to get my wife and the rest of them back. If that's all right with you, I'll follow your orders. If not, I'll go ahead by myself."

"It seems reasonable to me, Lieutenant."

"Let's get started then," exclaimed Bookstaver. "They already have more than a three-hour jump on us."

"Wait a minute, sir!" said one of the officers from Tomkins Ridge. "Maybe the rest of us ain't so keen on chasing a big war party. We didn't lose anything, and there's no sense in our going out and getting killed if it can be helped. Maybe that don't sound so neighborly to you Cedar Bush people, but Currie says there's a lot more of them than was seen. Now anybody around here knows that Tom is a smart man when it comes to Injuns. It don't sound good to me. I don't want to get ambushed."

Hayworth nodded. "Anything else, Captain Knapp?"

"Well, it seems to me we ought to listen to Currie. He says he can get the women back. We don't want to fight if we don't have to. Let him go ahead now. We can follow slower. After all, that's all we want—the people they carried off."

"What about next year?" exclaimed Bookstaver. "They'll be back again if we let them off without punishment. Give 'em a good licking and they'll never come back."

"If you're so damn keen on fighting," said Knapp, "why don't you go join a Continental regiment? We're militia—we ain't soldiers."

"I guess we'd better follow them as rapidly as possible and have a conference when we come up with them," said Hayworth. "That way Currie can talk to Brant with a show

of strength behind him. It's dangerous to let him go ahead alone, in case his plan doesn't work."

"All right. Let's go." Bookstaver was already adjusting his sword and setting his hat at an angle.

"We'll talk to the men before we start, Major," Hayworth said dryly. "As Captain Knapp said, this isn't the Continental Line. These men are in the militia."

Hayworth explained the plan to the militiamen from one of the stockade ladders. When he finished, there were many murmurs of dissent, as well as some cheers. Apparently Tom Currie's views on the strength of the war party had spread rapidly, even among the newcomers.

"There's a lot of Injuns up ahead there, Colonel," one of the men shouted.

Major Bookstaver cried out impatiently and strode to his horse. He mounted and drew his sword.

"I, for one, am starting after them. The brave men can come with me. All you cowards stay here with the women."

"We'll take a vote," said Colonel Hayworth. "Colonel Testing will make the count. All those in favor of pursuit, raise your right hands."

He lifted his own right hand, and about half of the men raised theirs immediately. Others went up more reluctantly. These were slowly joined by still more as Testing was counting, until almost all the men had their hands in the air.

"All right. Captain Knapp. Detail ten men to guard the fort. Issue muskets to all the men and boys staying here and to those women who can use 'em. Lieutenant Whittaker. As quickly as you can, call the roll of the Cedar Bush men. When all are accounted for, we'll start. Each man to have provisions for five days and plenty of powder and shot."

Whittaker climbed to the ladder in Hayworth's place. He pulled a militia roll from his pocket and began to call the names.

"Report and go for your equipment when I call your name. Thomas Currie, lieutenant."

"Here."

"Benjamin Whittaker, lieutenant." He looked up, smiling. "That's me. Bezaleel Finch, ensign."

"Here."

"David Wait, chaplain."

"Here."

Whittaker looked at Hayworth. "He's a new addition, Colonel. The men figured it would be nice to have a chaplain in the company."

Hayworth nodded approval.

"Isaac Youngblood, sergeant."

"Here."

"Abraham Sheperd, sergeant."

"Here, by God!"

"John Haskell, sergeant."

"Here."

"Ephraim Dunning." He looked up again. "I'm sorry, Daniel," he said to Dunning. "I didn't think. Next on the list is David Dunning."

"Here."

When Whittaker had finished, Reverend Wait said a short prayer for the success of the action. The Cedar Bush men fell into line, the column straightened, and the gates were swung wide. The drum started to beat. Some of the women cried; others watched impassively. The children and dogs raced along the line of men.

"All right, Major," said Hayworth. "Give the command."

Bookstaver turned in his saddle in a military manner. "Forward march!" he shouted. One of the dogs came racing up to snap at the hind legs of the major's horse. The animal kicked, bucked, reared, and started to gallop. The major's hat flew off into the dust. The horse reached the bridge before Bookstaver was able to rein him in. A great shout of laughter rose. When Bookstaver rode back, his face was flushed and he was obviously furious. No one picked up his hat; he had to dismount to get it.

The long string of men, one hundred and forty-nine of them, hitched through the gates and marched along the

lane toward the bridge. Tom Currie walked at the head of the column, beside Hayworth's horse.

"I'll take three men, Colonel, and scout on ahead. I'll send one of them back every couple of hours to report."

"Go ahead, Currie. Take anyone you want."

"All right. But I have a couple of suggestions."

"What are they?"

"First, when we get into the woods, you'd better keep flankers out. Second, throw that damn drum into the Deerkill. They'll know we're coming soon enough, without us telling them exactly where we are."

"Fine. Major Bookstaver! Tell the drummer to stop the racket."

So the column proceeded into the forest beyond the Deerkill and up the foothill slopes. Behind them the valley was silent. The smoke from the smoldering settlement curled in spirals into the clear air and vanished.

20

THE FLIES are the worst, thought Jessica. I guess I could stand any of it if it weren't for the flies. They could drive a person insane.

There were gnats and big black flies, and a green-and-yellow fly with sharply triangular wings, which buzzed interminably about her head and face, swooping and darting, stinging painfully when it landed. Her arms were weary from slapping at flies. Her body was soaked with perspiration and her clothing clung to her.

The forest in the valleys through which they passed was dark and shaded for the most part, with the sun penetrating the trees infrequently, yet the heat was oppressive and there was no breeze. Jessica longed to stop and rest, to gain her breath and to bathe her face, but the long column kept its steady pace.

Emma Polhamus had even more trouble with the flies than did Jessica, because they swarmed about the horse, whose belly was spotted with flecks of red blood where he'd been bitten. Emma had a sprig of maple brush with which she tried to keep the insects away from the children, who cried frequently during the afternoon. The Indians apparently were not troubled by the flies.

"They smell so bad even the flies won't touch 'em," Emma remarked.

Jessica's steady pace had long since been reduced to the automatic task of making one foot follow the other. She stumbled often, and her legs were covered with bruises and scratches. Dusk fell, and still the war party kept going. High above on the right Jessica could see the sharp peaks of two mountains—or rather, one mountain with two peaks. Would they never stop! She knew she couldn't go much farther. They must have traveled twenty-five miles since leaving Cedar Bush that morning.

Captain Desmond rode back to their position in the line of march.

"I hope you'll reconsider my offer of the horse tomorrow," he said. "You can't keep going like this."

"I don't need any help," she said. "Aren't we going to stop tonight?"

"Just a short ways to go now. Maybe another half-hour."

A few minutes later the column halted, and she took advantage of the respite to sit down, resting her back against a tree. Far ahead she could see Brant and Desmond talking to a Ranger and an Indian who must have come out of the forest ahead of them. The pause was brief and then the march began again. One of the Indians prodded Jessica with his musket.

Soon they topped a ridge, and below she could see the flames of many fires. Groups of Indians and Rangers came running up to meet them, and then walked beside the column into the camp. When the entire camp came into sight, and Jessica had a chance to guess how many there were,

she became disheartened. There were twice as many men in the camp as had raided Cedar Bush.

Tom and the rest will be helpless against this many, she thought.

Emma Polhamus was of the same opinion. "I reckon this is the end of us," she said. "There's not enough men in the whole of Highland County to do any good against this many."

"Don't give up, Emma," Jessica told her. "Remember what MacDonald said about us getting away."

"You know he was talking about you, not me and the kids. Besides, even if we tried it, I couldn't go very far the way I'm swelled up."

"I'm not going to try it without you."

"You'll have to. All I want is for you to promise to come after the kids when the war's over. If we win, these Injuns will have to give them up."

"We'll wait and see what happens, Emma. Maybe we can all try it together. Just don't give up."

They were herded into the camp by the Senecas, and then were left to take care of themselves. In spite of the apparent unconcern of their captors, Jessica could feel a hundred pairs of eyes watching her at every moment. She knew that if she made an attempt to leave the light of the nearby fire, there would be at least one Indian at her shoulder, ordering her back into the firelight. When the hubbub of their arrival had died down, most of the Indians dropped chunks of beef from the cattle slaughtered during the raid into great kettles of boiling water. They sat around the fires cleaning their weapons or making repairs to their sweat-streaked war paint, and then, after a few minutes had gone by, began to fish the chunks of meat from the kettles. Jessica was sure that it could be only half cooked. The Indians made no offer to feed their captives.

"I don't like the looks of what they're eating," said Emma, "and I know I wouldn't like the taste of it, but I sure am hungry. Maybe we'll get some after they're finished. If there's any left."

The Rangers had their own group of fires some distance to the left of the Senecas, upon the bank of a small roiling mountain stream. Jessica saw Lucy Quick and the Ranger MacLeod approaching.

"Sergeant MacLeod says you can come over to our fire and eat," said Lucy.

"Sergeant MacLeod can go chase himself," muttered Emma.

"Them kids has a long way to go, ma'am," the Ranger remarked kindly. "They need nourishment. We've got salt to fix up the meat, and some bread. I told one of the men to milk a cow for the little ones."

"Thank you, Sergeant," Jessica said. "I guess we'd better go, Emma. These Indians apparently don't intend to feed us."

"They'd let you have the leavings," the Ranger told her.

Reluctantly, Emma picked up her sleeping daughter while Jessica took little Oscar. MacLeod spoke a few words to one of the Senecas, who grunted and returned to tearing a chunk of half-cooked beef.

With an air of proprietorship, Lucy led them to MacLeod's campfire. The exhausted children revived enough to eat the beef one of the Rangers fished out of the kettle for them. They drank several pewter cupfuls of the warm milk another Ranger provided. As soon as they had finished eating, they fell asleep once more.

"Where did you get this bread?" asked Emma. "It ain't hardly fit to eat, soggy like this."

"That's my bread," Lucy giggled. "I never was a hand to make bread. They took it from our cabin."

"I thought as much," Emma whispered to Jessica. "Only I was too polite to say so."

On the far side of the fire sat the scrawny unkempt Ranger who had threatened Jessica in her cabin. He was peering at the pages of his New Testament, frequently looking up to stare at Lucy Quick and at Jessica. He seemed to be muttering constantly, although Jessica couldn't hear the words. She thought that perhaps he was reading. She noticed that one

of the other Rangers, a young man with a girlish petulant face, kept glancing at Benson angrily. Finally the young man stopped eating and sat motionless, glaring at Benson. Then he spoke in a quivering voice scarcely audible.

"I'm getting pretty goddam sick and tired of that!"

Benson paid him no heed. Several of the other men stopped eating and watched.

The young man spoke again, this time as if to the others, still in a low voice. "All the time. All the goddam time. That crazy loon makes me sick."

"Easy, Morrison," MacLeod said.

"I'm not going to stand for it," the young Ranger muttered.

Benson looked up. His voice croaked: "We have the words before us. *Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.*"

Morrison rose to a crouching position. His voice was a thin scream. "Will you shut up, now!"

Benson stared fixedly at him. *"The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are bold as a lion."*

Morrison yelled. From his crouch, he leaped at Benson. The older man fell backward. Morrison punched viciously at the bearded face with his left hand; his right was already drawing the knife from its sheath at his belt. Benson squirmed and twisted under him. MacLeod was on his feet and above them instantly. He grabbed the arm which held the knife, pulling Morrison away. The young man was yelling wildly now, threshing frantically to get at Benson's throat. MacLeod hauled him to his feet and threw him into the throng of Rangers who had crowded around. They held him, and after a moment he stopped yelling.

"Take him away from here," MacLeod ordered. "You, Benson! You've got to stop this damn talk about blood and burning."

The other didn't reply, but settled once more by the fire with his Bible. He didn't look up again.

"I'll kill him myself if he doesn't quit!" MacLeod muttered.

Emma was trying to quiet her children, who had started to cry during Morrison's outburst. "Let's go back to our Indians," she said to Jessica. "At least they ain't trying to kill anybody right now."

When they were back at their own campfire, they were approached by a small woman about forty years old, with a sad-looking, kindly face.

"I'm Anna MacDonald," she said. "My man told me to look after you a little. Anything you need?"

"Blankets for the kids, if you can get 'em," Emma answered. "I'd thank you if you can."

Mrs. MacDonald nodded. "That's easy enough." She glanced toward the Senecas. "They feed you?"

"We ate with Sergeant MacLeod," Jessica told her.

"These Injuns speak any English that you've noticed?" the woman asked.

"I don't think so," Emma said. "Not much, anyway."

"Well, I'll talk low in case they do. James told me to tell you this, Mrs. Currie. Brant has fixed it so that tomorrow night, one of the Mohawks will come in from a scout with a story of a big party of soldiers up ahead. Brant will take Desmond with him to see who they are. Course, they won't find anything, but by the time they get back, you'll be well on your way. Desmond will be mad, but there won't be a thing he can do about it. If you're lucky, you'll meet up with the militia. James says they're sure to follow us, and by that time they won't be so far behind. Brant figures to give you about three hours' start. I'll give you the sign when to go. Nobody will bother you, not even these Senecas. Is that all clear to you? Tomorrow night, about the time the camp is going to sleep."

Jessica nodded. "I understand. What about Mrs. Polhamus and the children? Why can't I try to take them, too?"

"No. Don't even try it. The Senecas wouldn't let you. They don't care about you, long as they're told to let you go, but you can't take their prisoners with you. I'm sorry it has to be that way, but it's your only chance."

"Don't you worry about us, Jess. You run for it," Emma

told her. "We'd only slow you up, anyway. I have your promise that you won't forget the kids when you get back."

"I guess it will have to be that way," Jessica said. "But don't worry, Emma. Tom will come after you as soon as he can. If we only knew where they were taking you!"

"I know that," said Mrs. MacDonald. "James made it his business to find out, and he says Tom Currie will know the place. These Indians here are from a town called Kanadesaga at the head of Seneca Lake. Can you remember that, Mrs. Currie?"

"Kanadesaga," Jessica repeated. "I'll remember."

"All right, then," the woman said. "I wish you good luck."

"Thank you very much," Jessica replied. "You've been exceedingly kind, and I wish you good luck as well. I hope you will be happy in Canada."

"I was happy with my man before this war came. Maybe I will be again after it's over. It don't really matter where we are, I guess, as long as James has this hating and killing out of his mind. Now, remember. Wait until I give you the signal tomorrow night. Then you get up and go into the trees as if it was a matter of nature. Then you get on the trail back and keep going. Don't stop for anything at all! Keep on the trail and you'll likely meet your militia."

She left them then.

"Kanadesaga," Emma said. "Don't you forget that, Jess."

"I won't, Emma. And Tom will come after you and the children as soon as he can."

"Just the kids, Jess. I won't never make it."

Soon the entire camp was sleeping. The fires burned down to masses of glowing coals. Despite her fatigue, Jessica lay awake for a long time. Occasionally an Indian or two would come through the forest, swiftly and silently. Once she saw Joseph Brant walk past her through the camp and into the trees toward the ridge above. Later, Desmond walked up and stood over her for a minute or so. She gave no sign that she was awake, keeping her breathing regular and deep. She could hear him whistling a light dancing tune almost soundlessly. The length of the knife concealed in her dress was

reassuring. After he walked away again, she lay there thinking of Tom and wondering how many miles of mountain forest lay between them. Soon she fell asleep.

21

THE MILITIA kept a rapid pace all that first day. Several times Tom Currie waited for the column to catch up with him, so he could point out short cuts which clipped several miles from the trail Brant had taken. Whenever the forest path was wide enough, Major Bookstaver would ride back along the column, exhorting the men to greater speed.

Sam Terwilleger was marching with his brother Moses and with Abraham Sheperd. The Sheperd sons were right behind them. Sam glanced quizzically from time to time at the elder Sheperd.

"Tell me something, Abe," he said finally. "Here I been swatting and swearing at flies all day long, just like everybody else except you. Why don't these damn pests bother you?"

"Hide's too tough and I'm too skinny," Sheperd said. "They like nice tender fat meat like yours, Sam."

"That ain't it," remarked his son Bill. "Ain't Pa the hairiest man you ever seen? Well, the flies can't get through that hair that covers him. Why, I been on huntin' trips with Pa, and you wouldn't believe what happened. Had to comb himself all over when we got home. Flies would get in that hair and beard of his and get their feet tangled and couldn't get out. Stay in there till they starved to death. Sometimes, when a horsefly lands on Pa's arm, he turns his muscle and one of those hairs winds right around that fly and strangles him. That's a fact. Saves Pa a lot of swattin'."

"Tell you something else," said young John Sheperd. "Last year when harvest was over, Pa got drunk and stayed in bed for two days. Damn if a little old field mouse didn't

crawl in his beard and whelp herself a litter of young mice. We saw 'em while we was trying to wake him up. We set a trap on his chest. Got every damn one, too!"

"Uh huh," grunted Sam. "I don't doubt it a bit. Did I ever tell you boys how I caught that big trout in the north branch of the Deerkill? In that big hole up above the valley there where it comes down from the mountain? Why, that fish was so big I couldn't haul him ashore. I had to go in and stab him four times with my knife. You know what I found in his belly?"

"What?" asked Bill Sheperd.

"Well, there was two gray squirrels, small ones, and a rabbit, five chipmunks, and one mink. Imagine that, now! A trout big enough to eat the mink that was fishin' for him. That's a fact."

"Sam, you know that's a goddam lie," said Abe Sheperd calmly. "Who ever heard of a trout eatin' rabbit?"

Sam ignored him. "What kind of bait did you say you used for them field mice in Abe's beard, John?"

"Same kind you used for that trout, Sam."

As dusk came, they could see a double-peaked mountain in the distance. They kept on long after nightfall, because the trail here was wide and well-defined, passing through the winding valleys toward the western slope of the mountains. The moon was bright and full, and its light guided them well enough, although many of them fell. The otherwise silent forest was filled with muttered curses and grumblings and the rattle of muskets and equipment.

"I'm hungry!" one of the Tomkins Ridge men shouted ahead at the officers. "And I'm tired. When the hell are we going to stop?"

"Silence back there!" called Major Bookstaver.

"Silence, my ass!" the man shouted back. "We want to stop."

Bookstaver rode back and reined in beside the Tomkins Ridge men. "Who said that?"

"I did," answered the guilty one. "What you going to do about it, mister?"

Bookstaver seemed startled that he had received an answer.

"You can't address an officer that way!"

"Why can't I?"

"You're under military orders. I could have you brought before a court!"

"Do it and be damned to you. I'm hungry and I'm tired. If we don't stop soon, I'm falling out and so are these men here."

"That will make you a deserter, soldier."

"Look here, mister. I ain't no soldier. This here is the militia. I ain't going to do any damn fool thing you say just because you got a fancy hat and a sword. We're going to take a vote here, and we're going to vote to stop and eat and sleep. We're militiamen, not a bunch of goddam owls!"

Bookstaver hesitated a moment. "I'll tell you, men. I'll ride ahead and consult with Colonel Hayworth."

"Go ahead. Consult all you want. We'll wait right here. We ain't marching another step."

As Bookstaver rode away, the man turned to his companions. "Ain't he somethin', though?" he grinned. "Man was to put a red coat on him, he'd make a fine Britisher. He's stupid enough."

Colonel Hayworth had already decided that they had traveled far enough. There was a mountain stream just ahead, and they made camp beside it. No fires were allowed, and the men ate quickly and rolled themselves in their blankets.

Soon after they halted, Tom Currie came into camp.

"They're up there ahead of us about six miles, Colonel," he told Hayworth. "I swung wide up the mountain slope and saw the fires burning. There's a lot of them there."

"How can you tell that, Lieutenant?" asked Bookstaver. "Surely you didn't get close enough to count them in the dark?"

"No," said Tom, "but I counted the fires."

"How many would you say there are, Currie?" Hayworth asked.

"Same as I told you back in Cedar Bush. Somewhere around three hundred."

"There can't be that many!" exclaimed Bookstaver.

"Go take a look for yourself, Major," Tom said.

"How close could you get without being seen, if you were to try, Lieutenant?"

Tom shook his head. "They've probably got plenty of sentries all around. They'd shoot first and talk later. They know we're coming. That's why they're so careless with the fires. I wouldn't try to go in there at night."

"How do they know we're coming?" asked Bookstaver.

Tom explained patiently. "They've had Indians on every mountainside we've passed all day long. They know how many men we have, and probably just how far we were behind them when the sun went down. They may have quit watching then, so maybe they don't know we've traveled so far in the dark."

"Where will we catch them, Currie?" asked Colonel Testing.

"Maybe just before they get to the East Branch of the Delaware. That wouldn't be bad. The country is open, and it's downhill to the river. They haven't been traveling as fast as they could. I don't think they're much worried about us."

"They will be before tomorrow is through," Bookstaver said.

"I don't think we ought to chance a fight, Colonel," said Tom, ignoring Bookstaver. "There's too many of them. I maybe can avoid it by talking to Brant."

"I hope you can, Lieutenant. I don't want unnecessary bloodshed."

"By God, we ought to teach 'em a lesson," said Bookstaver.

"Let's leave that to General Sullivan," said Hayworth. "He's better equipped for it."

22

EARLY the next morning Tom Currie and Bez Finch crouched in the brush on the rise of land overlooking the enemy's campsite of the night before. All was quiet in the valley below.

"They got an early start," Tom said. "Looks as if they're all gone, but we'd better stick here for a while and watch."

"Hadn't we better tell Hayworth?"

"Not until I take a look at the camp. There's lots of time. We'll sit here until I'm sure they've all pulled out."

"How can you tell?"

"By watching the birds, for one thing. If there's anybody down there, the birds will set up a ruckus. Just keep looking around. Watch the squirrels, too. See them on the ground? They'll run if anybody moves in those trees."

For a few moments, Finch's gaze wandered to and fro across the clearing below. Then he looked at Tom.

"Say, Tom. My boy Matt figures to go off with the army. I'm against it, but he's almost a man grown. I guess I'll have to let him. Says he wants to be a scout like you."

"Takes a deal of learning," Tom answered. "He's a smart boy, though, and knows the woods."

"I thought maybe you'd try to talk him out of it. Seems to me he'd be better off in the Continentals. He'd be safer, anyways."

"Not so safe, Bez. There's sickness and bad food and the chance that some general is going to run a regiment right into artillery fire. A scout is on his own. Anything happens to him, it's usually his own fault, not some officer's."

"Maybe so, but there's a lot of danger while he's learning. Like you say, it takes a long time to know as much about the woods as you do."

"Get Matt the right teacher and he'll be all right. Tell you

what I'll do, Bez. I'll send him up to Tim Murphy, if that's all right with you. Course, they're going to run into some Indian fighting."

"Matt's going to get some right here, Tom. It certainly would make me feel better if Matt was with a man like Murphy. If you'd do that, I'd be thankful."

"All right. If he wants to go, I'll give him a letter to Murph. Looks as if we can move up now, Bez. Let's go."

They approached the campsite cautiously.

They went around the perimeter of the clearing, but there was no sign of any enemy. Then Tom walked among the heaps of campfire ashes, studying the ground around each one. Finch watched without comment until Tom suddenly crouched at one of the dead fires.

"What is it, Tom?"

Tom pointed to some marks in the soft earth. "These prints. It's my wife. Mrs. Polhamus and the kids were here, too. Senecas got 'em." He reached into the ashes and pulled forth a half-burned, worn moccasin and showed it to Finch. "That's a Seneca moccasin."

A half-hour later Tom lay flat on the brown pine-needled crest of the ridge, his rifle beside him, looking down at the ford which Brant was using to cross the East Branch. Far below him the stream flowed swiftly between the banks patched with brush and rocks and evergreens. Directly across the river was a grassy intervale on both sides of the confluence of the Seven Mile River and the East Branch.

A few yards north of the Seven Mile River, there were a few Indians herding the stock which they had just driven across the ford. From the trees below came another group, Senecas, who were leading the prisoners to the ford. Tom started to rise when he saw Jessica. He had to control the impulse to race down the face of the ridge to her. He brought his rifle up and aimed at the Seneca nearest her. Then he lowered the barrel. He could kill the Indian as a sign to her that he was near, and he would have done it had he been alone. It would be no trick for him to get away through the woods. But he'd sent Bez Finch down the

southern slope of the ridge, so any shooting was out of the question.

All right, he thought. I know she isn't hurt. There's other things to think about.

He hoped Finch was keeping under cover. Tom had sent him down the ridge instead of going himself because he wanted to watch the ford to see Jessica. Finch was quite near the river and much closer to the ford than Tom was. A bend in the stream hid the river bank from view southward, and Tom had wanted to know how far back Brant's men were strung out along the river trail, and how long it would take them all to reach the ford and cross it.

Brant must be figuring to lay for us, Tom thought. Else he would have brought them all up here together to cross. There's only about a hundred down there. Two hundred more laying back. Either that, or he's getting careless. Maybe I'd better go down there with Bez and find out.

As he rose to his feet, a musket cracked down by the river south of the ford. Four more shots were fired immediately. Tom started down the slope. Then he saw Bez Finch come running along the river bank near the ford. Finch swerved and started up the face of the ridge. A score of Indians and a few Rangers were chasing him. Several of the pursuers stopped to aim and fire. Tom raised his rifle and fired at one of the Rangers. The man toppled. The others fired at Finch and ducked for cover. Tom saw Finch stumble and fall in a clump of scrub pines. He started toward him, and then saw that the nearest of the Indians were in the pines. One of them whooped in triumph and Tom stopped running. The Indian came out of the pines, yelling and waving the scalp above his head.

They got him, Tom thought. Poor Bez! Worrying about Matt and all, and never giving a thought to himself. They got him and now he's dead. If I don't get out of here, they'll get me, too.

An instant before he turned and started to run, Tom looked once more down at the ford. Jessica was across the stream now, dismounting from the horse. Tom's lips moved.

"I'll be back, Jess," he whispered.

Then he ran through the pine trees to the eastern slope of the ridge. They might chase him, but they wouldn't catch him.

As he ran, sadly Tom thought of all the glasses of flip which he had lifted with Bez Finch in Youngblood's tavern. He remembered many years ago, when he was but a small boy, how his father had helped Bez Finch build his cabin. He remembered the cold autumn night almost a year ago when Sally Finch had died, and how Bez had seemed so strong in his grief, and Tom also recalled how he had taken some venison to the Finch cabin a few weeks later and had walked in to find Bez sitting alone by the fireside, weeping silently. Tom thought of Matt a few miles away with the militia, and of the three children back at Cedar Bush.

I'll keep an eye on them for you, Bez, he thought. I'll see that they get their start.

23

Tom met Hayworth and Bookstaver a hundred yards or so ahead of the militia column. He reported briefly what had happened, but put off Hayworth's questions.

"I'll be right back, sir," he said. "I'll have to tell Matt about his father."

Tom walked back along the column, parrying questions, until he saw Matt. Motioning the boy aside, he took his hand.

"What's the matter, Mr. Currie?"

"Your father, Matt. He's dead."

"Pa's dead! He can't be. I saw him not two hours ago."

"Up ahead. We had a brush with the Indians. I'm sorry, Matt. He was my good friend."

The boy began to weep, his shoulders bowed. Tom consoled him, while motioning the curious militiamen to con-

tinue marching by. The rear of the column had gone by when Matt looked up and brushed his eyes.

"We'll get left behind if we stay here, Mr. Currie," he said.

"All right, Matt. Let's get started."

"I guess now I'll have to take Pa's place with the kids. It's going to be hard telling them."

"My wife and I will give you a hand with them, Matt. Don't worry about them."

"Thanks, Mr. Currie. I guess now I won't be able to go off to the army, with the kids and all. But I'd sure like to get a few of them for Pa!"

"You've got a right to feel bitter, Matt, but if we get into a fight, you keep your head. And maybe we can work something out about the army. I guess a man should do some fighting for his country, if he thinks he has to. We'll see."

"You're a kind man, Mr. Currie. Pa would be grateful to you."

"He was my friend, Matt. And he never called me 'Mr. Currie.' I want you to call me Tom, just the way he did."

"All right, Tom."

When Tom rejoined Hayworth, he told him that Brant was crossing the stock, the plunder, and the prisoners first. "You're still bent on bringing all the men up, sir?"

"I think it's best, Currie. I want to avoid a fight, but Major Bookstaver is right. If we don't challenge them now, they'll be back next year."

"All right. I sent Bez Finch down to the river to find out how they were spread out, and if they were laying for us, but it's too late now to scout them again. What I think we'd better do is go over the hills and come in above them. We'll have to take care, though. There's a dry brook up in there where Brant could cut back away from the river bank and come in behind us. Then we'd be in a fix, whether we wanted to fight or not. We'll be all right as long as we control the ground above that ford and south of it. When we get in position, I'll go down and talk to Brant."

"Sounds good to me, Currie. Major Bookstaver, take fifty men and watch that ravine. Don't fire unless they try to come through. Stay under cover on the other side and pour it into 'em if they come up from the river."

Bookstaver seemed disgruntled at the order which would take him out of the center of any possible action. Without strenuous objection, however, he picked his men and moved away through the trees, bearing slightly left from the main party, which began cautiously to climb the long ridge far back from the river. In about fifteen minutes they were in position among the evergreens along the slope overlooking the river.

"I still don't see Brant down there," said Tom worriedly. "And there's a lot less of them than there was before. I'll bet they're trying it."

"Trying what, Currie?"

"Going around behind us and coming up this slope."

"Bookstaver will hold them."

"Maybe. I'd better talk to Brant as quick as I can."

Just as he finished speaking, there rose a rattle of musketry from the river bank south.

"That's Bookstaver," Colonel Testing exclaimed.

"That shooting's not anywhere near the ravine," Tom said. "It's coming from way down the river."

"What's happened to Bookstaver?" Hayworth asked.

"I'd hate to say," Tom told him.

"What do you mean?"

"Sounds to me as if he met the main part of them, and instead of trying to take cover in the dry brook, he's trying to retreat."

"He had his orders!" Hayworth exclaimed.

"Orders don't mean much to a man when he sees his first painted Iroquois," Tom said.

"I'll have him before a court."

"If you get a chance to," Tom told him. "Only hope we have now of getting out of this mess is if Brant doesn't want to fight, unless we pull out of here right now and start running. That's what I think we better do, Colonel, and not

waste any time. Head straight across the hills and keep going."

"Not on your life, Lieutenant. I won't turn tail."

"All right, then. I'll see what I can do with Brant, soon as they stop trading shots with Bookstaver."

A minute or so later, the firing down the river ceased, and there was no sign of the enemy at the ford, although there were about fifty Indians and a few Rangers on the opposite bank of the river.

Then came a shout from the slope directly behind the militia. Joseph Brant had ridden out of the forest into a rock-strewn clearing. Beside him was a mounted officer in the green-and-black uniform of the Rangers. Brant held his right hand in the air, palm outward.

"Hello, the ridge," his deep voice called. "Send an officer to talk terms."

"Go ahead, Currie," Hayworth said. "You have a free hand. Make the best terms possible."

"Send a couple of men up to cover me in case anything goes wrong, sir."

Tom stepped forward out of the brush on the hillside and walked slowly toward Brant and the Ranger. He saw the Indian smile and say something to the white man. Tom advanced until he was about twenty yards away.

"Thayendanegea, my brother," he called in the Mohawk language. "They have been long years since we met."

"Tom! It's good to see you again," said Joseph Brant in English. "I'm sorry it is this way." Brant dismounted and stepped forward. He put out his hand and shook Tom's vigorously.

"I've heard a lot about you, Tom. You and Tim Murphy are a two-man army."

"I've heard a little about you, Joseph. I can't say it was all good."

"War is war, Tom. But I'm glad to see you! Why did you let your rebel friends fall into this trap?"

Tom shrugged off the question. "I've come for my wife, Joseph. My wife and the other captives."

Brant nodded. "I knew you would, Tom. I told Captain Desmond here that you were coming. Let me introduce you two, since you're probably going to know each other much better. Captain William Desmond, this is Tom Currie, a dear friend of mine from days of peace. Desmond is one of Colonel Butler's most esteemed Ranger officers, Tom. He's also a friend of Walter Butler."

Tom nodded. He turned away from Desmond. "You'll tell the Senecas to let my wife go, Joseph?"

"Not the Senecas, Tom." Brant paused and then spoke in Mohawk. "Brother, I did not take your wife. I gave orders that you and your family were not to be harmed. This man here is the one who took her. He intends to carry her to Niagara, but I'm not going to permit it. She will be protected. My brother, you go back and tell the officer who commands your force to surrender and no harm will come to him or to his men. My warriors are already wild because of the blood which has been spilled. You know that I will not be able to control them if there is any more shooting. Surrender your men and we will treat you as prisoners of war. You are surrounded and we could kill you all. How did you let that happen, brother?"

"We had the ravine guarded," Tom answered.

"Yes," Brant nodded. "An officer in a fancy hat and about fifty men. If they are still going as fast as they were when I last saw them, they are halfway home now."

Desmond spoke then. "I suppose he's telling you that your wife is my prisoner and is going to Canada with me."

Tom struggled to control his rage and to suppress his urge to haul Desmond from the horse. He couldn't kill the man here. If he attacked Desmond, then Brant's Indians would think he was trying to kill their chief, and the battle he hoped to avoid would start. He spoke again in the Mohawk language.

"Thayendanegea, you had better warn him that I'm going to kill him. Ask him if he will surrender my wife for money. Ask him how much it will take."

"He doesn't want money."

"How about the others, the women and children?"

Brant shook his head. "Your men must surrender to me, my brother. I give you my word that none will be harmed. I also promise that you and your wife will be allowed to escape without pursuit after we cross the river. I promise you that. For the other captives I cannot speak."

"That is all you have to say?"

"Those are my words, brother."

"I am sure that we will not agree to surrender."

"Take care, then, brother. That hill of yours will run with blood. I hope none of it is yours."

"I will go back and tell them your words."

"Your wife will be safe. If there is a battle and you escape the hatchet and the knife, then stay close on our trail. I'll see that your wife escapes."

"There is no hope of freeing the prisoners and letting us go in peace?"

Brant shook his head. "This is a cruel war, brother. My people did not start it. Now they cry for revenge for their lands and for their men who have been killed."

"I didn't ask you for a speech, brother. Cannot we take our women and children and go?"

"An end to speeches, brother. The answer is no."

"All right. I'll be back to tell you what we've decided."

"Take care. It has been good to see you again. I will wait here for your officer's reply. Goodbye and good fortune, brother."

"Until we meet again, Thayendanegea." Tom looked at Desmond and spoke in English. "You'll never get back to Canada," he said softly.

Brant smiled as he remounted his horse. "I told him to run for the St. Lawrence and take the first ship for England, Tom."

"You'll never get off that ridge, rebel," sneered Desmond. "You're trapped and we'll lift every scalp!"

Tom turned his back to them and started to walk back up the slope. With every step he remembered Brant's advice to surrender, and the promise that if they did, Tom and

Jessica would be allowed to escape. Tom knew that Brant was a man of his word; no one would be harmed, and he and Jess would go free. He also knew that surrender would mean the saving of many lives.

We won't, he thought. Because we're all pigheaded. Even I think there must be some way to win the fight. Every man on that hill thinks he can whip his weight in Indians. So we won't surrender.

Up in the evergreens, Ben Whittaker, with Youngblood and Abe Sheperd and his sons, was covering Tom's passage across the open ground. Abe Sheperd lay flat, his rifle barrel trained on Brant. He had taken careful aim several times.

"I could pick him off that horse like a squirrel from a tree," he whispered to Youngblood.

"Whatever Tom asked 'em," Whittaker said, "they didn't agree to. Can't say as I blame 'em. They got us on the river side and on this side. We can't go anyplace but right into 'em or higher up on this ridge."

"Looks to me like we're going to have us a fight, Pa," said Bill Sheperd softly. "Why don't you go ahead and knock over that red bastard? Make you the most famous man from here to London, killing that son of a bitch!"

"Don't fire, Abe!" said Whittaker sharply. "Not until the colonel gives the word."

"Ah, hell, Ben. I was just layin' the bead on his stomach," Sheperd said. "Like this. See?"

Once more he aimed at Brant. "Easier than knocking a cow in the head with a hammer," he remarked. "I got him right on that belt of his. All I have to do is squeeze."

The crack of the rifle startled them—all but Abe Sheperd.

"By Jesus, I got him!" he yelled.

"You did, Pa!" yelled John Sheperd. "Lookit 'im sag."

Brant fell forward in his saddle, but straightened immediately. He clutched his waist and tugged at something. The leather belt came apart and he waved it high in the air as he turned his horse. His war whoop rolled across the ridge. Desmond was already riding for the trees.

"Goddam it, Sheperd!" Ben Whittaker shouted. "Now

you've done it. If Tom Currie fixed any kind of deal with that Injun, you've ruined it. Colonel ought to have you shot."

Sheperd paid no heed as he reloaded. "Give it to 'im, boys! Don't just cut his belt, way I did."

The Mohawk war whoop resounded and echoed as Brant rode toward the trees. Bill and John Sheperd each fired at him. Tom Currie was running toward them, bent low and weaving, while from the forest which concealed the enemy came a steady cracking of muskets. The smoke in the still air was hanging in grayish-white gouts among the trees. The militia began to return the fire.

Tom Currie reached the sheltering trees and stopped running.

"What goddam fool fired that shot?" he asked bitterly.

"I did," Abe Sheperd said.

Tom stepped up to him, his hands clenched. For an instant he appeared ready to punch Abe in the mouth.

"Hold it, Tom!" Whittaker said.

Tom stared at Sheperd, who had his rifle half raised, as if to protect himself. Then Tom relaxed. "All right, Abe. You got us into a fight. Think about it when they come over these rocks to lift your hair." He turned and made his way back through the trees to Hayworth and Testing.

"I couldn't get any terms," he said. "Brant said tell you surrender or get wiped out. And it's too late to surrender now, since they fired on Brant. Of all the stupid tricks."

Hayworth nodded worriedly. "We'll have to fight now. They'd massacre us if we surrendered. If Bookstaver had only been able to keep them from swinging around behind us!"

"Brant said Bookstaver pulled foot," Tom told him.

"Pulled foot! That's it. Those are the very words. If I ever get out of here, I'm going to see to it that he gets a new name for the rest of his life. Pull-foot Bookstaver, they'll call him, by God. No matter where he goes in New York, that name will follow him."

"We'd better get out of here fast, Colonel," Tom said.

"Up in those rocks we can hold 'em off," Testing declared.

"It's the only place," Hayworth agreed. "Currie, circle around and tell the officers to have their men keep firing while we fall back to the rocks. Tell 'em to go slowly and to hold their ground if Brant tries to rush us. I don't think he will, though. First he has to bring his men up from the river."

Down the slope among the trees, Brant's voice called for those of his men who were still near the river and across the ford. A ragged line of Indians and Tories began to creep from rock to rock and shrub to shrub up the slope.

Colonel Hayworth watched his men retreat toward the crown of rocks above them.

"All right, Doctor," he said wearily to Testing. "Let's get up there. He'll try to jump us as soon as he can."

24

THE PLATEAU to which they retreated up the ridge was formed by a ledge of slate rock, most of which was covered by enough earth to support shrubbery. The edges of the ledge projected in a semicircle toward the southeast, southwest and northwest. There was broken rock all around this projection, which might be climbed without difficulty, although it was open to the defenders' fire. At direct west, there was a narrow slope of earth toward the river. On the east was a steep hill, about twenty-five or thirty feet high. To the north was the best cover and the best position from which to launch an attack. The upward slope was gradual and well-covered. Several hundred yards beyond the eastern position was the ravine through which Brant had flanked the militia.

As soon as the men had reached the plateau, which was roughly about one hundred and twenty yards square, Hayworth and Testing directed the throwing up of breastworks

of rock and the few fallen logs available. Since the northern position was most susceptible to attack, Hayworth paid particular attention to its defenses.

From the trees down the northern slope came ragged but constant firing, and many of the enemy on the west were within musket range and were beginning to fire up at the ledge.

There was a steady eruption of individual Indians from the trees. They whooped and shook their muskets at the militia and immediately dashed back to shelter. A volley of shots greeted each appearance.

"Don't pay 'em any mind," Tom Currie cautioned the militiamen. "Chances are you can't hit 'em, and they just want you to waste powder. You'll have plenty of close targets before the day's over."

"Don't shoot, men, until you're sure of your mark!" shouted Hayworth.

All of the Cedar Bush men were grouped at the northern defenses, with a few of the Gardinerville militia. The rest of the Gardinerville men were scattered on the other three sides of the plateau. Major Bookstaver had taken most of the Tomkins Ridge men with him.

Tom rose to a standing position behind a huge outcropping of rock to study the trees and brush on the northern slope.

"You think they'll try to rush us, Tom?" asked the Reverend Mr. Wait, who stood beside Tom behind the rock.

"They sure enough will, Mr. Wait. Matter of fact, they're getting ready now." Tom looked at him quizzically. "You know how to use that musket?"

The minister nodded. "I'm quite familiar with it."

"That's all right," Tom said, "but are you ready to kill a man with it? I don't want you wasting powder."

"If my aim is true, I won't be wasting it, Tom."

"Good enough, then."

"I wish they'd come," growled Ike Youngblood. "I'll begin paying 'em for my tavern."

"Goddam stupid officers to get us in a fix like this!" re-

marked Gabe Quick. "If we'd of caught the bastards at the river, we'd of wiped 'em out."

"Back at Cedar Bush, you were going to chase after them by yourself," John Haskell told him. "Some of us were wise enough to know we were heading into real trouble." He turned to Tom. "Think we can hold them off, Tom?"

Tom shrugged. "Depends. Maybe, if the powder holds out."

"How will they come, Tom? From tree to tree, or all at once?" Ben Whittaker asked.

"Likely they'll try creeping up in the trees and rocks until they figure they're close enough, and then they'll fire and try to break through. Best thing for us to do is not to fire unless it's a real good shot. When they come at us in a bunch, then we all fire together and use your bayonets and clubbed muskets when they get here. Everybody got his bayonet fixed?"

Tom looked along the line of Cedar Bush men, and then toward the forest once more. He crouched and moved beside the breastworks toward the small group of Gardinerville militia. He paused beside Abe Sheperd. "You're going to get your fight, Abe. How you feel about it now?"

"I don't like Injuns," Abe said, "and I never saw one I couldn't whip. These ain't no different."

"Hope you're right, Abe."

Tom moved up to the lieutenant in charge of the Gardinerville men on the north side, a husky farmer named Gordonier. "Tell your men to hold their fire until they're close enough, and then pour it in."

"Let 'em come," Gordonier said. "We'll blow 'em apart!"

"Sure," Tom said. "But don't waste your powder."

Tom started to hunch along the rocks to his own men. Mathias Finch was seated behind a shelf of slate with his head down and his musket on the ground beside him. Tom put his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Come on, Matt, pick up the gun," he said gently.

"My God, Tom, I'm sick." The boy looked up. His face was pale and twisted.

"Sure, Matt. We all get that way sometimes. You'll forget it in a minute. You weren't sick yesterday, were you, when you killed those three Indians?"

The other lowered his head again, and when he spoke his voice was scarcely audible. "Did they scalp my father, Tom?"

Tom didn't know how to answer. He patted the boy on the shoulder again. The slim body convulsed and the boy vomited on the ground between his legs. He began to weep. Tom tried to soothe him.

"It's all right now, Matt. You'll feel better. Get ready now. Pick up your gun."

"I ain't afraid, Tom. You know that. I just feel bad about Pa."

"Sure, Matt. I understand. Now get up behind the rocks and give 'em hell."

"Tom! Here they come!" Ben Whittaker called.

A whistle sounded once, twice, from the trees to the north. Then the Indians began to yell, a ragged exultant crescendo which ended suddenly as they emerged from their cover. Slashes of black and white and vermilion dashed from tree to tree. Here and there a musket flashed red against the green wall of trees and a puff of black powder smoke mushroomed in the still air.

"I'll be goddamned!" Sam Terwilleger said in a hoarse voice. "They look just like painted weasels. In and out of them trees just like weasels."

A musket ball slammed into the slate beside his head and whined off through the trees. Slate splinters ripped into his cheek and several spurts of blood spattered the rock.

"Jesus! They bite like weasels, too."

There were more than a hundred and fifty of them. Now they had reached the slope which was broken only by scrub oak and stunted pines. They came in an irregular line, about a hundred yards away now, the Indians weaving and screaming on the flanks, and the green-coated Tories in the center keeping an erratic formation. The whistle shrilled once more.

"Down!" Tom Currie yelled. "They're firing."

The line of attackers dropped with the sound of the whistle

and a flash of flame leaped upward at the militia. Then the enemy was up again, racing forward under the broken black wall of powder smoke. Three or four shots spurted from the rocks of the ledge. A Seneca, vaulting a log, twisted grotesquely in the air and fell on the log. He lay there with his legs threshing the air as if he were still running.

"Hold your fire!" Whittaker and Tom shouted together.

Someone near Tom began to scream in terror. Tom glanced quickly aside and saw a body stretched flat and twitching. One side of the face was gone. Suddenly the screaming stopped and the body lay still. Tom didn't know who it was.

They were close enough now. Forty yards, maybe fifty. Most of the Rangers held their guns clubbed. The Indians had their hatchets ready.

Beside Tom a high-pitched voice called brokenly: "O Lord, deliver us." It was the Reverend Mr. Wait. He was squinting along the barrel of his musket.

Tom aimed at a tall Indian with a silver shoe buckle in his scalplock. The buckle glinted in the sun.

"Ready, men!" Whittaker shouted. "Fire!"

Fifty guns cracked in a burst of flame. Indians and Tories tumbled headlong on the slope. Almost a score of them fell. Some instantly began to crawl back down the slope; others lay still. The tall Indian with the buckle sprawled and lay where he fell. Tom pulled his tomahawk from his belt and leaped to the top of the breastworks. "Come on!" he yelled. "Give 'em hell and they'll run!" Colonel Hayworth stood beside him an instant later, waving his pistols. The Indians and Rangers were climbing the rocks now. From the flanks of the militia's position, the Gardinerville men were firing steadily.

Tom launched himself from the slate shelf at a dark-skinned Indian who was trying to climb the rocks. Tom hit him in the midriff and knocked him flat. The Indian was greased; he slithered away like an eel. He slashed with his knife at Tom's throat. Tom caught the Indian's wrist with his left hand, while he brought his tomahawk up in a long overhand swing. There was a thunk like that of an axe sinking into rotten wood. The Indian shivered and became limp. Tom

didn't move for a moment. He lay there sprawled across the Indian's body, looking up at the struggle on the breastworks. Militia and Tories were swinging muskets and jabbing bayonets. Already the Indians had quit. They were bounding back across the slope, whooping and screaming. Then the Tories turned and ran. There were only a few shots fired after them from the militia's flanks.

Tom remained where he was. He saw the frenzy on the faces of the militiamen as they rammed powder and ball into their muskets; saw them lift the guns wildly and fire at the fleeing enemy. Ben Whittaker stood on the parapet directing the fire at the enemy's wounded who were trying to crawl to safety through the brush of the slope. Tom knew that if he moved he might get shot. In their insane rage, his own men might shoot him. He and the Indian had rolled about fifteen feet down the little hill.

Without changing his position, he yelled: "Ben! Ben Whittaker!"

He saw Whittaker stare around wildly.

"Ben! Here! Down the hill here!"

Whittaker saw him then, stared a moment, and then pointed Tom out to the men around him. "Come on in, Tom."

Tom jumped to his feet and clambered up the slope. There were a few shots from the enemy as he jumped behind the breastworks.

"We licked 'em, Tom," Whittaker exulted, the wild look still in his eyes. "We did it. They turned tail."

"By God, I got two of 'em!" Youngblood shouted.

"Did you see 'em run, Tom?" Whittaker asked with a grin.

"Take it easy, Ben. They'll be back." Tom turned to Colonel Hayworth. "How many did we lose, sir?"

"Too many, Currie." Hayworth's right ear was torn; he was trying to swab away the blood from his face and neck. He pointed with his free hand. "Six dead. Seven wounded, four of them badly enough to put 'em out. They lost more, though. Look at that hill out there."

Tom counted the bodies of the enemy. There were five green-coated figures sprawled in the brush, and fourteen In-

dians. He was loading his rifle as he counted. He had just rammed the charge down when one of the supposedly dead Indians leaped to his feet and ran limping toward the forest. The long rifle came up and Tom fired. The Indian dropped and rolled and then lay still. A cheer went up from the militia, while the Indians in the forest howled and sent a volley crashing into the rocks.

"There may be more of them playing dead, Ben," Tom remarked to Whittaker. "Tell the men to keep an eye on them."

He walked over to the six bodies laid side by side under one of the dwarf pines. They had been covered with their blankets to keep the flies off them. The first one was a gray-haired Gardinerville man he didn't recognize. His head had been smashed by a musket. Mr. Wait was kneeling before the bodies. His eyes were closed and his lips moved. Daniel Dunning was crouched beside one of the blankets, patting it gently and weeping. Tom waited until the minister opened his eyes.

"Who are they, Mr. Wait?"

"I don't know this first man, rest his soul. He was an officer from Gardinerville. Whittaker knew him. The others are all Cedar Bush men. There's John Haskell, and Samuel Embler, and Eleazer Mastin, and Nat Wisner, and Stephen Dunning. Is it all right if I stay here for a few minutes, Lieutenant? I'd like to comfort Daniel Dunning and pray for these men."

"Go ahead, Mr. Wait. They won't be coming back for a while."

An ensign named Cuddeback from Gardinerville came over to Tom. "Currie, the colonel's calling a council. He wants you and Whittaker."

The officers gathered beside a high outcropping of slate rocks near the northwest corner of the plateau. Under these rocks Colonel Testing had established his hospital. One of the four badly wounded men lying there, Abraham Vail, was babbling incoherently. The others were quiet. Except for this man's noise, and an occasional musket shot from the Indians which was always followed by a short series of yelps, there was no sound in the woods. Tom noticed that there were no

birds singing. High in the blue sky above the plateau he saw a hawk circling. It was then about eleven-thirty, and the day was getting hotter. Many of the men had removed their shirts and the perspiration had soaked their breeches. Most of them kept up a constant swatting at flies. The air was still and humid. There wasn't a cloud to be seen in the sky.

"We'd better warn the men to save whatever water they have," Tom told Hayworth. "We're not going to get any more."

"Good idea, Tom. Cuddeback, go around the circle and tell the men to watch the water supply."

Hayworth sat on a flat rock, mopping the perspiration from his face. The officers crouched in a semicircle around him. There were eight of them: Tom Currie, Whittaker, Testing, and Captain Corning, Lieutenant Gordonier and Cuddeback, all three from Gardinerville, as well as two ensigns from Tomkins Ridge who had not gone with Bookstaver.

"We've licked them once, but they'll be back," Hayworth said. "And we can't expect any help from Major Bookstaver. As Lieutenant Currie said, Bookstaver has pulled foot and gone home."

"Him with his damn sword and fancy hat," muttered Whittaker.

"All right," said Hayworth. "We have ninety-one men, and four of them are badly wounded. The enemy has almost three times that number. We have three choices, it seems to me. Correct me if I'm wrong. We can surrender, or we can try to make a run for the river, or we can stay here and fight. I want you all to consider how we're fixed and then give me an opinion. Think about it a minute, now."

Hayworth pulled from his shirt pocket a stubby clay pipe which had somehow survived the hard march. He packed it with long shreds of tobacco. Testing had a small fire burning under his hospital rock, and he reached for a burning twig for Hayworth. The colonel took a few puffs on his pipe and then pointed the stem at one of the Tomkins Ridge men.

"Junior officers first," he said. "Mr. LeFevre, what do you say?"

"I'm not sure of what's best, sir, but I don't think we'd have a chance if we surrendered now. And I think we'd be pretty bad off if we tried to run for it. I guess the best thing is to try to stick it out right here until night comes."

"Mr. Hurd?"

The other ensign from Tomkins Ridge, a young man who was obviously badly frightened, said quickly: "Surrender, sir. He promised to treat us as prisoners of war, and Mr. Currie says he's a man of his word."

Whittaker started to interrupt, but Hayworth silenced him with a wave of the clay pipe. "Mr. Cuddeback, you're next."

"Stick it out here, sir."

"All right. Now, Mr. Whittaker."

"Stay right here. If we run for it, they'll cut us down, all of us. The brush is too thick between here and the river, and we're no match for the Indians in the woods. You know what would happen, sir, if we surrendered now after our men started this fight."

"Yes, Mr. Whittaker. What do you say, Gordonier?"

"I look at it another way, Colonel. I think the only thing we can do is to make a try for the river. It stands to reason, if you look at it with common sense. No matter what happens from now on, not many of us are going to get out of this alive. That's the way it is, and you all know it. I think maybe more of us would get away if we run for it."

"Thank you. What do you say, Currie?"

"I'm sure we'd stand a better chance here, sir, until dark comes. This is a pretty good natural position, and if we beat off the next couple of rushes, they may lose their stomach for coming up these rocks. When it gets dark, we can try for the river. I agree with Whittaker about making a break now. It would be just like running the gantlet. They'd be all over us. I'll tell you one thing, though. If we stay here, the men mustn't waste their powder. Not one of them has more than twenty rounds left. Most of them haven't that much."

"I favor surrendering, Colonel," interrupted Captain Corning. "We've all heard Mr. Currie say that Brant is a man of his word. He said he'd treat us as prisoners. I don't believe

we should waste all these lives in a hopeless fight. I don't want to die. Nobody does. Let's save ourselves while we can."

"Brant couldn't control those Indians now, Mr. Corning," Tom said quietly. "If we surrendered, they'd push and shove the men, and hit 'em with muskets, and then somebody like Abe Sheperd would get mad and swing back. That would be all the Indians needed. They'd wipe us out."

"James, what do you say?" Hayworth asked Testing.

"Stay here, now that we're up here," Testing answered.

Hayworth was silent for some time, sucking on his pipe. "All right. I'll have to add my vote to those who favor fighting it out here on these rocks. God help us if we're wrong. Well, gentlemen, thank you and good luck to each of you. Now get back to your men. And make 'em save their powder!"

25

TOM CURRIE pushed himself up on his elbows and peered over the log behind which he was lying. "It's about time for them to try it again," he said.

Whittaker nodded. He shifted his wad of chewing tobacco from one cheek to the other, pursed his lips, and spat accurately at a bright green grasshopper perched delicately on the end of the log. He missed by an inch. The grasshopper didn't move.

"Ask me," Whittaker remarked casually, "I'd say this was a nasty spot to be in." He spat again and the grasshopper vanished.

"Couldn't be much worse," Tom answered.

"Tell me the truth, Tom. You figure we'll get out of here?"

Tom shrugged. "If all their rushes go like the first one, I guess we might. They've got no stomach for running up to get killed on these rocks. But Indians are funny fighters, Ben. Sometimes they don't give a damn for all the guns in the

world, and next time they'll run like hell soon as you open fire. This time I think they know they've got us where the hair is short. When they come up the hill again, we'll get the whole kit and caboodle of them."

Someone tapped Tom's shoulder and he turned. It was Bill Sheperd, crouching and trailing his rifle.

"Tom, I keep seeing that Brant through the brush down there. He's walking back and forth talking to them. I can tell by that blue and red cape of his. How about me shinnying up one of these oaks and picking him off?"

"They'll see you just as well as you see them."

"Sure, but it's about two hundred yards, and they ain't got any rifles. Them muskets couldn't hit a barn at two hundred yards."

"Try it if you want to, Bill."

"This is the end of that big Indian bastard," Bill grinned.

Tom and Ben Whittaker rolled over and watched Bill Sheperd pull himself up through the thickly leaved oak. It wasn't much more than thirty feet high, but it was strong enough to hold him. All the other men were watching also.

"Tom," said Ben quietly. "He knocks Brant over and what happens to your wife?"

Tom didn't answer.

"You shouldn't of let him try it, Tom."

Tom shrugged. "If he gets Brant, they may quit. There's a lot of men on this plateau, Ben."

If he kills Joseph, Tom thought, that's the end of Jessica's chance to get away. Brant promised, and he meant it. If he's dead, she'll go off to Canada with that handsome bastard with the red tomahawk.

Colonel Hayworth came hunching over from his inspection of the defenses on the western side of the plateau. "What's he trying to do?" he asked.

"Thinks he can pick Brant off," Ben said.

"Good thing for us if he does. Maybe take the taste for fight out of them."

They watched Bill Sheperd's progress through the branches. The top of the tree was shaking violently.

They'll see those leaves shaking, Tom thought. Maybe Brant will take cover. Maybe Sheperd will miss. Tom felt guilty. The lives of all these men might be saved if Brant were killed. Yet he lay here hoping that the Indian would live.

Abe Sheperd came to the base of the oak tree and peered up at his son. "Don't forget she shoots a little high, Bill," he called.

"Is he a pretty good shot, Abe?" Tom asked.

"Damn good. Best around, next to you, I guess."

Sheperd was now as high in the tree as he could go. He twined himself in a fork and brought up his rifle.

"See him, Bill?" his father called.

"I see him. He's walking around. Soon as he stops, I'll let him have it."

The men on the ground watched the rifle barrel and waited for the shot. Then, from the trees shielding the enemy, came a flat crack and a puff of smoke. Bill Sheperd's rifle dropped straight to the earth through the leaves. His body followed, shaking the tree as it bounced from limb to limb, finally sprawling on its back in a bramble patch. Abe Sheperd, heedless of the brambles, cradled his son's body as it slipped to the ground. Bill was already dead. John Sheperd cried out and ran to his father's side, followed by the Reverend Mr. Wait.

Tom was ashamed of the thought that came to him first. Jess would still have her chance to get away.

"He was wrong, Ben," Tom said softly. "Somebody over there's got a rifle."

"And knows how to use it. That was quite a shot. Too bad. He was a rough one, Tom, and always into trouble, but a good lad for all that."

The Indians had started to whoop again when they saw Sheperd fall from the tree, and they fired a few shots which rattled through the trees above the ledge. A green-clad Tory appeared for a few seconds at the base of the slope, waving a long rifle and shouting. The Cedar Bush men fired a volley of shots and the man dashed back to cover.

"Save your powder, men!" Hayworth shouted. "No more of that!"

It was about twelve-thirty, Tom figured after a look at the sun. Seven hours, more or less, left before dark. Not many of the men had any water, and the heat was getting worse by the minute.

I wish they'd come and get it over with, he thought, glancing once more toward the enemy's position. No, I don't either. Because this time might be the last. It's the damn waiting for something to happen.

"Here they come!" someone shouted from the western edge of the plateau. "They're coming on our side!"

Tom didn't turn around as did the rest of the men on the northern barrier. He watched the brush down the slope. Some of the men around him began to crouch and run for the rocks on the west.

"Come back here," Tom called. "We'll get it here, too."

"Hold your positions, men," Hayworth ordered.

"They're moving down there!" exclaimed Ben Whittaker. "They're crawling this time. See 'em in the bushes?"

"Hold your fire!" exclaimed Tom. "Abe Sheperd! Come over here."

Sheperd hunched over to him, knuckling his eyes as if ashamed of the tears in them.

"I'm sorry about Bill," Tom said kindly, although he couldn't help thinking that if Abe Sheperd had not taken that shot at Brant, his son might be alive. "We all liked him, Abe."

"He was a good lad, Tom. It'll near kill his mother when I tell her."

"They'll be here again in a minute, Abe. I'm going to give you a hard position to hold. The best place for them to break this line is right over there beyond Testing's hospital rock. They can get close in under the rocks. Take two men with you and go over there. That'll make six at that one place, counting the three there already. Don't let 'em come over those rocks. If they get through there, we're finished. If you think you can't hold 'em when they jump us, yell for

me as loud as you can. I'll bring more men, Tom said."

"They won't get through, Tom."

"Get over there, Abe. Take the extra guns. They're starting up the hill now."

It was no sudden rush this time. They slithered along the ground, using all possible cover, coming slowly, cautiously, under protective fire from the forest behind them. Hayworth allowed only those militiamen with rifles to return the fire. There were about a hundred of the enemy on the northern slope and the same number approaching through the trees on the west.

"This is the big one, Tom," Ben Whittaker whispered.

"Maybe it is."

They weren't in any hurry to run for the plateau. They were close enough now for musket fire to be effective.

"Fire at will!" shouted Colonel Hayworth.

The militia started shooting as they saw targets among the rocks and brush on the slope. The fire was effective. Several of the darting figures fell and lay still. While Tom was reloading, he saw Joseph Brant rise from the shelter of a rock and he heard the whistle shrill twice. Instantly the hill was scattered with men running for the plateau. Brant was running with them, easily distinguished by his bright blue breechclout and his lack of war paint. Tom's sights picked him out, wavered, and moved along. Then Tom saw the Ranger captain named Desmond running near Brant. Just as Tom squeezed the trigger, the man tripped and fell. He was up again in an instant. He held a pistol in his left hand and the red tomahawk in his right. The first line of attackers reached the rocks and scrambled up. Bayonets forced them tumbling back. They were gathered up in the rush of those following, however, and came forward again. As he jumped to meet the attack, Tom was conscious of shooting on the western slope, and the shouts of the Gardinerville men. Tom wrestled with a wiry Ranger who came at him with a bayonet. The blade passed through Tom's shirt at the armpit and he twisted, at the same time swinging his hatchet. It struck the man's forehead and ripped his face apart. He fell scream-

ing to the ground. Tom had kept his eye on Desmond. He plunged through the churning mass of bodies on the rocks and met the Ranger captain head-on. There was a snarl on Desmond's face as the red hatchet went back. Tom parried the blow with his own tomahawk and threw Desmond to the ground with the force of his rush. He was about to leap on him when he was struck in the shoulder by a clubbed musket. The blow sent him sprawling. He had to give all his attention to the Indian who had struck him. Tom jumped to his feet and ducked underneath the second awkward swing of the musket. He drove the Indian backward into the rocks. They both fell. Tom grabbed the Indian by the throat and pumped his head up and down in the pointed rocks. When he let go, the man was limp and his shaven head was a mass of blood. Tom looked around for Desmond, but didn't see him.

There were both Indians and Tories within the circle of rocks. All along the perimeter of the ledge were little groups of struggling men. Hayworth and Testing were hemmed in near the hospital rock by several Senecas. Hayworth was trying to hold them off with his sword, while Testing had a bayonet. One of the wounded men lifted a rifle and aimed it at the group of Indians. Tom ran forward just as another Indian dropped from the top of the rock and wrested the rifle from the wounded man. The Seneca brought the gun to his shoulder and aimed at Hayworth. Tom drew back his arm and threw his tomahawk at the Indian. It struck him in the throat and he dropped the rifle, staggered with both hands on his throat, and then fell.

As Tom ran to help Hayworth and Testing, the whistle blew again, and the enemy turned and ran for the slopes. There were about thirty of them inside the perimeter of the plateau. Five of them were killed when the rest ran.

Most of the militiamen began to reload and fire after the fleeing Tories and Indians. Tom saw that one of the last Indians to leave the plateau was Hiokatoo, who had somehow in all the confusion managed to lift a scalp, which he waved defiantly as he jumped down the rocks. In an instant,

fat little Daniel Dunning was over the edge after the Seneca. There were shouts at him to come back, but he paid no heed, his stocky little legs pumping to bring him up to the Indian. Hiokatoo ran easily ahead of Dunning down the slope, until all the militiamen were screaming at Dunning to come back. David Dunning started over the rocks after his father, but the other men held him. When Hiokatoo was almost out of musket range, he turned and faced his pursuer. Daniel dived for the big Indian's legs and they went down in a heap. The two rolled over a couple of times and then the watchers on the slope saw a knife flash in the sunlight and the struggle was over. Hiokatoo was bent over the little man for a few seconds, and all the men with loaded rifles fired at him. Hiokatoo rose to his feet, whooped in triumph, and waved Daniel Dunning's scalp. Then he vanished into the trees.

26

ALL THROUGH the long afternoon the women heard the musketry on the ridge. They could see the powder smoke terraced in the still air above the treetops. Several times they saw groups of Indians or Rangers carrying wounded men down from the hilltop, leaving them in the shade of a birch grove on the river bank. There seemed to be one Ranger taking care of the wounded. Toward mid-afternoon, Mrs. MacDonald rose from her place a little apart from the other women, and walked toward the ford.

As she passed them, she remarked: "Seem to need some help with those wounded men over there. Any of you want to come?"

Jessica rose immediately to her feet. "Of course we will. Come on, Emma."

"Not me!" ejaculated Mrs. Polhamus. "I'd as soon touch

a snake as one of them red Indians, or the blue-eyed ones, either!"

Jessica bent over as if she were coaxing Emma to her feet. "Better over there than here," she whispered. "If the militia breaks through, or drives them back, we might get a chance to get away."

"I can't stand blood!" Lucy Quick exclaimed. "I'm not going over there."

"All right," Emma said. "I suppose a body ought to help the wounded, no matter who they are." She beckoned to her children who were digging in the sandy soil of the river bank. "Come on, you kids."

Jessica started for the ford, but she had only gone a few steps when an Indian stood before her. There had been four Senecas guarding them all day, older men than the rest. They had been lying on the river bank in the shade, seemingly paying little attention to the captives, keeping their gaze fixed instead on the plateau across the river. Now Jessica saw that they were all on their feet, watching her and the Indian who stood in her path. The man's painted face twisted as he gestured to her to go back.

"We're going over to help with your men who are hurt," she said slowly, hoping he could understand.

"No!" he answered. "You go back."

"They need help," she said. "You can come with us."

"You go back!"

"All right," she said. "I'm going." She smiled at him and spoke softly. "Do you speak English?"

He didn't answer. From the expression on his face, she thought he was trying to puzzle out her words.

"Well," she told him with a smile, "I think you're the ugliest, smelliest, old fat man I've ever seen. I'll wager you haven't washed yourself for forty years, have you?"

Again he didn't reply, but his paint twitched into another grimace. Jessica felt a wave of fear that he had understood her.

"Brant say go back!" he exclaimed finally.

"All right, Pot-Belly. I'm going." She smiled again and

returned to the others. Emma Polhamus was laughing, while Lucy looked terrified.

"I'm glad you told him what you think of him, Jess," Emma said. "It did my heart good to listen."

"No telling what he'd have done if he understood what I said," Jessica answered. "It was a silly thing to do, but it makes me feel better."

"Don't you do that any more," Lucy cried. "If they get mad at us, they'll kill us all."

"You don't have to fear those Injuns," Emma said dryly. "Your sergeant will protect you."

"Don't look down your nose at me, Emma Polhamus! Just because I was lucky enough to be captured by a gentleman, instead of a smelly heathen Indian."

"Gentleman, is he now! Wonder what your husband up there on that hill ducking musket balls thinks of your gentleman?"

Again Lucy looked frightened. "Maybe Gabe ain't up there. Maybe he didn't come."

"He's up there, all right! They're all there, every tarnation one!"

And Tom's there too, Jessica thought. Dear Lord, keep him safe for me.

She closed her eyes and said another long prayer. She felt her throat constrict, and she began to weep for the first time since the moment when Desmond had appeared at the cabin door. Her shoulders shook, and she bowed her head on her folded arms. Emma put both arms about her and held her.

"Don't you cry now, Jess. He'll be all right. He's been running the woods all his life. If any of them get off that hill, Tom will be one of them!"

"If any of them do," Jessica sobbed. "They can't get away, Emma."

"Yes, they will. They aren't licked yet, from the sound of it, and when night comes they'll get their chance."

"Oh, Emma. I love him so much. And I've been such a poor wife to him."

"What in the world are you talking about? You can cook, and your house is—was—neat as a pin, and you're the prettiest girl in Highland County! Why, if I heard one person in Cedar Bush say that, I heard a dozen. Everybody there likes you, and it's important to a man to have folks like his wife."

"Is that the way they feel, Emma? And I always thought they were so stand-offish and unfriendly. Why, outside of you and Mrs. Youngblood, nobody ever came to visit me. Some of the men would come to see Tom, but none of the women."

"You ever ask 'em?"

"Why, no. I expected them to come calling."

"You know why they didn't? They thought you were the stand-offish one. They used to say that you looked like a nice girl, but you sure had unfriendly ways."

"Oh! And I was so lonely."

"How were they to know that?"

Jessica's tears began to flow again, and her voice was low, halting. "I didn't like Cedar Bush. I thought it was away out in the woods, far from civilization. I didn't like farming. All I wanted to do was go back and live in a big house in Highland Landing and wear fine clothes again and go to parties and dine with my old friends."

"Why, that's natural as sin. You think you're the only one? Course, I never lived in a big house or knew any rich people, but over to Kingston where we lived when I met Oscar, we had a nice place and lots of neighbors and I had pretty fancy clothes, too. Then Oscar took me to Cedar Bush and I thought I was at the end of the world. I hated it! I used to say I was going home to my father's house every time Oscar and I had words. Which wasn't often, of course, 'cause he was a good kind man." She paused a moment. "But I'd say it every chance I got, until one night Oscar got really mad. Then he turned me over his knee, lifted my night rail, and gave my bare bottom such a spanking that I was bawling like a calf. Then he started to bawl, and we both lay there on the bed feeling sorry for ourselves for a while, and then

. . . Well, no matter! But my bottom was sore for two–three days. I never again said a word about going home to Kingston. And pretty soon I never even thought of it."

She began to weep also as she thought of Oscar, but she wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and gently raised Jessica's head. "Come on, now, Jess. It ain't doing us a bit of good to sit here and cry. And it don't seem right with what's going on across the river."

Jessica nodded and sat up, drying her eyes. She glanced at the sun, already low in the western sky. The firing on the plateau was now limited to occasional shots.

"The sun's going down, Emma."

"Yes, praise God. They'll soon get a chance to get off that hill."

"If it isn't too late."

"It won't be. Here comes one of those Tories across the river. Looks like Lucy's sergeant."

"It's Sergeant MacLeod!" Lucy exclaimed. "Now we'll find out what's happening."

They watched the Tory wade the ford and waited for him to approach. Instead he went to the pile of supplies near the water's edge, spoke a few words to the Indian guarding them, and the two of them pulled forth several heavy sacks. Then MacLeod walked toward them. He smiled warmly at Lucy. "You all right?" he asked.

"We're fine," Lucy said with an answering smile. "Who's going to win the fight?"

"We'll win all right." He shrugged. "There ain't many of them left, but we lost a lot of men. They fight like treed 'coons. I come over here for the rest of the powder and shot."

"Sergeant," Jessica said, "did you see a tall man in buckskins, with dark hair?"

"Lots of 'em wearing buckskins."

"You'd know the one she means if you saw him," Emma said. "He's an officer."

"One of their officers in buckskins come out at the begin-

ning to talk to Brant. Somebody said he used to be a friend of Brant's."

"That's my husband!" Jessica exclaimed. "Did you see him after that?"

"Did I see him? I sure did. He damn near split my head with his hatchet. He was all right, looked like, just a few minutes ago. He knows what to do in a fight, ma'am."

"Thank you. Thank you," Jessica said in a soft voice.

So that's her husband, MacLeod thought. No wonder Desmond told everybody with rifles to try and pick off the tall lad in buckskins. That bastard with his London airs. When I go back I'll pass the word around and tell 'em all to quit shooting at him—what's his name? Currie. That's it, Currie.

"You didn't see *my* husband up there, did you, Sergeant?" Lucy asked.

"How would I know?" the Tory replied with a grin.

"Well, he's kind of skinny, and has a cowlick, and sort of yellow hair."

"I dunno. There's a lot of them look like that, too. And we only been close to 'em three times. I wasn't paying any attention to their looks. All I know is, they sure fight like catamounts. Well, I have to get back. We're running out of powder and shot, but I don't think they got any left at all. I'll keep an eye out for your husband, ma'am," he said to Jessica. "Like I said, though, he can take care of himself."

They watched him and the Indian crossing the ford with the small heavy sacks. Then they sat quietly for a long time in the darkening twilight, watching the children play in the sand, listening to the whoops and shots on the ridge.

27

"THERE'S ONLY sixty-odd of us left to fight, Tom," Whittaker said. "You think we can stick it until night?"

Currie shook his head. "I dunno, Ben. Not if they keep jumping us. Powder's running low."

"Yeah. It's hard to keep these idiots from banging away at every puff of smoke."

"All we can do is sit and wait for them. If Brant knew how bad off we are, they'd be all over us."

It was now late afternoon. The enemy had been firing steadily from the cover on the slopes since the last attempt to break through the militia's square. Often their riflemen would try to crawl forward to positions close enough for accurate fire, but volleys from the defenders would drive them back each time. Too much powder was being wasted, but the militiamen were nervous, and all of them knew how little chance they had of getting away, so it was difficult for Hayworth and the rest of the officers to make them hold their fire.

Tom noticed that much of the sharpshooting was directed at the northwest corner of the square, the point held by Abe Sheperd and three other men. Two men had been killed there in the last charge. Tom walked over there to talk to Abe.

"They're trying hard to pick you off, Abe. Better be careful."

"We're staying down behind the rocks. They'd need cannon to do us any hurt."

"Just hold out until sunset. Then we'll get out of here."

"I ain't goin' no place, Tom," Sheperd said grimly. Tom could see the muscles working in Abe's jaw as he paused. "First they got Bill, and last time it was John."

"John! I didn't know that, Abe. He was killed?"

"He ain't dead yet. Got a musket ball in the chest. Test-

ing's working on him over there under the rock. But I ain't leavin' him. If those red bastards are goin' to get him, they got to get me first."

"We'll take John with us, Abe."

"How the hell you goin' to do that? When we pull out of here, only them that can run will get away. I'll stay with my boy."

"We'll see, Abe. Just don't let them through here."

"They won't get through."

The heat of the afternoon was oppressive; the humidity was high, and all the water the militia had was collected for Colonel Testing's use. The flies were a worse torment than the lack of water. They particularly plagued the wounded. Down on the slope, the enemy's dead was blanketed by the swarming flies. Their constant buzzing and humming was clearly audible on the plateau.

During the afternoon, Sam Terwilleger conceived his own private plot against the enemy. Over his head, in one of the shrub oaks, was a grayish tapered globe hanging from a branch. It was almost concealed by the thick green oak leaves. A steady parade of black-and-white hornets passed through the small hole at the point of the globe.

"There ought to be a way we can use them hornets," Sam remarked to his brother Moses.

"You just worry about one of these here shots dropping that thing in your lap!" Moses replied. "If them hornets get riled, why—Brant or no Brant, you won't see me for dust."

"If we could only put a plug in that hole," Sam mused.

"Where do you get that 'we'?" his brother asked. "Anybody's going to play with hornets at a time like this, it's going to be a damn fool, and that's you."

"Sure," Sam said. "I didn't know you was afraid of a few measly little bees, Mose."

"I'm not afraid. I just treat them with respect and hope they do the same with me."

"Let's see now," Sam said. "Just slide a plug in there and let 'em get good and mad because they can't get out. Then

the next time those buggers come over the rocks . . . my God, that'd be somethin' to see!"

He picked up a piece of wood and began to whittle at it, holding it up occasionally to squint along it. "Just about right," he muttered finally. "Nice and thick at one end and thin at the other."

"Don't be a damn fool, Sam," exclaimed Moses. "You knock that thing down and we'll all have to get the hell out of here. Now leave it be. Those hornets could kill a man when they get mad."

"Don't worry, Mose, I won't knock it down. I swear, I didn't know you was such a coward."

Sam stood up suddenly, his right arm with the bit of wood moving cautiously upward through the oak leaves.

"Don't touch that thing, Sam!"

With a deft motion Sam slipped the plug into the opening of the hornets' nest and gave it a good flick with his forefinger to set it.

"There! Now just let 'em stew awhile and get real good and mad. Listen to 'em, Mose."

The angry buzzing of the hornets inside the nest sounded clearly. Sam looked up at the nest with pride. "I never heard of doing a thing like that before. By God, we'll have some fun next time those Injuns come up that hill."

"All right," Moses said dryly. "You'll get your fun. Here they come now."

This time Brant used all his men. His casualties had been heavy; Hayworth had figured that sixty or seventy of the enemy were out of action. Brant had them spread in a thin line all around the plateau, excepting the eastern slope. So when the whistle shrilled, they came from three sides at once, screaming and firing as they ran. The militia's return fire was accurate and several of the attackers fell. When the enemy reached the rocks, the militia presented a three-sided wall of bayonets and tomahawks. Once the enemy fell back, and once more they came again. The militiamen fought desperately. They knew that if their line crumbled now, they

were finished. They were outnumbered almost four to one, yet they didn't give way.

As the Indians and Tories began to clamber up the rocks in the first rush, Sam Terwilleger whooped and reached into the leaves of the shrub oak. His fingers caught the top of the hornets' nest and pulled it loose with care. His arm went back and then the buzzing gray ball soared outward. It hit a Mohawk in the chest, burst, and fell to the ground. The startled Indian looked down at it for an instant. Then he yelled and started to run. He bent down and slapped at his legs and then fell and began to roll down the slope. Others near him began to yip and slap at their naked bodies. The attack was broken at that point. The broken nest lay in the center of a widening circle of Rangers and Indians.

Sam jumped up on the rocks and yelled in delight. "Take that, you red devils! Run, you dirty—" He staggered and seemed to collapse, and then slumped down to the ground at his brother's feet. The wide grin was still on his face as he lay there. There was a growing patch of red on his linen hunting shirt.

Moses Terwilleger bent over him. "Sam! Ah, God! Sammy!"

The grin on Sam's face was grotesquely twisted now. He struggled to speak. "You see 'em run, Mose?" Then a stream of dark blood flowed from his mouth.

The Indians gave way first, turning to race down the slopes of the plateau. The Rangers had to be beaten back with bayonets and hatchets, but finally they also turned and ran.

The cost to the militia was heavy. Of the original ninety-seven men on the plateau, thirty-four were dead, seventeen gravely wounded, and many of the remainder were wounded, although still in condition to fight.

As the last of the enemy vanished into the brush below, Tom Currie began to hope. Just maybe, he thought. There's just a chance they've got enough. Brant will try it once more if he knows how short we are of powder and ball, but maybe he doesn't know.

Colonel Hayworth hunched along the breastworks to Tom's position. "What do you think, Currie?"

"We can't take another one. I wonder if they know it."

Hayworth nodded worriedly. "No, another rush would finish us. But I'm thinking—" He paused and looked at Tom. "Have they had a bellyful?"

Tom rapped the stock of his rifle. "Knock wood, sir. I was just thinking the same thing."

Hayworth gazed again down the slope. "Look down there. See that Ranger with the red hair lying under that bush? He's not dead. I saw him crawl a ways. If they're getting ready to pull out, they'll come out to get him."

The men near Hayworth and Tom heard the conversation and passed the words of hope along. Some of the tenseness in the militiamen disappeared.

"Good thing they're leaving," Youngblood said. "I ain't got but two shots left."

Brant wasn't quitting, however. With swiftness and ferocity, the enemy line came up the slope once more in the dimming light of the day's end. The attack was centered on the northwest corner of the plateau near the hospital rock. Abe Sheperd fell as the first of the Indians reached the rocks, and then the Rangers and Indians were over the rocks and into the militia's square. The defenders' line broke up into clumps of men desperately trying to throw the attackers back with bayonet and hatchet.

There was no direction from the officers—the struggle was man against man. The Indians weren't whooping this time. Wounded and dying men screamed, but there were only a few shots. Suddenly, on the south and west sides of the plateau, the militia turned and ran, leaving those on the north to bear the full weight of the attack.

"The river!" Hayworth shouted. "Run for the river, Testing. Come on."

Tom had been forced back to the eastern lip of the plateau by two Indians and a big Ranger with a black beard. The stock of his rifle was gone and he was keeping them off with the barrel as he went backward. As he reached the

edge of the hill, Whittaker ran to his side. One of the Indians fell with a crushed skull dealt by Tom's rifle barrel. The other Indian and the Ranger didn't press the attack, and Whittaker had a chance to yell at Tom: "Come on! Everybody's running."

"What about the wounded?" Tom gasped.

"Got to leave 'em. Run. Come on."

It was hopeless now. Through the brush, Tom had a glimpse of the hospital rock. He saw Testing with his back to the rock, swinging a hatchet. A score of Indians were converging on him.

Whittaker grabbed Tom's arm as the bearded Ranger came in once more. Tom turned and jumped over the edge of the hill. Slipping and sliding, he and Whittaker reached the bottom and raced for the woods and the river.

28

THE DENSE FOREST between the plateau and the river closed around the quarry and the hunters. Some of the escaping militia threshed through the undergrowth in panic, leaving a loud trail of noise for the pursuers. A few screams rose not far from the plateau in the quiet dusk, but soon the only sound which could be heard was the triumphant yelling of the Indians from the rocks above.

In the forest, the darkness of night protected those of the militia who were wise enough to move cautiously. For the most part, the Indians had remained on the plateau to kill the wounded and to scalp the bodies. The Rangers followed the fleeing men.

Whittaker and Tom Currie made no headlong flight for the river once they were in the forest. On their right they could hear crashing in the brush, so they kept to the left although the forest there was not as dense and offered less cover. They moved carefully from tree to tree, listening for

pursuit. A few hundred yards from the plateau, Tom found a slate outcropping under which was a small cavelike recess.

"Ben," he whispered. "Let's stay in this hole until it gets real dark."

"Good idea, Tom. Is there room for two?"

Whittaker crouched and was about to slide into the shelter.

"Wait!" Tom grabbed his arm. "These rocks are loaded with snakes. Let's try it first."

Currie searched the ground until he found a stout stick about four feet long. With this he probed the corners of the little cave, listening.

"No rattlers, anyway," he whispered. "And I didn't hear anything move. But there may be a copperhead in there. We'll have to chance it."

"My pa always said you could smell a copperhead. Smells like cucumber, he told me." Ben went down to his knees and sniffed. "Don't smell a thing, Tom."

"I've heard that about the smell, but I never took any stock in it. I've killed many a copperhead and never smelled cucumbers. Come on, get in! Somebody's coming!"

They slid under the rock and lay there listening. A man was threshing through the brush toward them. The only weapon they had was Tom's knife. He held it ready in his hand. They could hear the man gasping for breath now, and he was stumbling as he ran.

"Think he's one of ours, Tom?" Whittaker breathed into Tom's ear.

"Yes, but lie still. Maybe they're chasing him."

The man passed. They could see him outlined faintly against the skyline as he slid over the edge of a dip in the slope a few yards from their rock. Almost immediately they heard someone else coming; a dry branch cracked and a dislodged rock rolled past their hiding-place. Two men came out of the forest and paused by the rock shelf.

"Listen!" one whispered. "Where is he?"

"He must have gone straight ahead. Let's go."

"Wait! We'll hear him."

As they stood there, Tom soundlessly picked up the stick with which he had probed for snakes. He drew his arm back carefully and tossed the stick into the brush some twenty yards away. Instantly he nudged Ben and drew himself to a crouching position.

"There he is—over there!" one of the Rangers exclaimed.

The two of them ran toward the sound made by the falling stick. Tom and Ben leaped to their feet and followed swiftly. Together they launched themselves at the two Rangers. Tom's knife went deep and his man made not a sound. The other Ranger thrashed and kicked and grunted under Ben's throttle hold until Tom had his knife free for another blow. Then the forest was silent.

Tom and Ben stood there listening. Down the slope they could hear the Rangers' intended victim thrashing through the underbrush.

"He'd better quiet down or he ain't getting to that river," Ben whispered.

"Yeah. Let's shove these two into the bushes and get back in our hole."

They stayed in the cave under the rocks for more than an hour. When they did start again for the river, Tom led the way with caution. Far off, near the ford and again near the top of the plateau, they heard occasional shouts. Once there were three musket shots which seemed to come from far down the river. Otherwise the only sounds were those of the forest night. Peepers sang nearby and others answered from the distance. A raccoon heard them coming and scurried away. Once they were startled for a moment by the muffled beating of great wings, until they saw an owl swooping away through the trees. The full moon was rising over the eastern mountains, and although it helped them make their way with less noise, its brilliance doubled the danger.

Two hundred yards from the river's edge they came to a rock-strewn clearing, roughly circular and about thirty yards across. With his hand Tom deterred Ben Whittaker from stepping into the moonlight. He motioned Ben to go around the right side of the clearing while he went to the left. They

would meet on the other side. When he was halfway around Tom heard an exclamation from Ben and the sound of a body falling and then scuffling on the ground. He ran across the clearing and saw Ben grappling with a naked Indian on the edge of the trees. The only sound they made was the crackling of dry branches on the ground. Tom came up behind the Indian silently. He waited until the man's head was lifted for an instant, locked his arm around the Indian's throat to prevent an outcry, and plunged his knife into the greased chest. The Indian threshed wildly for a few seconds, then stiffened and as instantly relaxed.

"Thanks, Tom," Ben gasped. "He'd of had me with that tomahawk."

"Come on," Tom whispered. "There's more of them around. They're like wolves. They hunt in packs. The others may be pretty close."

They had not traveled fifty yards when a war whoop sounded from the little clearing.

"Run!" Tom exclaimed. "Into the river!"

They covered the remaining hundred and fifty yards as fast as they could go. The moonlight helped them now, outlining the rocks and fallen logs in their path. There was a high bank at the spot where they reached the swift stream, and there was no way to judge the depth of the water. They couldn't hesitate, however. The Indians, about ten of them, Tom thought, were too close. Both men leaped off the bank into the stream. The water closed over their heads. Tom swam as far as he could underwater on a tangent toward the center and downstream. He came up, gulped some air, and went under again. The next time he came up he was perhaps forty yards from the high bank. He could stand on the bottom here. There were riffles and swift water just ahead. There was no sign of Ben. With just the top of his head above water, so he could see and breathe, Tom watched the Indians running along the bank. None of them came into the water. Soon, he knew, they would finish their search of the bank and start to search the surface of the river. Slowly he let himself sink and then he swam frog-fashion toward the head of the riffles, tak-

ing care not to let his arms and legs break the surface. He felt the current begin to pull him along. Now he was in the riffle. There was scarcely depth enough to conceal his body. He bumped against a big rock which jutted from the water. Letting his body swing downstream, he clung to the rock with one hand. Then he lifted his head from the water. The rock concealed his head from the Indians on the bank. He stayed there, although the current buffeted his body against the rocky bottom.

It was long after midnight when he finally released his grasp on the rock, pulled himself away from the smaller rocks into which he had wedged himself, and let the current take him down through the riffles. It was a rough trip; he used his heels and his hands on the rocks to brake himself, but he took many good cracks on the thighs, shoulders and head. When he reached deeper, slower water again, he swam cautiously, letting the current take him most of the time until he reached another patch of riffles. Sometimes he had to leave the stream and walk along the far bank. He traveled about three miles this way until he reached the mouth of a tributary brook which flowed down from the mountains to the east. He knew this stream; knew that its mouth was wide and fairly deep, although the current was strong. He stayed in the main stream motionless for about fifteen minutes, watching the brush-covered banks. There was no sign of anyone. Finally he swam carefully to the mouth of the brook and went underwater. He swam a ways up the brook, came up cautiously for air, and went under again, bucking the current. It was slow exhausting work, but he kept going until he was about thirty yards from the mouth of the brook. Then he swam to a spot where a willow grew out over the water, its drooping branches touching the surface. As he went under the branches, there was a splash and a swirl of water.

A big trout, he thought. I wonder which of us was scared more.

He crawled out on the bank here and rested for an hour. The long immersion had chilled him and his legs and arms felt weak and useless. Long before dawn, however, he was

making his way eastward along a game trail. He would need weapons and some food before he turned westward again. With a sense of guilt he realized that it had been hours since he had remembered Jessica. Brant's pledge that she would not be harmed had reassured him. First things first, anyway. The battle was over now and he could go after her. As for the other captives, there was nothing he could do. There was no one to help them. Polhamus was dead, killed at the fort, and Tom thought he'd seen Quick fall in the third charge on the plateau.

Just at dawn, Tom reached the trail which the militia had followed in pursuit of the raiders. He studied it carefully and saw that a party of men had passed not long before. Twenty-five or thirty, he judged. Here and there he saw bloodstains, and the marks of sticks used as canes, and one set of bootmarks sunk so deep that the man must have been carrying another. There were no signs that the enemy was following them. Tom followed the trail with all the speed he could muster.

It took him about three-quarters of an hour to come up with them. They were straggling along, keeping their pace to that of the wounded. Despite their disorderly passage, they had two of the few men with muskets acting as rear guard. They were Gardinerville men. They didn't even bother to greet Tom, but just nodded forward when he asked if Hayworth had escaped.

There weren't many Cedar Bush men among the twenty-nine strung out along the trail. Most of them were boys; Tom supposed they'd made it because of their running speed. Mathias Finch limped along near the rear, one leg of his breeches flapping and revealing a long bloody gash on his thigh. His face brightened when he saw Tom. He stepped out of line and took Tom's hand. "Glad you made it, Tom. We were worried."

"I was a little worried myself, Matt. But I guess we're all right now."

Stephen Dunning walked with Mathias Finch, his face still showing terror, mixed with exhaustion and sorrow. Ahead

of him he saw Matthew Youngblood, without shirt or shoes.

"Your father?" Tom asked Youngblood gently as he moved along the line.

The boy shook his head and stared at his bare feet. "He's dead, Mr. Currie."

"I'm sorry." Tom walked along with the boy in silence, thinking that there was nothing else for him to say to this boy, or young Dunning, or to Mathias Finch. It seemed so futile to say only that he was sorry. In one brief day, so many dead.

It was a few moments before Tom spoke again. "Did you see Ben Whittaker this morning, Matt?"

"Yeah. He caught up with us about a half-hour ago. He's up ahead with the colonel."

Tom increased his pace and soon reached the head of the column. Hayworth was walking stolidly along with his head down, watching the path before him. He never looked back. His uniform was ripped in a score of places and it was caked with mud. His face and hands were scratched; some of the gashes had left streaks of dried blood. Ben Whittaker, seeming to be in better shape than most of the others, marched beside the colonel.

Ben greeted Tom with a grin. "I knew you'd make it! Where'd you go, Tom?"

"Downstream bit by bit. I was in the water all night."

"I swam across, lit out through the woods, and then I circled and crossed again."

"This all that got through, Colonel?" Tom asked.

Hayworth nodded, looking up for the first time. "I guess so. There may be a few more scattered in the woods."

"Any sign of Bookstaver?" Tom asked.

"He's back home by this time," Hayworth said. His tone was bitter. "All those brave men lying up there, and that coward goes scot free. I'll see that he never lives it down."

Hayworth walked along a few more steps and then looked again at Tom. "None of us knows for sure what happened at the end. I was just as busy as the rest of you saving my own

skin, and I never looked back. Did you see Jim Testing after we started to run?"

"Yes. He was trying to hold them off at the rock, the last I saw. I don't think he ran. If he did, he didn't have much chance."

"No. I yelled to him, but he pointed to the wounded men, as if to say he wasn't going to leave them. I suppose they're all dead."

Tom nodded. "The Indians wouldn't leave any of them alive. After all, a scalp is easier to handle than a wounded prisoner."

Hayworth shook with emotion. "I didn't want to run!" he said wildly. "I wanted to stay with them. I don't know why I ran. One minute I was swinging a musket, and the next I was off that hill and racing through the trees."

"Don't let that bother you," Ben said. "There wasn't any shame in running. In a thing like that, it's every man for himself and devil take the hindmost. No sense in everybody getting killed, if some can get away."

Hayworth didn't reply. He turned his head and looked back along the ragged little column of survivors. "Any chance of them jumping us again, Tom?"

"I don't think so. They took a licking, too. They want to get back to Unadilla. Anyway, there's no use thinking about it. We couldn't do anything if they did."

Hayworth nodded.

"If I can have a musket," Tom said, "and maybe a hatchet, knife, and some food, I'll be starting back."

"You're going back there! You're crazy, man."

"Got to go, Colonel. They still have my wife."

"I won't let you go. You look half dead already, Currie. That cut on your head is open again. What can you do against those Indians now?"

"I can get my wife back, just the way I said I would in the beginning. And don't talk about letting me go, Colonel! There's nobody can stop me. I'd appreciate a musket, though, if you can spare one."

"I guess you're right," Hayworth said. "I can't stop you, and

I suppose I don't want to. Go ahead, Tom, and good luck to you. Just take what you want from those who have anything. Tell 'em it's my order. I noticed that Andrew Dutcher from Gardinerville has a rifle. Take that if you want it."

"Make that two rifles," Ben Whittaker remarked. "And tell my wife I'll be back in a couple of days."

"No, Ben," Tom said. "Thanks, but I'm going alone."

"Not by a long shot!"

"Yes, I am, Ben. You're a good man in the woods, but this is my job. I'm going alone."

"That's right, Whittaker," Hayworth said. "If he can do it at all, he'll do it better alone. You stay here."

"That an order, Colonel?"

"That's an order, Ben."

"All right. Good luck, Tom. Don't take any chances."

Tom nodded and smiled. He dropped back along the line of march, borrowing the things he needed. Moses Terwilleger still had a knapsack with some food, and Stephen Dunning had a knife. Young Jonathan Wisner furnished the hatchet, and Tom took the rifle and a few rounds of powder and ball from Dutcher.

Tom stopped beside the brook which the trail followed. He soused his head in the cold water and managed to wash away most of the dried blood which had run from the wound on his head. He fixed his moccasins as best he could although they were badly ripped. As he picked up the rifle and started back along the trail, the two men with the muskets passed.

"Where you going?" one of them said.

Tom pointed westward with the rifle barrel. As he stepped forward, he heard one of them say: "He crazy or somethin'?"

"I guess he must be," said the other.

29

THE CHILDREN continued to play quietly in the twilight.

"It beats all how kids will take to new things," Emma said. "Here these two of mine are playing as if they didn't have a care in the world. Haven't come crying to me once all day. Back home they were always under my heels. That's what scares me, Jess. If they get in one of those Indian towns, they'll be Indians themselves in a couple years."

Jessica nodded. "At least they aren't causing any trouble. If they were cranky all the time, the Indians might get angry. It's better this way."

They heard rapid firing begin on the plateau. It continued for a minute or so and then stopped. They heard occasional shots, war whoops, and then screaming. A few minutes later, what shots there were seemed to be coming from the slope near the river and some distance downstream from the ford. They heard screams and whoops from that direction.

"It's all over, Jess!" Emma cried. "They're running away!"

"God help them!"

"Amen!" Emma paused and listened. "Some of them's getting caught, Jess. Listen to the screams down there. Oh, Jesus, it's terrible."

Darkness came swiftly while they waited, and soon all was quiet across the river. Then the Rangers and Indians began to carry the wounded across the ford. Huge fires provided light to dress the wounds. The dead, more than fifty of them, were brought across, and several groups of men began digging pits for their burial. The men began to cook meat, and the captives once again shared Sergeant MacLeod's campfire and food.

"No sign of your husband up there, Mrs. Currie," MacLeod said.

"You think he got away?"

"Not many of them did. I didn't have much chance to look, but I didn't see his body anywheres, unless the Indians caught up with him in the woods. I know my men didn't."

"What about Gabe?" asked Lucy Quick. "Did you look for him? Did you see him?"

"Not that I know of." He looked steadily at her. "If you got the stomach for it, you can go around among the Indians here and see can you pick out his hair. They'll show the scalps to you."

"Oh, my God," she cried. "No! I couldn't bear to look at one."

He shrugged. "Only way I know for you to tell."

Jessica swallowed. She couldn't eat any more of the meat. She felt as if she would be sick. After a few moments, however, the feeling passed away. She stood up.

"Where you going, Jess?" Emma asked.

"I'm going to do what the sergeant said—ask to see the scalps."

"I guess *you* don't have to do that, ma'am," MacLeod said. "Sit down again. Captain Desmond will be over the river in a few minutes. He'll tell you what happened to your husband. He had his eye on him all day long."

"That's better, Jess," Emma said. "If he don't know, then you can go around and look."

The Indians had finished eating. Some of them were repairing their war paint with the aid of the firelight and little hand mirrors, while others were already cleaning the bloody scalps, preparing to stretch them on wooden hoops.

Jessica sat a little apart from the rest while they continued to eat. She didn't want to hear the Rangers talking about the massacre on the plateau. She gathered that all the militia who weren't able to run had been killed and scalped by the Indians. One Ranger, the young one named Morrison, said in a tone of disgust and horror: "There was almost sixty of 'em layin' there for the Indians to work on!"

Suddenly Jessica sensed someone standing behind her. She turned to see Brant. His blue leggings and breechclout were

ripped by briers. The hat with the gold lace which he had worn that morning was gone. His features seemed drawn and tired as he looked down at her. Then he smiled.

"He got away, Mrs. Currie."

"Thank God for that! You're sure?"

"I looked everywhere up there. I asked among my Mohawks and the Senecas. The Seneca chief, the big man called Hiokatoo, told me he and some of his warriors chased Tom and another man to the river and lost them there."

"Thank you for telling me."

"I'm glad he made it. You tell him that for me when you see him."

"I hope I can," she said.

His voice dropped to a whisper. "I've told the Indians that you're to be allowed to escape. You've been told my plan to draw Desmond away from camp? It will probably be tomorrow night."

"Yes. I'll be watching."

"Once you get started, don't stop for any reason. You think you'll find your way back?"

"I'm sure I will. I'll watch the trail as we go."

"All right, then. Good luck to you, Mrs. Currie. When this war is over, if the good Lord is willing, I'll see you again."

Her surprise at his use of the pious expression must have shown on her features, because he smiled slightly. "I am a Christian, Mrs. Currie. I try to be a good one." He paused and gestured across the river. "The things that happened up there are painful to me, but these are my people. I do what I can, but it's little enough. If I don't see you again before tomorrow night, goodbye to you, and once more, good luck."

"Thank you. Goodbye, Colonel Brant."

He bowed and walked away.

30

Lucy Quick sat on a blanket near the fire watching Sergeant MacLeod clean his musket. He looked up now and then and said a few words to her. A few minutes ago he had told her a bit about Niagara. It sounded no worse than anywhere else. She'd have to make the most of it. That's all a body could do.

She looked across the firelight at the nearest group of Indians. She was certainly glad she didn't have anything to do with them. She wished she had the courage to do what MacLeod had told her—go around and look for Gabe's scalp. Of course, finding it would clear matters up. Chances were that Gabe had been killed; he was always the first one into trouble and the last one out. She was sure he was dead, and she was sad. She would mourn for him. Why not? She had always loved him, most of the time, anyway, if you wanted to get right down to it. But he'd always been so shiftless and such a poor provider. He drank a lot when he had the wherewithal, and she was sure that in the past year he'd been ducking over to Gardinerville so often because he had some woman there. Yes, she'd mourn for him. But Emma and that Currie woman had no right to look down their noses at her because she'd had the good luck to be captured by Sergeant MacLeod. She shuddered when she thought of those Senecas and Mohawks.

If Gabe was dead, why shouldn't she make the best of things? MacLeod had been kind and considerate, and he was a lot better-looking than Gabe. Last night beside the campfire he'd told her how in '76 he'd been run off his Mohawk Valley farm—near Schenectady, he'd said—and how his wife had died of the smallpox that first winter in Canada. After the war was over, he was going back to his farm. That wasn't but right, was it? It was his property, wasn't it? She'd never been able to make much sense out of this war. Some people were for the King and others were against him. That was simple enough.

But somehow she'd never quite understood why. Gabe was for Congress, of course, but he'd never bothered telling her why so she could understand it. Her own people had always been King's people. For all she knew, they'd gone off to Canada with the rest of the Loyalists. She hadn't heard from them in a couple of years, since Gabe brought her to Cedar Bush. Maybe if Sergeant MacLeod took her to Canada, she'd meet her Ma and Pa. Wouldn't that be nice? And she'd be proud to be with such a good-looking man as MacLeod. Course, the first thing Ma would ask was if they were married. Well, she could get around that. At any rate, she wasn't going to worry too much about Gabriel Quick. He was either dead or he wasn't, and here she was a captive and MacLeod could do what he wanted with her. Of course, he was a gentleman and wouldn't try any of that! At least, she didn't think he would.

She let herself think about it a moment. He sure was good-looking, though. Last night he'd let on that a man would be a pure fool to go farming without a wife to look after his house and chickens and things. Well, if it came to that, she didn't see why she shouldn't marry him if he asked her when they got to Canada. She would try to act real nice to him from now on, and see what happened. And if he did want to act like a husband before that, why, maybe it would be wise to let him. Then she'd have a kind of hold over him. He talked and acted like a man who would do the right thing. She'd heard that sometimes that was the only way to get a man and hold him.

She wished that ugly little man Benson would quit staring at her and muttering the way he did. He was reading his Bible again. How could he see in this light? He probably knew it all by heart. It sickened her to look at him. He had dried blood all over his green jacket and he hadn't even tried to wash it off. His beard was greasy, and his eyes had that crazy stare in them. She wondered what that was he had been fooling with in his knapsack just before they'd eaten. She'd caught one look at it. It was a small brown thing, with strings kind of hanging from it. She was sure she knew what it was,

all right, but she wasn't going to let herself think about it. She didn't know the white men took scalps too! She wondered if he'd get eight dollars for it, if that's what it was.

Suddenly she bent forward in her sitting position, pressing her hands into her abdomen. Cramps again! All afternoon she'd had them, and she'd refused to go into the bushes in the broad daylight. Not with those red devils there to watch. She wondered how Emma and Jessica Currie could stand the shame of it. Whenever they had to go into the trees, one of those Senecas just picked up and went right along and stood nearby. At least when she had to, she just stood up and said: "I'll be back in a minute," and Sergeant MacLeod just nodded. That's what she was going to do now.

MacLeod didn't even look up when she left. She had to go a good ways out into the brush because the campfires were scattered all around.

Benson closed his Bible a minute or so after she left the campfire. He also hurried off toward the thickets, although he headed in a direction different from that taken by Lucy. The young Ranger Morrison watched him go.

"Look at him go!" Morrison remarked. "Hope the heat ain't touched the meat. Everybody seems to be gettin' the trots."

One of the other men laughed. Another started telling how the same thing had happened after Oriskany. "Maybe it's the meat, but I think it's getting hell scared out of you."

"Can't be," the other said. "Benson's so cracked in the head he ain't scared of nothing."

MacLeod looked up. "What's that about Benson? Where is he?"

"Went off to move his bowels," said Morrison.

"He didn't follow that girl, did he?"

"Nah. He went over that way."

MacLeod stood up. "I better take a look and see, anyway. Never can tell what he's going to do."

Perhaps fifty yards from the glow of the campfires, Lucy Quick halted her careful progress through the brush and briers. She decided she'd come far enough. She was deathly afraid of snakes, anyway.

"Oh, Lord!" she whimpered. "These cramps are the worst ever."

Then she tried to scream. Something—an arm—snapped around her throat. Another held her body. She threshed and twisted, and, insane with terror, kept trying to scream. She couldn't even breathe. A voice panted near her ear: "Fight, you rebel's whore! Jezebel! I'll cut the evil out of you!"

She was straining desperately for breath. She managed to twist and see in the moonlight the grotesque grimace and glaring eyes of Benson.

"Now you will get the wages of sin!" he said harshly. His left arm, holding her body, moved away from her and upward. She saw the knife gleaming in the moonlight. With one final lunge of desperation she freed herself from the arm about her neck. She started to run. Gasping for air, she managed a short shrill scream.

Then he had her again and the knife rose and fell.

Throughout the camp the men heard the scream and looked up. Some of them rose to their feet and held their muskets ready. Most of the Indians didn't move, but they listened attentively.

MacLeod came crashing through the trees, running toward the scream. The others around his campfire followed. As they moved into the brush, more men followed, some of them pausing to get blazing brands from the fires for light.

Captain Desmond had been standing beside Jessica and Emma for about twenty minutes, trying to persuade Jessica to talk to him. She had been giving him short answers, letting him do all the talking. When he heard the scream, he looked swiftly around the camp.

"That's the blond woman, isn't it?" he asked.

They didn't answer. Jessica rose to her feet.

"I'll see what's happened," he exclaimed, striding away.

Now almost the entire camp, including most of the Indians, had moved into the darkness.

MacLeod, bursting through the thickets, was guided by a curious kind of whimpering snarl. He heard the sound of ripping cloth. He had his hatchet ready in his hand when he

came upon Benson and the body. The man was crouched over Lucy Quick, tearing her clothes away with one hand and slashing the knife with the other. His head was bobbing madly and the queer little burble of sound continued. With a tremendous shout, MacLeod launched himself at Benson's back. The small man turned instantly and fought in a frenzy. MacLeod kept shouting wildly as he struck with the hatchet. The hatchet went deep once, twice, and MacLeod had to wrest it away. Benson fell to the ground and MacLeod kept hitting him with the hatchet until the man's head was shapeless and the big Ranger's arm and shoulder were dripping blood. Finally his comrades managed to pull him away.

Back at the campfires, Jessica stood looking into the forest. Only a few Indians remained in the camp.

"What in the name of God is it?" Emma asked.

"I don't know, but whatever it is, they're going to be busy with it. Emma, I'm going to run!" Jessica cast a quick look around. None of the Indians were close.

"Run, Jess? You mean escape?"

"Yes! Brant said the Indians wouldn't chase me. Goodbye, Emma. I won't forget. Kanadesaga."

Jessica bent and gave Emma a swift hug and then turned and ran for the ford. The Indians watched her go without moving to follow. Two Mohawks standing nearby exchanged a few words, and then one of them trotted into the forest in the direction of the uproar.

He's going to tell the rest of them, Emma thought in despair. She won't even get across the ford. He'll tell Desmond. Run, Jess! Run!

The other Mohawk walked over to her and looked down. "You stay here," he said. He didn't seem angry.

"Where did the other one go?" she asked. "To tell them to chase her?"

The Mohawk didn't answer for a moment and she thought he hadn't understood.

"Brant said she could escape!" she exclaimed.

Then the Indian spoke. "Tell Brant. Brant said not to follow."

"You're going to let her get away?"

He shrugged almost imperceptibly. "Do what Brant said." He walked away from her.

The Mohawk who had gone to tell Brant pushed his way through the mob of men which had converged on the clearing where the bodies lay. Brant and Desmond and several others were standing over the bodies. MacLeod was being calmed by others some distance away. The Mohawk touched Brant's arm and spoke in their language.

"Does the white man understand the Mohawk tongue?" he asked.

"No," Brant answered. "What do you want to tell me?"

"The woman with the red hair has fled. She is already across the ford."

"Good." Brant smiled and nodded. "No one followed her?"

"No."

"We will keep this one busy, then, so he will not see that she is gone."

"What's he telling you?" Desmond asked.

"Nothing of importance." Brant dismissed the Mohawk and looked again at the bodies. "Captain, will you see that these two are buried? Use your own men for it. Stay here and see that they put them deep enough to keep the wolves out. I suppose you plan no punishment for Sergeant MacLeod?"

"Don't see why I should," Desmond answered. "We all knew Benson was crazy as a loon."

"All right, Captain. See that they're buried properly, will you?"

It was perhaps twenty minutes later that Desmond returned to the clump of campfires, and ten minutes more before he noticed that Jessica was gone. He walked over to where Emma was feigning sleep, huddled beside the children in a blanket. He nudged her with his foot.

"Where's Mrs. Currie?" he demanded.

"Keep your feet to yourself!" exclaimed Emma.

"Where is she?"

"Can't a body take care of nature without a guard over her?"

"She's been gone long enough."

"Why don't you go find her, then?"

He turned away and walked to Brant's campfire. The Mohawk chief was writing by the light of the fire. He looked up as Desmond approached.

"What's the trouble, Captain?"

Desmond shook his head as if to shrug off the question. After a moment, however, he said: "The redhead seems to have wandered off."

"Just out in the bushes, Desmond. Tell me, now that you're here, did anyone get an accurate count of the rebels today?"

"About a hundred and fifty, counting those that ran this morning. About a hundred on the hill."

"I want no more such victories. Who was the general who fought the Romans? Pyrrhus?"

"I guess so," said the Ranger absently. "Say, do you suppose she's tried to get away?"

Brant looked up with a smile. "She's your prisoner and your problem."

"I'll wager she has!"

Brant shrugged. "I'd certainly do the same in her case."

"By God! I'll take some men and go after her. I'll drag her to Niagara if I have to."

Brant rose to his feet. "If you go after her, you'll go alone! All the men in this party, Indians and Rangers, are under my command until we reach Unadilla. I'll not let a small group cross that ford into the danger of an ambush in those hills."

"Ambush! Are you crazy, Brant?"

"Don't forget the fifty men who fled. They may be waiting for us to send a party in pursuit. You can go alone, Desmond."

"All right, by God! I'll go alone. And the right people in Canada will hear about how you let prisoners escape, Brant."

"I've done it before," Brant said. "God willing, I'll do it again. They know that in Canada and in London."

When Desmond hurried out of camp toward the river, Emma watched him go with despair.

Please, God, she prayed, let Jess get safely away.

31

AFTER CROSSING the ford, Jessica took the trail southward along the river bank. She remembered that it followed the bottom of the hill on which the battle had been fought for perhaps a half mile and then turned eastward through the mountains.

Her skirts had been soaked in the crossing and they were heavy with water, clinging to her legs and slowing her pace. She tried to wring them out, but it didn't do much good. After a few miles, she would be exhausted from the effort of moving her legs against the wet cloth. So she pulled them up around her and tucked them into her waistband, leaving her legs free.

She tried to maintain a steady rapid pace. It wouldn't do any good to run. She wouldn't last more than a couple of hours, and if they were going to pursue her, they would catch her no matter how fast she traveled, since any of the Indians could easily outrun her. Her hope was that Brant would forbid pursuit.

For a time she wondered if she should leave the trail and try to find a hiding place somewhere on the slopes of the hills. That would only delay them until morning, however. Then they'd find her track and trace her. She didn't know how to hide a trail. Tom had often told her how expert the Indians were in trailing their quarry, whether it be animal or human. Although she thought that Brant wouldn't send Indians after her, she didn't want to take a chance. Moreover the Rangers were almost as good in the woods as Indians. They'd find her in the morning if she tried to hide. She reasoned that Desmond would most likely come after her, either with a few Rangers or alone. She hoped that he hadn't missed her too soon. Whatever that commotion had been in the woods, it had appeared probable that it would occupy them all for quite a while.

Her main chance of escape, she thought, was to hurry on until she caught up with the survivors of the militia. They couldn't be too far ahead of her. It had been just dark when the battle ended; and now it was about ten o'clock. She prayed that they had kept to the trail in their flight. If they'd scattered in the woods, she would never find any of them.

She knew also that Tom was somewhere ahead of her, and that he would be coming back for her, if he was physically able to do it. Maybe he'd been wounded and needed her now! That thought started her running, until she tripped on a root or a rock and fell, barking her knees and scraping her hands. She calmed herself, and resumed her former pace.

Jessica was thankful that the moon was so bright. She had long since turned away from the river, and the moonlight helped her to stay on the narrow path. If it had been really dark she would have wandered off among the trees and would have lost herself on the mountain slopes. At the same time, however, if there were anyone after her, the moonlight would help them as much or more than it helped her.

At first the forest noises terrified her. She expected to have Indians leaping from all sides each time an owl swooped noiselessly along the path ahead of her, or a raccoon scampered off into the brush. There were scores of eerie sounds in the forest around her; unseen things crashed through the brush; once a horrible scream burst from the trees above her, and she cried out and ran as fast as she could until she fell painfully. She'd heard Tom talk about catamounts—she didn't know exactly what one sounded like, but for all she knew, there was one right behind her.

After a while, however, her common sense asserted itself, and she paid little attention to the noises or to the momentary glimpses of something moving ahead of her. She realized that the only real danger lay behind her. She had to keep going eastward, toward Tom.

Desmond started to run as soon as he was across the ford. It was a long even stride, interrupted only occasionally by rough ground and frequent pauses to listen to the sounds of the forest. The noises worried him almost as much as they did

Jessica Currie, but for the opposite reason. He feared the retreating militia, who might not be far ahead. Also he remembered Brant's words about Tom Currie. Desmond had looked at all the bodies on the plateau, but Currie had apparently escaped. He was somewhere in those woods ahead.

Occasionally as Desmond stopped to listen, he studied the trail. It was too dark to read any signs, and even if it were not, he probably wouldn't be able to pick up her tracks. An Indian would.

I'll take care of that goddamned Brant when we get back to Canada, he thought. If I can't do it one way, I'll do it another. No matter. She can't be more than a couple of miles ahead. She hasn't had that much time. And she won't leave the trail. She's trying to catch up with the militia. I'll have her in another hour. Now I'm all through playing the gentleman with her. Not to a backwoods rebel bitch with high-and-mighty airs! I'll have her crawling at my feet. She's not like the rest of them, the ones we've been hauling off to Canada these two years past. Treat them well for a month or two and they come around. After a while they'll sleep with anyone who feeds them. But she doesn't want anybody but her woods-running husband. She's going to need some discipline.

He remembered how beautiful she'd been the morning of the raid when he'd opened the door. The high-pointed breasts and the long slim body and the proud scornful look on her face when she'd seen him. There'd be no waiting any more until they reached Niagara. When he caught her, he'd rip the clothes from her and have her right here and now, by God!

He increased his pace. He felt the strength in his legs and his lungs drawing in the air without laboring. That was one thing about the Rangers: you had to be a good runner.

Three-quarters of an hour passed. She couldn't be far ahead now. His eyes watched the moonlit trail as far ahead as he could see.

Jessica had halted to drink from the brook which ran beside the trail when she heard him coming. She was kneeling on the rocks at the water's edge. She had finished drinking and sousing her face with the cold water when her ears caught

the sound of pounding footsteps. Without rising, she looked back along the trail. She saw him about sixty yards down the slope. For an instant, she reacted hysterically. She was going to jump up and run as fast as she could. Just as quickly, she realized that he would immediately catch her. He hadn't seen her yet. Crouching, she stepped into the water and crossed the little brook. Right before her was a clump of alders. She could hide there until he passed. She almost made it. Just as she stepped from the water into the shelter of the alders, her foot slipped on a rock and she fell. Desmond was thirty yards away. He halted at the sound of the splash and searched the trail ahead. He remained perfectly still for a long time. She knew he would see her if he came forward, so she tried to inch her way into the alders.

He heard her or saw her move. She heard him cry out and then came the sound of his running feet. She jumped up and began to clamber up the rocky brush-covered hillside. At the same time, she reached inside her dress and pulled out the knife MacDonald had given her. She heard him right behind her and then she felt his hand clutch her shoulder, ripping her dress. She pulled free and turned.

"Run from me, will you!" he cried, leaping at her.

She felt the knife strike him solidly. It sank deep into his chest. She felt it touch bone; she couldn't wrest it free. He screamed in pain and fell backward. She stumbled back across the brook and started to run up the trail. Desmond rose to one knee, cursed, and his hand sought the red-handled tomahawk at his belt. His arm came back and the hatchet hurtled end-over-end through the air. It struck. Jessica crumpled and fell, sprawled across the trail.

Desmond sat among the rocks. He raised his right hand to his left shoulder and pulled the knife out. Blood flowed across his chest.

"Christ! I'll bleed to death," he whispered.

He opened his jacket, shrugged it off, and tried to unbutton his shirt. The blood was dripping from his left arm to the ground.

"Got to hurry. Can't go far if I lose too much blood."

He managed to remove the shirt and with his right hand to wrap it in a crude bandage around the wound. Then he draped his jacket across his shoulders and lurched to his feet.

He walked a few steps toward Jessica, but he could see in the bright moonlight the stillness of her body and the dark spreading stain beside her head. He began to feel sick.

"Dead," he said softly. "She shouldn't have run. I never killed a woman before." He stood a moment, looking down at her. Then he turned. "Rebel bitch! Maybe she's done for me. Got to get back."

He started down the trail.

Although it was almost dawn, they hadn't left the camp yet when he staggered across the ford. A couple of Rangers ran to help him, followed by Brant and a crowd of curious men.

"What happened, Desmond?"

"Stuck a knife in me and got away," Desmond gasped.

"Where'd she ever get a knife?" MacDonald asked.

Brant looked at Desmond searchingly. "She got away? Where's your hatchet?"

"Lost it."

Brant nodded. "No matter. I hope she did get away, but whether she did or not, I wouldn't give a penny for the value of your life from now on, Desmond. Don't ever wander the woods alone, day or night."

Desmond didn't answer. He began to fumble with the bloody shirt wrapped around his wound.

"All right," Brant said. "Get that fixed up and let's get started. We've got a long way to go."

32

Tom Currie passed the spot where he had come out of the forest that morning and had picked up the trail of the fleeing militia. He was only a few miles from the river now.

He was traveling rapidly, almost running, with a long even stride. He intended to keep to the trail until he was quite near

the river. It was possible that Brant had left a few men to cover his back trail, since he would have to travel slowly with his wounded. Any rear guard wouldn't be this far back, however.

He paused on the crest of a height of land. Ahead of him were the hills along the river. He could see the wooded plateau where they had fought, miles away. There were numerous black dots in the bright blue sky above the plateau. They were spiraling downward.

Turkey buzzards, he thought. There'll be nothing but scattered bones left, if anybody ever comes back here to bury them. Well, that means that nobody's left alive on that hill, anyway.

He started down the slope. Below him he could see the trail winding through the trees, a slender brownish-green line threading the deeper green of the trees. Then he paused. He stood motionless for a moment, gazing at a spot of color on the trail, about halfway down the slope. It was perhaps five hundred yards away. Just something red and white lying in the trail without moving. He didn't know what it was, but he wasn't taking any chances. Whatever it was, it didn't belong there.

He moved swiftly off the trail into the thick growth of evergreens and birches. Swinging away from the trail, he moved cautiously down the slope. Beside whatever it was he'd seen, there was a mountain brook flowing downhill to the river. He kept going through the trees until he reached the brook, and then he followed its course. He moved forward a few yards at a time and then stopped to listen and watch. There was no sound. Soon he was close to the trail again. Nothing moved. Only the sound of the water tumbling over its rocky bed disturbed the silence.

Now he was close enough to get a good look at the thing in the trail. He moved a few paces through the trees. Then he dropped his rifle and ran.

With a soft cry, he crouched beside the body. "Jess! Jess, my darling!"

He couldn't make himself touch her. Her hair was matted;

there was blood across her neck and shoulders, and the leaves and earth of the trail beside her head were stained dark. He was weeping now. He put out his trembling hands to take her in his arms. Then her shoulder moved. He heard an almost inaudible murmur.

"Thank God!" he whispered. He bent and kissed her hair and said softly, "Can you hear me, Jess? It's Tom. Can you talk?"

She whimpered again. Her face remained pressed to the earth.

Carefully he put his hands beneath her body and carried her to the edge of the brook. He took off his shirt, folded it, and put it beneath her head. With his knife he cut her dress away from her shoulders and pulled the bloodsoaked cloth away from the wound. She cried out weakly.

"It's going to be all right, Jess," he said gently. "It'll be all right."

Her eyes were closed and she seemed scarcely to be breathing.

"Can you hear me, Jess?" he asked softly.

She didn't move.

He straightened her legs on the ground and removed her white cotton underskirt. He tore it into strips. Soaking one of them in the brook, he gently washed the blood away from the wound. It was high on her neck, at the base of the skull. It started to bleed again.

Pretty deep, he thought. I can't tell whether it cracked her skull or not. Now with Testing dead, there's no doctor nearer than Gardinerville, and maybe Highland Landing. It looks bad. She lost all that blood, and now she won't wake up. How am I going to carry her back without hurting her more?

He bandaged the wound with the strips of cotton. She still didn't recover consciousness, although she whimpered several times while he worked.

That long hair saved her, he thought. If her neck had been bare, it would have killed her. Must have been a tomahawk, and a thrown one at that. If it had been in his hand, it would have sunk all the way in.

She seemed to be quiet. He thought he had better wait until she recovered her senses, if she was going to, before he tried to move her. He walked back to the spot where he'd found her. Now he saw the hatchet lying at the edge of the trail. He picked it up. He remembered that red handle all right. Brant had said his name was Captain William Desmond. Tom would remember that. There were only so many places a man like that could go. One way or another, Tom would find him.

Tom walked back toward the brook. He found blood on the rocks not far from where Jessica was lying. There he picked up a scalping knife stained with blood.

He found Desmond's tracks. The man had been walking unsteadily. Here and there on the rocks were spots of dried blood.

Then Tom heard someone coming down the trail. He moved behind a screen of oak shrubs and waited with his rifle ready. The barrel of the gun poked through the green oak leaves as two men came into sight on the trail about a hundred yards up the hill. One was Ben Whittaker; the other was young Matt Finch. Tom stepped into the trail. Whittaker waved and they trotted toward him.

"Convinced Hayworth I'd ought to come as far as the ford, anyway, Tom," Whittaker said as they approached. "Matt here wanted to come along, so I let him. Thought you might run into some trouble."

"I did, Ben," Tom answered wearily. "Look." He pointed to Jessica's body beside the brook.

"Jesus! Is she dead, Tom?"

"No. But she's pretty bad. I was wondering how I could manage to move her."

"Good thing we came, Tom," said Matt Finch, moving forward toward Jessica. He blushed as he did so, and turned away quickly, because Tom, in his doctoring, had cut Jessica's dress away from her shoulders and breast. Tom noted the boy's embarrassment and stepped forward. He removed his hunting shirt from its place as a pillow and placed it across Jessica's shoulders.

"Tom, I didn't mean—" Matt began, his face very red.

"It's all right, Matt," Tom said, putting his arm around the boy's shoulders.

"What happened to her?" Ben asked.

"I guess she got a chance to run away and took it. The Ranger who captured her came after her. When he caught up with her, she slashed him with a knife and started to run again. He threw his tomahawk and it hit her in the back of the head. I found her here. I guess he thought he'd killed her."

"What happened to him?"

"Went back. He was bleeding pretty bad." Tom held up the hatchet. "He left this behind him."

"Well, I'll be goddamned! That's the Tory we tried to get during the fight. Or at least he had a hatchet just like that."

"Yeah, it's his."

"How come he didn't make sure she was dead, Tom? How come the Indians didn't scalp her?"

"He was alone, and I think he was scared of bleeding to death. From the looks of things, he headed right back without even looking at her."

"How are we going to carry her?"

"Make a stretcher, I guess."

"Matt and I will do it, Tom. You stay here in case she wakes up."

She didn't awaken, however. Ben and Matt went into the forest and cut two long straight birch saplings for the carrying poles of the stretcher. Then they lashed a network of crosspieces between the poles, tying them with vines and with strips of buckskin which Ben cut from his leggings. Matt hunted until he found a clump of young spruce trees. He brought back a huge armful of spruce boughs for Jessica to lie on.

"All ready, Tom," said Ben. "She wake up yet?"

"Not yet."

They put her gently on the stretcher. She cried out once, and then lay motionless. Her face was pale. Tom saw that the wound had started to bleed again.

"Now, she ain't so bad off, Tom, if she can yell like that," Ben remarked with false heartiness.

"She's bad enough. Come on, let's go. She's got to get to a doctor."

Matt carried the guns and equipment, and Tom and Ben carried the stretcher. The trail was good all the way through the mountains. They made excellent time. At sunset that evening they halted and made camp. Matt and Ben started to build a lean-to shelter for Jess, while Tom kindled a small campfire and made some broth using the dried meat. Ben had brought a little iron kettle in his pack. Tom set the broth aside to cool. She would need it if she awakened. He sat beside the fire, watching her. His gaze must have wandered, for suddenly he realized that her eyes were open and she was looking at him.

"Tom," she whispered, managing a slight smile.

"Jess, my dear." He was at her side, touching her lips gently with his.

"Don't cry, Tom. I'll be all right."

"Am I crying?" He brushed the back of his hand over his eyes. "I guess I am."

"I knew you'd come for me, Tom."

"Of course," he said. "Now, don't try to talk. You're weak from all the blood you lost."

"Desmond," she said. "That's his name, Tom."

"I know his name. I know all about him."

"I stabbed him," she whispered, her voice rising in excitement. "Did he die, Tom?"

He shook his head. "Not yet."

"What happened to me?"

"He threw his tomahawk. Now you lie there while I feed you."

"All right, Tom. Kiss me again."

Tom kissed her once more, softly, and then picked up the kettle of broth. He had prepared a birch-bark ladle. As he started to dip the broth, Ben and Matt came out of the woods laden with evergreen branches for the lean-to. She smiled weakly at them.

"Hello, Mr. Whittaker. Hello," she said to Matt.

"That's Matt Finch, Jess," Tom said.

"I know him," she said. "I know everybody in Cedar Bush."

"Hope you're feeling better," said Matt.

"She looks as spry as a chipmunk, Tom," Ben remarked.

"I'll be all right, with three such fine nurses."

"We'll have you home tomorrow," said Ben, "where a doctor can see you."

"I won't need a doctor now," she said, smiling. She reached for Tom's hand.

"Keep quiet now, Jess, while I feed you. You're not out of the woods yet. Not by a long shot."

"We're together again, Tom. That's all that matters. We'll never be apart again."

He looked at her without answering. His eyes were troubled. She saw the determination in his face, and it puzzled and somehow frightened her.

"Will we, Tom? Never again."

"You drink your broth and stop talking," he said gently. "It's a long way from here to home."

33

THE DOGS began to bark as Tom and Ben carried the stretcher out of the woods toward the bridge over the Deerkill. Someone in the fort fired a musket and the sound echoed through the quiet valley.

The two men and the boy looked at the little heaps of black which were all that remained of most of the houses of the settlement. Every field in their sight had been burned, excepting those meadows where the hay had already been cut. A few people were moving in and out of the fort, and children were playing near the few houses which had not been burned.

"Nothing left," Ben muttered harshly. "Nothing to get through the winter with."

"Are you going to stay, Mr. Whittaker?" Jessica asked him.

"Sure, I'm staying. It's my land, ain't it? I got nowhere else to go, have I?" He turned his head and glared at her, as if she had accused him of some crime just by asking the question. "Brant and the Butlers could come down here a hundred times, and I'd stay. Only way they can get rid of me is to kill me."

Jessica smiled. "No need to get angry with me, Mr. Whittaker. We're staying too, aren't we, Tom?"

He nodded but didn't answer.

"And what are you going to do, Matt?" Jessica asked.

"I got the kids to look after," Matt answered. "Guess I'll take them into Highland Landing to my Aunt Martha. That's Pa's sister. Then I got a score to settle with the Indians. I'm going off to the army."

"Matt, you run ahead and tell them to get a bed ready," Tom said. "Go ahead, now!"

"Sure, Tom." The boy started to lope across the plain to the fort.

"Tom, what did you send him off for?" Jessica asked. "I was just going to tell him that he shouldn't join the army. He's too young."

"That's what I thought you were going to say. That's why I sent him. There's some things a man feels he has to do, and Matt has made up his mind."

"Well, I think he's too young. Anyway, now we're home again! Tom, first thing we'll do before winter sets in is build a new house," Jessica said. "I know just what I want. Can I have my own way about the house, Tom?"

"There's other things to think about right now," he told her abruptly. "You quiet down now, Jess. When we get inside, you go right to bed and sleep while I go get a doctor. We'll have trouble if that cut of yours gets mortified."

"You may have to go all the way to Highland Landing, Tom," Ben told him.

"Maybe not. They brought in the wounded. They ought to have a doctor by this time."

"If you have to go to Highland Landing, Tom," Jessica said,

"you get my cousin Sam. He's a doctor. You remember him? You met him at the wedding. Bess will tell you where he lives."

There was a group of people, mostly women and children, watching at the gate as the yelping dogs escorted the two men and their burden. Ben's wife ran out to meet them, with the four young Whittakers crowding around their father, who was trying to kiss them all and handle the stretcher at the same time. The people by the gate were silent, watching with dull eyes. The tragedy of the raid had by this time apparently drawn all emotion from most of them. Tom saw the wives and children of the men who had been left on the plateau: Mrs. Sheperd, gaunt and embittered; the Reverend Mr. Wait's wife, her eyes red-rimmed from weeping; plump Mrs. Dunning, who had lost her husband and two sons. John Haskell's wife, a pale blonde not much more than twenty, stepped out of the group and approached Tom appealingly.

"You see Johnny, Mr. Currie? None of them others that come back saw him. You saw him get away, didn't you?"

Tom tried to meet her gaze and tell her, but he couldn't. None of the others had told her. Why should he? He licked his lips, which suddenly seemed very dry, and looked down at his hands as he readjusted them on the poles of the stretcher. Somehow he knew that she couldn't take the truth.

"No, I didn't see him," he said finally, remembering the bodies covered with blankets after the first attack. Somebody had said John Haskell was among them.

"Maybe he's out in the woods yet," Ben ventured. He seemed about to say something else, but didn't.

"Yes," Mrs. Haskell murmured, staring wildly beyond them at the mountains, hazy in the afternoon sun. "Yes, he'll be in soon."

Her face was even more pale than usual, and suddenly she crumpled and fainted. Two of the women moved forward to pick her up.

"You didn't see any of them, Mr. Currie?" asked Mrs. Wait quietly.

He shook his head. "There may be some more out there like Ben said," he answered.

"You see my husband?"

He nodded. "I saw him, Mrs. Wait."

She turned away. "Thank you," she whispered.

"Come on, Tom. Let's go," Ben said.

From the fort, a man and woman came running, followed by Colonel Hayworth.

"It's Bess!" Jessica exclaimed. "And my cousin Sam!"

Bess Bellnap bent over the stretcher, laughing and weeping at the same time. "Jessie, I'm so happy. Oh, dear, you're hurt. Is it bad? What happened?"

"Get out of the way and let me find out," said Dr. Bellnap.

"What did they do to you, Jessica?" wailed Bess.

"Cut my head open, that's all. I'll be all right," Jessica told her. "What in the world are you doing out here?"

"We came out as soon as we heard about the raid. The news was all over Highland Landing the next day—that you'd been carried off and all. I've been praying for you every day."

"Prayers aren't going to do any good now," the doctor remarked. "Not if you don't let me tend to her." He nodded to Tom. "Take her inside the fort where I can examine her, will you, Tom?" He walked beside the stretcher as they carried it. "How do you feel, Jess?" he asked.

"Tom says I lost a lot of blood, but that I'll be all right. He's just as good a doctor as you are, Sam."

"That's not saying much," the doctor grinned. "But in a case like this, maybe he's the best doctor you could have."

Colonel Hayworth, his face haggard, his eyes dulled with defeat and despair, walked beside them into the fort. "Tom, when you've made your wife comfortable, come and see me, will you? I'll need your help on the report to the Governor. I'm asking again for troops for our protection. Maybe Congress will listen, after this. Maybe, but I doubt it. They'll probably blame the whole thing on me."

"I'll be in, Colonel," Tom told him.

"I also want to know how you got her back, Tom."

"Not much to it, sir. Ben Whittaker can tell you."

Later, after Tom had reported to Hayworth, he hunted for Matt Finch and his brothers and sisters. He found them being marshaled for the community meal by Matt.

"You making out all right, Matt?" Tom asked.

"Sure, Tom. They're good kids," he said with a paternal smile.

"How you going to get them to Highland Landing?"

"I figure somebody will be going in soon. Otherwise, we'll all walk."

"Uh, huh. Well, when you get your arrangements made, come and see me. I guess maybe you and I can travel together up to see Tim Murphy and General Sullivan."

"Gol, Tom! That would be wonderful!"

"It'll be a couple of days. You get the kids settled first."

"Sure I will, Tom. Thanks!"

That evening in the barracks room of the fort, Tom and Bess and Dr. Bellnap sat on the floor beside Jessica's mattress. She had slept most of the afternoon, after her cousin had dressed the wound. He'd said she would be all right, with plenty of rest.

The barracks room was crowded with the families who had been burned out of their homes. It was a sorrowful group; here and there in the room a woman would suddenly begin to weep, while the others tried to comfort her. The children were whimpering constantly, and some of the younger ones who couldn't yet understand death were crying for their fathers. One of the wounded men whom Colonel Hayworth and the others had brought back from the plateau was moaning in one of the few bunks in the room.

"He won't last long now," Dr. Bellnap said. "I've done all I can."

"At least they brought his wife to be with him," Tom said. "He's from Gardinerville."

"You think those Indians will be back, Tom?" the doctor asked.

"Not this year. We did a lot of damage to 'em up there. And if Sullivan does a good job in this campaign of his, maybe they won't ever be back."

"I pray you're right, dear," Jessica said. "It would be terrible to build our new house and have them come and burn it."

"You're going to stay here after this?" Bess exclaimed incredulously.

"Of course we are! Tom is going to start to work right away on the new house, aren't you, Tom?"

He didn't answer her, and Dr. Bellnap broke into the conversation.

"If you want my opinion, I think you both should come back to Highland Landing with us. Jessica needs a good rest to recover. You can stay until next spring, and then, if you're bound and determined to come back into this wilderness, you can do it and build your house easily. If you start now, you may not finish before cold weather."

"We can finish one room. The rest can wait," Jessica said.

"I think Dr. Bellnap's right," Tom said slowly. "You'd better go back to Highland Landing with them, Jess."

"And what will you do?"

He started to answer her, and then looked away.

"Tom, what's the matter? I'm not going to leave you ever again! If you want to go to Highland Landing for the winter, all right, I'll go. But I'm not going without you."

"Yes, you are, Jess. It's the best thing."

"While you stay here?"

"I'm not staying here, Jess."

She knew what it was then. She didn't say anything for a moment. Then she said, "You think you have to, Tom?"

"Yes," he whispered.

"Why, Tom?"

"A man's got to make a stand some place. Even young Matt Finch has decided what he's got to do. They need me, so I'm going. And then there's this." He reached to his side and pulled the red-helved tomahawk from his belt. He hefted it in his right hand.

"What is this all about?" Bess demanded.

They didn't answer her. Jessica looked at the tomahawk and then at her husband.

"Not just for that, Tom. I won't let you! What happens to us from now on is more important than he is."

"That's not it, Jess. It's only part of it. He's like a sign pointing to what I've got to do. I've known it ever since Murph and Dave were down here. I belong up there. They need me and every man until the war's won."

"You've done your share, Tom. You were there when they were deserting by the hundreds every day. Now they have plenty of men, since it's beginning to look good for our side. I won't let you go, Tom, not after you've done your share."

"No man gets a share of a war, Jess. He's in it or he isn't."

They were interrupted by Matt Finch coming across the room. "It's all set," he called. "The Haskells are taking the kids to Highland Landing, Tom. I'm ready to go whenever you are."

"All right, Matt," Tom said. "I'll let you know."

"I can't stop you, Tom," Jessica said. "But I won't be here when you get back."

"I expect you to be in Highland Landing."

"If you go, then you needn't come to Highland Landing to get me when you come back."

"You two stop this foolishness!" Bess demanded. "If he goes off to the army again, Jessica, he's still your husband. Lord knows, Elihu don't have to stay in that army, but I don't raise a fuss about it. I must say, though, that I don't see any sense to it, Tom. From the looks of things around here, a man doesn't have to go looking for this war. It's right in our back yard."

"Couldn't you stay with the militia in the county, Tom?" asked Dr. Bellnap. "There's lots of scouting work, and the militia is called out every time the British make a pass at coming up the Hudson."

"I'm going up to the Indian country," Tom told him. He looked at the tomahawk in his hand. "That's where I'll do the most good, and besides, I have to look for a man."

Jessica turned her head away and closed her eyes. They all sat there beside her mattress in uncomfortable silence for what seemed to be hours. Then Bess and Dr. Bellnap rose

and said they were going to turn in. They'd been assigned places on the upper floor of the fort. Jessica opened her eyes and bade them goodnight.

When they had gone, she looked at Tom appealingly. "Are you sure, darling?"

He nodded.

"I knew it, the way you looked last night when I told you about Desmond, and today, all the way down the mountains. Every time I looked at you, you had that angry look on your face. I expected to hear you grinding your teeth."

"I've got no right to expect somebody else to do my fighting for me. Not if I believe in the thing we're fighting for."

She lay gazing tenderly up at him for a long time. In the candlelight, he could see tears in her eyes. Finally she spoke.

"All right, Tom. You go ahead. I knew you would, anyway. And now maybe I even want you to go. Probably I wanted you to go all along, because I know how important it is to you. And to me. And, most of all, to our children—if that army ever gives us a chance to have any. You just remember that I raised a fuss only because I'm a woman. Now, come here and lie beside me so I can tell you how much I love you without all these people hearing me."

"They're all asleep," he said with a smile.

"Don't be so practical! I want to whisper to you about all the things I thought of these past few days. Tom, I have a confession to make."

"Hush now, and go to sleep."

"No. I want to tell you. I hated Cedar Bush from the first day you brought me here. I had you, of course, but it was so lonely and so far from my home, and I thought those mountains up there were ugly and forbidding. I hated it, Tom! I used to wonder how I could get you to give it up and go back with me to Highland Landing. I tried to imagine what kind of work Elihu could find for you to do. And yet I was afraid to tell you, because I knew that you wouldn't go."

"Maybe I would have. Why didn't you say it? You shouldn't have kept it inside you. I knew something was wrong ever since we came."

"I'm glad I didn't, darling. Because when they took us up that mountain trail, I realized what I was leaving, and I knew that if ever I could come back, I'd be happy here with you for the rest of our lives. I wanted our farm to be the best in the valley, and I wanted our children to know this land and love it as I realized I did."

"It will be the best farm, Jess. As soon as the war is over, we'll get to work and make it so."

"I'm not waiting for the end of the war, Tom. When you come home from the army, I'll be here. Our house will be built, and we'll have barns, and everything. And, God and General Washington willing, maybe before the end of the war we'll have time, whenever you're passing through, to see if we can't start a family."

He smiled and caressed her hand. "Maybe, Jess. I'll ask Washington the next time I see him. How are you going to build the house and the rest of it?"

"I have some money, Tom, and I'm going to use it. Elihu has been taking care of my affairs. I'll take that money and start the building. I'll hire some of the people who have been burned out. It will help them and help us."

"I don't know as I like you using your money to build a house that I ought to build myself."

"I don't care what you like or don't like, darling. You're running off to the army and deserting me, and I'm going to do what I please."

"All right," he smiled. "Go ahead."

They were silent a few moments, and when she spoke again, her words were soft and pleading. "You'll not leave right away, Tom?"

"I have to. They'll be starting the campaign in a few days."

"When are you going, Tom?"

He was a long time answering that question. "In the morning, Jess. Your cousin Sam said you're going to be all right. There's no need for me to stay."

"So soon! Can't you come with us to Highland Landing for a little while?"

"No, Jess. I'd like it, but I've got to go."

"All right, Tom. You know best." She turned her head slightly, grimacing with the pain it caused her. "Kiss me, darling."

He kissed her lips gently and she whispered: "I love you, Tom. I love you so much. God keep you safe for me."

The morning dawned clear and warm, although there was a hint of a thunderstorm building above the mountains to the northwest. Tom ate breakfast alone, and made a deal to buy the rifle from the Gardinerville man from whom he had borrowed it during the retreat. The man was still on guard duty at the fort. Tom packed food, powder and shot, extra flints, and a few other things he thought he'd need. He told Matt Finch to do the same. Then Tom said his farewells to Hayworth and Ben Whittaker and a few others. Then he went to Jessica's side. He bent to kiss her.

"Goodbye, Jess."

She held his hands, weeping softly. "Tom, darling. God be with you. Take care of yourself and don't do anything foolish because of that Tory."

"Maybe I won't even run across him."

"Well, you tell that Tim Murphy to send you back safely to me."

"I'll tell him. He's the best bodyguard a man could have."

"And one thing more, Tom. When you get into Seneca country, don't forget Emma Polhamus."

"Don't you worry. I'll bring them back if I can find them. You're sure it was Kanadesaga? A lot of those names sound alike."

"That's what MacDonald said."

"I've been there once, years ago."

She appealed once more. "Tom, wait a few days."

He shook his head. "I'm going now, Jess."

"Goodbye, then, my darling."

He kissed her again and rose. "Goodbye." He turned and walked from the room.

Bess and Dr. Bellnap had been standing by. Jessica held

out her arms to them. "Help me to the gate," she said. "I want to see him again."

They demurred, but she was insistent. Ben Whittaker came to help Dr. Bellnap, and the two of them carried her to the open gate of the fort. They stood there watching Tom and Matt Finch cross the bridge and head toward the edge of the forest. There were tears in Jessica's eyes, but she was smiling.

At the edge of the trees, Tom turned and looked back. He saw them standing at the gate. He lifted his rifle and waved. He saw Jessica wave in return. He and Matt stood there a moment and then they walked into the forest.

"Well, we're on our way, Tom," Matt said.

"We are, Matt."

A few paces along the trail, Tom drew the red-helved hatchet from his belt. About twenty-five yards away, there was a belt of bare trunk about three inches wide on a birch tree. One of the Cedar Bush boys must have peeled it away to make a miniature canoe. Tom's arm went back and the hatchet flew to the tree. It sank into the center of the bare spot.

"Good shot, Tom!" Matt cried.

"All it takes is a little practice," Tom said. "I wonder if he's got himself another one of these things yet. He'd better have."

He walked forward, pulled the tomahawk from the tree, and they started the long walk across the mountains.

34

JULY PASSED and August came, and the days in Highland Landing were long and weary for Jessica. She had recovered her strength and now she was anxious to return to Cedar Bush. She was, of course, greatly concerned for Tom, but even more she feared that he might return before she could rebuild the house and barns.

She was surprised and quite pleased to find that Highland Landing no longer seemed like home to her. While it was pleasant to have Bess entertain their friends for her benefit, and to meet old acquaintances at church and at social affairs, her thoughts turned incessantly to Cedar Bush and its townspeople. Finally she decided that her visit was ended.

"I'm going home, Bess," she told her cousin. "I just can't stay here any longer."

"Home!" cried Bess. "Haven't you got over that idea? I thought you and Tom would make your home with us at least until the war ends. What will you do out there? Where will you live? Suppose the Indians come back?"

Jessica took the questions one at a time. "I'm going to build a big stone house for Tom and me. As soon as the first room is finished, that's where I'll live. And as for the Indians, I don't think they'll be back this year, but I'm not afraid any longer, Bess. The most important thing is to build the house and barns. I promised Tom."

During the second week in August, Jessica made the journey back to Cedar Bush, driving, despite Bess's dismay, a new team of horses she had purchased in Highland Landing. She had paid considerably more than their worth, she thought, but she didn't have to tell Tom the price. And she was lucky to have them! The army took most of the horses nowadays.

The team pulled a wagon full of the building materials

she had purchased for the new house. There was glass for the windows, packed carefully against breakage on the rough road, and window frames which she'd had made in Highland Landing. There was ironwork and hardware and nails, all hard enough to come by in Highland Landing because of the war. It would be impossible to find these things in Cedar Bush, since Moses and Sam Terwilleger and their former slave Joe had all been killed in the battle with the Indians, and now there was no one to work the smithy. The wagon contained far more manufactured materials than she would need for herself, but she had figured that other people in Cedar Bush would need them also. They would pay for them with the labor which she must hire.

She was surprised to see how quickly the people of Cedar Bush had progressed in their recovery from the raid. Every family had a dwelling—most of them one-room cabins which provided only shelter from the weather. A few families, those whose men had returned from the battle, were building bigger permanent homes, some of them promising to be larger and more comfortable than those they had before the raid. Young Matthew Youngblood had already started rebuilding the tavern. The Embler brothers had set up a new sawmill on the banks of the Deerkill. Stephen Dunning and his younger brothers were building a stone house on the site of their old one. The townspeople showed yet, Jessica noticed immediately, the numbing effects of their grief, but they were determined to start again. A few had given up—Haskell was gone (his wife had died two days after the raid); Mrs. Wisner with her older children and the new baby had gone to her family's farm in Gardinerville; all the Bakers and Samuel Carpenter and his wife, next-door neighbors, were gone.

Jessica took lodging with Mrs. Wait, whose house near the fort had not been burned.

On her first morning back in Cedar Bush, Jessica hired Ben Whittaker to supervise the building of her house.

"More than pleased to do it, Jess," he said. "I got neither the money nor the equipment to do any more for myself

than build that little cabin I put together. What I earn from you will give me a start for next year."

"Hire all the men you need to get it done this fall, Ben. I want the house ready when Tom comes home. The barns aren't so important this year, but we must have shelter for the horses."

"Those horses will help on this job, Jess. You want a stone house—that means an awful mess of stones has to be hauled down off the hills. But we'll do her for you."

Jessica spent all her days from dawn to dusk at the site of the new house, helping with the building as well as she could. She cooked for Ben and his two helpers, young Sam Terwilleger and one of the Embler boys. She sorted and graded the stones they drew down from the hillsides, lifting and piling the gray-blue rocks until all her muscles ached and her hands were raw and rough. Ben had hired a team of oxen to supplement the horses, and soon the heavy stone-boats drawn by the two teams had carried more than enough stones to complete the house. The heavy beams were rough-hewn from Tom's supply of building logs, which the Indians had failed to burn, and so the house was started. Jessica learned to handle a hammer and nails, as well as a mason's trowel; she supervised the planning of the structure, drawing dimensional sketches and explaining their intricacies to Ben Whittaker. She was constantly amazing herself at her new abilities.

Ben hired two more men to help him, and by the first of September the walls and chimneys were finished and the roof was started.

"You're going to be proud of it, Jess," Ben said one evening. "It's going to be the finest house between here and Highland Landing."

"I hope Tom will like it."

"He can't help but like it."

The women of Cedar Bush came frequently to watch the progress of the building, and Jessica soon realized how wrong she had been in her first impression of them the previous spring. Their reserve was gone; they were friendly and

voluble in their praise of the house. Her one fear, she found, was not warranted—she had thought they would show their envy of the resources which allowed her to build a bigger, finer house than any of them could attempt. Instead, she discovered that they were eager to profit from her experience in building, and that they had many helpful suggestions for her, drawn from their years of living on the frontier.

There was no sign of any further trouble from the Indians. The men kept their muskets at hand while they worked, and there was a detachment of Highland County militia now stationed at the fort. Frequent patrols of the mountain foothills were made, but the scarce news from the frontier indicated that the Indians and Tories would be forced to center their manpower against the Sullivan expedition.

Early in September it was known that General Sullivan with almost four thousand men had left Tioga Point and headed up the Chemung River into the Seneca country. Ben did his best to gather further information for Jessica, but none was to be had. The infrequent travelers to Highland Landing returned to Cedar Bush with nothing to report.

One evening during the second week of September, just as Ben and the others were finishing their day's work, young Matthew Youngblood came up the lane from the town road.

"Got a letter for you, Mrs. Currie," he called.

She ran to meet him and eagerly took the package he held out to her. It was wrapped in tan buckskin and tied around with buckskin thongs. The writing on the buckskin was faded and the ink had blurred, but she recognized Tom's writing: *Mrs. Thomas Currie, Care Of Mrs. Elihu Bellnap, Highland Landing, York State.* Below the address another line was inscribed: *By Hand Of W. Kniffin, Pte., 5th N. J. Regt.*

"My uncle Pete brought it in from Highland Landing today," Matt said, watching curiously as Jessica tried to undo the thongs. "That Jersey soldier left it there for you. Must have cost Mr. Currie a good price to send that all the way here."

Ben Whittaker interrupted. "Come on, all of you. We'll leave Mrs. Currie read her letter in peace."

Matt wanted to linger a while. "We ought to know what's going on out there," he told Ben.

"It'll keep. We'll find out tomorrow. Come on, now. Good night, Jess."

"Good night, Ben. Good night and thank you, Matt."

When she finally had the letter open, she saw that it was written on four sheets of heavy white paper in Tom's labored handwriting, and she realized how many hours it had taken him to write so much to her. She began to read:

Big Horn Village on the Chemung River
27 August 1779. Friday evening.

My Dearest Wife:

I am enjoying the best of health and hope that you are the same. We have been most busy and so have had little time to write you. Often have I thought of you, however, and found that even my many duties of this march could not quiet my longing to be with you. I find it difficult to put my feelings on this subject into words, so you must imagine the words which do not appear.

I trust that your pride in your husband will be increased when you know that I have been commissioned acting lieutenant of scouts, because of my knowledge of this country. As part of the equipment of an officer, I have here at hand an order book with a proper supply of ink. In this book I am keeping a journal of these events, which may one day prove of much interest to our children and their children, because this expedition must surely be one of the most important of the war. As you must know, I would be happy could I write you every day, but it would serve no purpose. We have little or no communication with the frontier, and the letters could not be dispatched. Instead I am keeping my journal so that you may read it one day, if you can make out these hen scratchings I put down.

We have been most successful in our purpose this far, and now we are entering the heart of the Long House. We have traveled rapidly since leaving Tioga. Many of

the Indians' villages have been destroyed, with their fields and crops. We have many villages ahead of us, and although you know that I have never doubted the right of our arms, it pains me to see this country which I know so well put to the torch. I agree that it must be done, but I am truly grieved for my many friends in the Long House. A few of our men take great delight in burning and destroying. For the most part, they are the ones who have been through Indian raids.

There has been little opposition to our strong force, but there soon will be. Brant and the Butlers with perhaps 800 men are just ahead of us, and we think they plan to give us battle in a day or so. I do not see how they can stand up to us, for we are almost 4,000 in number, with artillery, of which they have none. We of the rifle corps march in advance of the main force to give warning of the enemy should they appear. Each day we note signs that they are just ahead, but they have yet to show a desire for fight. They must do so, however, because Brant knows that we intend to destroy the Long House forever, and he must try to stop us. Tim Murphy, who is here with me as I write this and sends his greetings to you, says that the battle will be two days hence. He believes he knows the spot where they will stand. I think he is right this time, as he usually is.

I have not forgot my mission at Kanadesaga. I will be frank in saying that Tim and Dave Elerson think we will not find a trace of Emma and her children, believing them to be taken already to Canada. All villages we have entered to this time have been empty. I am more hopeful, however, and you know I will do my best.

We have lost few men except for those who wander off. There are many who do not listen to good advice about the Indians, just as there always are among our people on the frontier. We in the rifle corps are always careful, and I do not think we will be much troubled,

particularly with the cannon behind us. The Indians are always fearful of cannon.

Young Matthew Finch is well and cheerful. Tim and I persuaded Major Parr to take him into the rifle corps, although he is youthful for this service. He has taken to it quickly, and is a favorite among the men. With his serious ways, however, I am afraid he is the butt of too many tricks. He is learning, though. Two evenings ago, Dave Elerson and two others took Matt on a bear hunt along the river. Dave sneaked off and dressed in a bear skin he had found in one of the Seneca villages. When one of the others borrowed Matt's rifle a moment, Dave came growling out of the brush and ran at Matt, who stood his ground. When Dave roared in, Matt grabbed him and tossed him in the river. Dave near drowned before they pulled him out. Not only that, he soon was scratching rapidly because of the guests he had picked up in that bearskin.

It is evening here as I write this, and the sun is setting in the west. The river here, showing the sunset on its surface, is very beautiful and calls to my mind the Deerkill as it flows past our farm. I miss you most at this time of day, when we used to rest from our work and the world was quiet around us, as it is now. This camp is so silent that I believe all the men are thinking of their homes and their loved ones, as I am.

May you keep well and happy until I return, and always remember that I love you and will remain

Your Devoted Husband,
Thomas Currie

Jessica read the letter again. Then she folded it carefully and closed her eyes and bowed her head. She said a prayer for Tom's safety. She knew the battle he expected must be long past, and that he might have perished weeks ago somewhere in that far wilderness. But if he were well and safe this far, there were many dangers yet to be faced.

35

EXTRACTS FROM THE JOURNAL OF THOS. CURRIE, LIEUTENANT, RIFLE CORPS, DURING GENERAL JOHN SULLIVAN'S EXPEDITION AGAINST THE SIX NATIONS OF THE IROQUOIS CONFEDERACY, 1779:

Saturday, August 28

This evening arrived at Chemung after a difficult march. The artillery and packhorses had to ford the river twice during the afternoon. A small party of Indians, probably Senecas, fired on several of our men who were burning huts across the river. Everybody pulled foot and no one was hurt. Murphy and Elerson, back from a scout, report that there is a large encampment about six miles from Chemung. Tim says they're about ready to fight, and I doubt that he's wrong. They must fight soon.

Sunday, August 29

We marched at nine o'clock this morning, proceeding about four miles, when our advance riflemen cautioned us to halt. Just ahead the enemy had constructed a series of long breastworks on very advantageous ground. They had masked their fortifications with green brush most artfully, but it was the turning of the leaves which discovered them to us. Had regular troops been leading the march, they might have walked right into the ambuscade. Dave Elerson was one of the first to notice anything wrong. Major Parr complimented him for his keen sight, but Dave said it was his nose. He claims he can smell an Indian a mile off.

The Indians began to come into the open to fire upon us

when they saw that they were discovered, but we did not follow them as they tried to lead us closer to the breastworks. We of the rifle corps took cover in the trees and opened fire, while the army prepared for action. The enemy had their front secured by a large morass and brook, with the river on their right, and on their left and partly to the rear was a very large hill. Their works were about half a mile in length.

For about two hours a steady fire was exchanged between our riflemen and their main body, with few casualties but much shouting and whooping. With General Hand's brigade to hold the front with the artillery centered in his line, Generals Clinton and Poor were sent around the enemy's left flank to take the hill. The artillery opened fire. We could hear the shells smashing into their works. Brant's voice was easily heard above the noise, telling them to stand their ground. They responded to him bravely, although their dislike for cannon is well known. Once or twice I saw Brant atop the breastworks, braving the fire of these deadly rifles of ours. Brant is a man of much courage. I did not see Desmond, my friend with the red tomahawk, although I watched for him.

After heavy cannonading, we moved against their front and they began an instant retreat. They went up the hill and were met with heavy fire from Poor's brigade. Then they took off around Poor's right flank along the river's edge which he had not had time to guard. Their ambuscade having failed, they could not hope to withstand our numbers. They made their escape, although the riflemen pursued them for upwards of three miles. Tim Murphy and I captured a prisoner, a Negro who was apparently with the Rangers. He was too frightened to talk then, so we took him back to our lines, where he quieted somewhat when he saw we would not kill him. Our men also captured a white man. I stood near listening with much interest when these two prisoners were questioned.

"Who is in command of your troops?" asked Major Parr.

"Old Butler and Young Butler," said the Ranger.

"What about Brant?" Parr asked him.

"He commands all the Indians."

The Ranger thought they had about 800 men, while the Negro said it was closer to 700. When the questioning was finished I asked the Ranger a question of my own.

"Is there a Ranger captain named Desmond?"

He nodded. "Commands my company. You know him?"

I drew the red-helved tomahawk from my belt and showed it to him.

He looked puzzled for a moment, and then he whistled.

"You're the one he's scared of! He don't hardly sleep at night what with checking the sentries and worrying about whether he ought to lay near the fire or in the darkness. I know all about it. Fellow was in that Cedar Bush raid told me."

"How does he know I'm here?" I asked.

"Mister, we been scoutin' this army for more than a month. I guess Brant and the Butlers know all your first names."

From the account of these prisoners, the enemy had considerable losses in dead and wounded, most of whom they carried off. Our own losses were three dead and about forty wounded, some of them severely. However, for the importance of this engagement, that figure is slight indeed. For I am convinced that this was their major effort, and never again will Brant and the Butlers be able to rally a sufficient number to fight another battle. We must watch for traps, but if it is true that 600 Indians faced us today and ran, then we have defeated the full number of the fighting men of the Long House. They will not come against our cannon again.

We have camped on their ground. Dave Elerson has been sitting here while I write this, consuming a jug of rum which he found in the effects of one of their officers. He complains in a thick voice about generals. If the generals had planned the battle better, says Dave, we would have cut off their escape and captured all their rum. There would be at least enough for the riflemen. But I notice that he shares none of his.

Now he has ceased complaining and is singing the old song which goes: "Squaws along the Mohawk are good enough for me!" Some of the verses are not fit for delicate ears. Now he is beset by Tim Murphy and five or six others, whether for the singing or the jug, I don't know. Dave fights with vigor, and this journal is closed for the day as I go to rescue the jug.

Monday, August 30

This day we scouted while the army rested. Clinton's brigade destroyed the enemy's village of New Town. Having returned to camp, we listened to General Sullivan asking the army to agree to a ration of half a pound of beef and half a pound of flour per day as long as it may be necessary, since our provisions are short. There was little grumbling at this request, although Dave did some complaining about generals. His stomach is upset today, however, and he has little use for food, anyway.

It appears to me, although I keep my own counsel, that we have been foolish to burn so much of the Indians' stock of food on this march, when we might have saved it for our own use.

I find this journal of much interest to me, and I look forward each evening to recording the day's events. The riflemen scoff at me, but I know them too well to take offense. Major Fogg, of the New Hampshire troops, who was educated at Harvard College and is a teacher and lawyer, has loaned me a dictionary which I use most frequently in this writing. It is a marvelously compact book for one containing so much, and I have no trouble packing it.

Major Fogg has told me much about Harvard College, to its credit, and I will remember it in future years when our sons are grown. As Tim says, however, the way to make a rabbit stew is first shoot a rabbit. But Jess and I will have sons, this war permitting. I have also heard well about Yale and Kings colleges, both of which are closer to home. Jess will know about these things.

Wednesday, September 1

Frost this morning. We marched at eight o'clock. Very rough country all day long, the land as uneven as a sea in a tempest. Kept going into the night, when we of the rifle corps arrived at French Catherine's Town, where I spent many pleasant days in years gone by. The rest of the army is still straggling in. This town has just been deserted by the Indians. They are close, and we may be attacked this night.

Thursday, September 2

No sign of trouble. This morning discovered an old Tuscarora squaw hiding in the brush near town. She must be upwards of one hundred years. She is scarce able to speak. I questioned her and tried to calm her terror. She said finally that they left her the day before, telling her to hide since she was unable to march. She said that the squaws had wanted to stay at the town to surrender to us, but that the warriors had threatened to scalp them if they did not flee. Later she told General Sullivan through me that the Indians planned to return to the village after we left. She also said that Butler had been there and had been reinforced by a number of Indians, but that those who had been in the battle of New Town had said we were as many as the leaves in the trees and the fish in the lakes and that they would fight no more. We prepared a hut for the old woman and left her some supplies. She was most grateful, since she had expected to be killed.

Sunday, September 5

Arrived this day at Kindaia. We are not far now from Kanadesaga, where I hope to find some trace of Emma Polhamus.

Today a man named Luke Sweatland came into camp, hav-

ing escaped from the Senecas. He was taken last year at Wyoming. He told us that the enemy is not likely to make a firm stand against us, many of them urging that they retreat to Niagara. They have been disorganized since New Town, Sweatland said. He is a very lucky man. Few indeed are the men who escape Indian captivity.

Tuesday, September 7

This was a memorable day. We took up our line of march at seven o'clock and proceeded eight miles. There we reached the head of the lake, where I fully expected the enemy to give us another battle. They might have had a great advantage had they struck as we forded the outlet of the lake. When the army reached the ford, General Sullivan ordered a halt, while the riflemen crossed to scout the woods. We found no sign of the enemy and so the army crossed. Proceeding five miles, we came in sight of Kanadesaga. The rifle corps crossed to the rear of the town, while the main army marched into its front. But there was no sign of the enemy, so we entered the town about dusk.

As soon as we were among the houses, numbering about fifty, I told Matt Finch to search half of them for any sign of Emma and the children, while I looked through the other half. The soldiers had started plundering as soon as it was apparent the enemy was not about, and I realized that there was little chance of discovering any trace. It was only a few minutes, however, when I heard a great hubbub down the street of the village. I thought I heard a child wailing. Stepping from the house I was searching, I saw Matt Finch coming with a screaming child held firmly in each hand. They were the Polhamus children, although they were so dirty I could scarcely recognize them. They were wailing and tugging fiercely to get away. I ran forward. Matt held them while I crouched before them, trying to soothe them.

"Found 'em in a corner of one of the huts, Tom. They were hiding under some skins."

"Mary! You know me. Mr. Currie," I told the weeping girl. "Look at me, now."

She was too terrified to recognize me, and her fear was increased by the mob of laughing soldiers who crowded around. Little Oscar was kicking Matt's legs, to the delight of the soldiers. I motioned the men to get away, and in a few moments we were alone and the children's screaming began to abate.

Finally Mary seemed to realize that we were friends. She stopped weeping and told her brother to stop also.

"You know me, Mary?" I asked.

She nodded.

"And look! This is Matt Finch. You remember Matt, don't you?"

She nodded again.

"Where is your mother, Mary?" I asked.

She pointed to the right of the town's apple orchard, toward a grass-covered hillside.

"The Indians took her with them?"

"No. She's in the ground there. She died."

It saddened me to hear that, but there was no point in telling the little girl that I was sorry. It might set her wailing again.

"The Indians left you here?"

"They said hide. They said you would hurt us."

"We won't hurt you, Mary. We're going to take care of you and take you home."

After we had cleaned the children and repaired their torn clothing as best we could, I went to ask General Sullivan for permission to care for them and return them to their mother's relatives in Kingston. He readily agreed, although he asked how I would perform my duties with the rifle corps while caring for the children. There are several families of Oneida Indians who have joined us, and I suggested that one of their squaws could watch the children. He agreed. Later I looked for Emma's grave on the hillside. It was easy to find. Apparently some white captive had buried her, for at the head of the grave was a slab of wood marked: *Emma Polhamus, 1779.*

Wednesday, September 8

This day we lay on the ground, although most of the rifle corps moved down the lake to destroy a small village called Gaghsiungua.

An officers' council was held on the advisability of proceeding farther into the Indian country. Although we have been ill-furnished for such a long expedition, the opinion of most was that we should continue at least to Little Beard's Town, living on the Indians' stores as well as we can, until our object is accomplished and the greater part of the Seneca country is laid waste. So tomorrow we will move on. The children are well and seem happy to be with us. I have secured for their transport an old, gentle mare which was found roaming in the woods.

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FURTHER EXTRACTS FROM THE JOURNAL OF THOS. CURRIE:

Sunday, September 12

Hurried entry this night. Camped at Kanaghsaws. Enemy somewhere near. We have seen many signs. In a few minutes Murphy, Elerson, Matt and I will leave with others on a scout, commanded by Lieutenant Boyd. General Sullivan ordered Boyd to scout Little Beard's Town with five or six men. Boyd has asked for volunteers, and now we have twenty-nine men in all, including two Indians: Hanyerry, the Oneida, and Captain Jacob, a Stockbridge Indian. Murphy and I think this is too many men. The enemy will detect us, but I do not command, and so say nothing.

Monday, September 13

It is evening, and as I sit here beside the fire writing the events of last night and this morning, it saddens me to think that for the second time in less than two months I have seen so many brave men die needlessly. This is the unhappy story I must relate:

Since we were so near to Little Beard's Town, the general sent Tom Boyd to scout the enemy's whereabouts. Instead of the few men needed, twenty-nine of us left camp at about eleven o'clock at night. We proceeded through the abandoned village of Kanaghsaws and then pursued the direct trail which led southwesterly to a village which I remembered, as did Murphy, as Gathtsegwarohare, some distance from our objective. Hanyerry, the Oneida, who should know these lands even better than we do, said that Little Beard's Town lay in that direction. Boyd insisted that we follow Hanyerry.

"The devil with him, then," said Tim. "He's in command. I'll not say another word."

"Trouble with Boyd is simple," said Dave. "He's going to be a general some day, so he's got to start in young doing things wrong."

Sometime during the night, which was only ill lit by the moon, we must have passed the right flank of the entire enemy force commanded by the elder Butler. We had been better off, I think, if they had discovered us and put us to flight.

We reached Gathtsegwarohare early in the morning, to find it already abandoned. We had encountered no difficulty. While we insisted that this was not near the Genesee Castle, or Little Beard's Town, Boyd said that it was a big village and Sullivan should know its location. Hanyerry said it was the only town before the Genesee. Boyd and Murphy ventured into the town and searched the houses. Then they returned to where we were concealed in the brush. At this point, Tom Boyd dispatched Captain Jacob and three men to

report to Sullivan. We would wait until the dawn fully arrived before moving back.

In a few moments, we heard hoofbeats in the village street, and then we saw four mounted Indians. Boyd sent Murphy with six men to kill or capture them by driving them toward us and forcing a fight. They took alarm, however, and started to gallop away. A ball from Tim's Golcher brought one of them down, and the second barrel wounded another.

Lieutenant Boyd decided to return to camp. We traveled four or five miles in no great hurry, believing that the army was coming toward us. We did not know that they had delayed to repair a bridge across the inlet of the lake. Since we had been awake and traveling all night, we halted to rest, expecting the army any time.

Lieutenant Boyd, unfortunately being a man much given to afterthought, then decided to dispatch two men to tell Sullivan where we were, and that we would wait for the army. In a short time these men returned, telling us that they had discovered five Indians on the trail ahead. Boyd ordered us to our feet and we resumed our march. We had gone but a short distance when we saw the party of Indians. Several of the riflemen fired at them without hitting their marks.

"After them, men," Boyd cried. "Try to capture at least one."

"No," cried Hanyerry. "They are not alone."

Boyd and the most of the men were already running, so Hanyerry and Murphy and the rest of us followed.

It was quite apparent that the Indians were not trying very hard to outdistance us. Murphy and Dave and I finally persuaded Boyd to halt the pursuit for a moment.

"Tom," I said, "they're drawing us on. Don't rush into a trap!"

"The army's just ahead of us, Currie. They're running right into our army."

"How do you know the army's there, man? At least, will you send out flankers? They could close right around us on this path."

"All right, then. Currie, take three men to the left. Elerson, take three to the right. Let's go!"

I took Matt and Murphy and a rifleman named John Youse. We moved far to the left of Boyd and the rest, losing ground to them as they ran along the trail, since I insisted that we move with caution.

Then it happened. Boyd and his men raced after the fleeing Indians into a clearing, in the center of which was a clump of trees. We could see them through the brush, running across the clearing. The forest around the clearing came alive with whooping Indians, and a frightful volley was poured upon Boyd and the others. They reached the shelter of the clump of trees, two of them stumbling, and then they vanished from our view.

I realized instantly what had happened. Butler and Brant had been lying in ambuscade ahead of us, waiting for the entire army to walk into a trap. Hearing the firing behind them, they had turned to avoid being trapped themselves, and thus had discovered our party. We were opposed by the entire force of the enemy!

We took cover for a moment behind trees, waiting and listening. Over the noise of the firing in the clearing, I could hear the sounds of a large body of men coming up behind us. Looking across the clearing, in a moment's glance I saw that Boyd and his men were hopelessly caught in the clump of trees with the fire of several hundred men concentrated upon them, while far off to the right I had a glimpse of four men running with many Indians chasing them. That would be Dave, I thought. Swiftly I decided.

"Murph," I called softly. "We've got to run for it. Every man for himself. Bear right and keep going."

"Right, Tom," Murphy answered.

"Youse! Matt! You two ready?"

They nodded.

"All right, then. Here we go!"

We sprinted out of the forest and across the extreme right portion of the clearing. Instantly there was a volley of shots from somewhere to the rear, and I could hear the balls

whistling by. A glance told me that none of us had been hit. Then from the forest ahead burst a large party of Rangers, probably coming around to encircle Boyd and his men. There were about twenty-five of them. They immediately began to converge upon us. They fired a volley, but again none of us was hit.

I judged the distance they had to run to cut us off. Not all of them would make it. We'd have to run through a gantlet of ten or twelve of them.

"Run!" I gasped to the others. "Don't fight! Duck through and run!"

Now they were thirty yards away. Suddenly I saw their leader. It was Desmond! He was waving to the Rangers behind him to move across and stop us. I would pass close to him.

Now I knew that he saw me. His hand went to his belt and pulled forth another red-handled hatchet. The first Ranger came running at me, swinging his musket. I brought up my long rifle and threw it butt first at his face. He went down.

A glance showed me that Murphy and Matt were through. They'd make it! Another Ranger came and I ducked by him. Only Desmond remained between me and the protective forest. My red-handled tomahawk was in my right hand. He was only a few yards away. His hatchet went back for the blow that would strike me down. I saw his arm start forward and I veered to his other side. He had to swerve as his hatchet came down. I parried the blow as I smashed into him, and then I struck. The hatchet was wrenched from my grasp and I heard him scream. Then I was into the forest, running with all my strength. Youse, whom I had missed, was suddenly beside me. Matt and Murphy were ahead, looking back. Behind us we could hear the Rangers in pursuit. One hundred yards, two hundred yards we ran. Soon there was no sound behind us but the far-off firing where Boyd and the rest fought such hopeless odds.

"They're done for, Tom," Murphy panted as he ran beside me.

"Not yet!" I answered. "If the army's near, we can get back

to them. Matt," I called. "You're the best runner. Go for help."

Matt waved and sprinted ahead of us through the trees. He soon was out of sight. He need not have run, however, for soon the firing ceased and the woods were silent.

Now as I write this, I am thankful that we escaped, as did Dave Elerson and the three men with him, but I grieve for those brave men we found later today on the edges of that grove of trees. There were fifteen of them there, including Hanyerry, the Oneida Indian. We buried them where they lay. There was no sign of Tom Boyd, nor of a man named Parker. It is presumed that they were captured.

Tuesday, September 14

This day we reached Little Beard's Town, the Genesee Castle, the pride of the Seneca nation. It is now destroyed.

Here we found the bodies of Tom Boyd and the rifleman Parker. They were dealt with as I have seldom seen the Indians do before. Both bodies were naked and in a most terrible mangled condition. They had been beheaded. Boyd's eyes had been punched out and the skin stripped from his skull. Parker's head was gone. They had each been stabbed a score of times with spears, and great gashes were cut in their bodies with knives. Boyd's privates were nearly cut off, and the nails of his fingers and toes had been torn away. Several men became sick at the sight. We buried them with all the honors of war.

Now that we have burned the Genesee Castle, our mission is finished, and we will soon start back toward Tioga. This expedition, I think, has been so successful in its purpose that the Seneca nation is forever finished as a great power among the Indian tribes. As soon as the war is over, the settlers will move into this wonderful country. Indeed, some of the men are talking of farms bordering the beautiful lakes in this land. Soon the Senecas will be forgotten. It happens always to the red man when he meets the white.

We have done that which we set out to do, but it seems to

me that not many of us are proud of the destruction we have wrought. These men in this army are farmers, and it pains them to destroy crops and girdle fruit trees and burn fields and buildings.

The children are sleeping here beside me, and I am happy that I found them. Jess will be most pleased when I bring them home. And Desmond is dead. John Youse told me he saw the blow and that the man was surely dead. It doesn't matter to me. I thought that my old way of living demanded vengeance for a wrong he did me, but I know I am changing. He would have lived had I not met him in combat. My desire now is to return home to my wife for a brief time before going again where I am needed. Since I enlisted only for this expedition, I will be free until springtime.

All the men realize that this is as far as we go, and they are walking about with happy faces. Soon we will be homeward bound.

37

It was a long journey home—the longest, it seemed to Tom, that he had ever taken. The old mare would not be hurried. With the children on her back most of the day, she moved at a reluctant walk, wheezing and puffing on the mountain trails. But she kept going.

The children were patient and well-behaved most of the time, although they usually became fretful toward evening, after a full day astride the mare. When they did act up, it was Matt who took them in hand. He scolded them when it was necessary, prepared their food the way they liked it, and told them a story every night before they went to sleep on their spruce beds. Most of his stories seemed to Tom little calculated to make children sleep; they were about giants and beanstalks that climbed to the sky, and about ugly beasts turning into handsome princes, and wicked queens who fed

poisoned apples to beautiful girls. Tom wondered where Matt had picked them up; he'd never heard any of them himself, although his folks had not been much on story-telling. Then he remembered that Matt's mother had been born and raised in England. That probably accounted for it.

I suppose Jessica knows those stories, too, Tom thought. I'll have to ask her. The kids like 'em, all right. But maybe it's Matt.

It was pleasing to Tom to see the change in the boy. Actually, he was a boy no longer. In those few short months he had become a man. His face had lost its boyish roundness and was now lean and leathered from the sun and wind. While the rest of the army had been losing weight on the short rations during the expedition, Matt had filled out to a muscular hardness, and Tom guessed that he had grown taller as well. Even more pronounced was the change in his manner; the youthful volubility and constant curiosity had gradually given way to conversation only when the occasion required. I guess maybe Murph and Dave and I taught him a couple of things, Tom thought. He's going to be a woodsrunner, and a good one. Only we couldn't have taught him a thing if he hadn't been willing and able to learn. He's going to be all right.

They were seventeen days reaching the ford on the East Branch above which Brant had trapped the militia. It seemed so long ago, and yet this was only the end of October. Tom supposed it was the seasonal transition which made that battle seem so remote in place and time. The leaves had fallen from the trees; the mountainsides were brown and gaunt; the chill wind swirled down the slopes and across the valleys. There had been snow flurries three times in the past two days. Tom was keeping the fastest pace of which the old mare was capable, to get them over the mountains before they hit a real storm.

They camped beside the ford on the far side of the river. Matt was unusually taciturn that evening, and Tom noticed that he omitted the children's story when he put them to sleep.

He'll remember this place all the rest of his life, Tom thought. I will too, and so will the others who were here. But he has more to remember than most.

At dawn the next morning, Tom noticed that Matt seemed on the point of speaking to him several times.

"Something bothering you, Matt?" Tom asked.

"Yeah, Tom. I was wondering if you'd show me where it happened. Where they got Pa, I mean."

Tom hesitated a moment. He knew that the buzzards and the wolves and the other forest creatures had long since finished their work across the river. There would be nothing recognizable for Matt to find. It would perhaps be better to tell him that he couldn't point out the spot.

But he's got a right to know, Tom thought. I'm not the one to say he shouldn't.

"All right, Matt. I'll show you. It's right across the river there."

When they had crossed the ford, Tom pointed out the clump of scrub pines where Bez Finch had fallen.

"Want me to come along, Matt?"

"I guess not, Tom. I'll catch up to you in a while."

"Sure. We'll take it slow for a ways."

As Tom and the children moved along the river bank under the plateau, he was tempted to go up and look around, but he decided it would serve no purpose and he didn't want to leave the children alone on the trail. The plateau would remain as it was until the people of Cedar Bush came out to bury their dead. The underbrush would flourish and wither in the seasons; the bark on the trees would curl around the bullet scars; the falling leaves would cover the whitened bones; in years to come people might never know that brave men had fought and died in those rocks.

Let it be, Tom thought. Maybe some day the place will be marked with a stone to show where it happened. But now, just let it be.

Here and there along the trail as they moved, Tom saw the rusted barrels of muskets abandoned in flight, and sometimes a weather-stained rotting bit of cloth hanging to the un-

derbrush. When Matt came trotting along the trail to join them, Tom and the children had already left the river bank and were headed into the mountains.

"You find the place, Matt?" Tom asked softly.

"Yeah. I found what there was to find," the boy said grimly.

"I buried him there and marked it with a cross. Some day I'll come back to get him."

"Sure, Matt. We'll come back for all of them."

"I guess he'd want to be buried with Ma down in Cedar Bush."

Tom nodded, sensing that the boy didn't want to talk any further. In a moment or two, Matt said he'd move ahead and see if he could shoot some squirrels. Tom watched him go with a touch of a smile on his lips. Quite a change! In three months, Matt had become the hunter and he the baby-tender.

By mid-morning two days later, they had descended the trail below MacDonald's abandoned cabin and reached the Polhamus farm near the bridge across the Deerkill. Mary Polhamus began to cry for her parents when she saw the black ruins of their house, and little Oscar sympathetically joined in her weeping, although it was quite obvious that he didn't know why he was crying. Matt managed to quiet them, and then he turned to Tom.

"I'll go look at my place, Tom, and then I'll head for Highland Landing to see the kids."

"Come over and stay a day or so with us, Matt. Or if Jess is still in Highland Landing, I'll go in with you."

"No, Tom. If she's at the farm, she won't want me around. If she isn't, you come to the fort later on, and we'll go to Highland Landing."

"All right, Matt. But I have an idea she's here. I hope she's got a cabin up for us to stay in." Tom put out his hand and Matt shook it. "I guess I'll see you in the spring. You tell 'em I'll be back before the fighting starts."

"Sure, Tom. Thanks for all you done for me, and I'll be watching for you next spring."

"I'll be there."

So Matt crossed the bridge and started south along the river bank, while Tom gave the old mare a smack with the flat of his hand to start her heading north on the road beside the stream. There was a chill wind tossing the dry leaves down from the trees and causing them to swirl and flutter on the ground. The children were still snuffling, but they began to smile through their tears when Tom prodded the mare and said: "Lift your feet, Old Lady. Step smart now. You're almost home."

The children picked up his name for the mare and were soon chorusing happily: "Come on, Old Lady! Almost home, Old Lady!"

Tom feared that Jessica would not be there; the charred timbers would be lying where they had fallen; his meadows would have the forlorn and lonely look of abandonment. Were it not for the children, he would have run the rest of the way in his eagerness to see his land. But when he reached the edge of the woods beside the stream, he was almost afraid to move forward.

He took two steps and then halted. He stood there motionless, staring across the meadow. The mare stopped beside him. There, where in late July had been blackened ruins topped by a tumbling chimney, was a big stone house with a wide white-pillared porch, with two big chimneys at either end, with gleaming windows set in white sashes. Framing the house, seeming to shelter it, were the four tall copper beeches which Tom's father had planted. From one of the chimneys smoke whipped in the cold October wind. Beyond the house about fifty yards, under the foothill slope, was the skeleton of a partially finished barn, bigger than any Tom had seen in this part of Highland County. Beside it was a smaller structure, completed and painted gray. Nearer the house, almost hidden by tall elms, was a small stone building, a springhouse. Tom's attention returned to the new house.

It's big, he thought. As big as we'll ever need. And strong and solid and fine. There's nothing to touch it this side of Highland Landing. And it's ours.

His throat constricted and he swallowed. He brushed one

finger across his eyes. He stayed there motionless for a moment yet, leaning on his rifle.

"Whose house is that, Mr. Currie?" asked Mary Polhamus.

He didn't answer immediately.

"Whose house?" Oscar demanded.

"Why, that's my house," Tom said with a smile. "We can all live there for a while."

"It's nice," Mary said. "Me and Oscar like it, don't we, Oscar?"

The boy nodded solemnly.

"Well, let's go take a look at it," Tom said. "Come on, Old Lady."

The mare stepped forward, and Tom moved beside her. He saw two men emerge from the big barn, carrying a long plank. They put it down in the barnyard, and then he saw one of them pointing. They stood watching a moment or two, and then one of them yelled something with his hands cupped to his mouth. He waved and started running for the house. Before he reached it, a side door opened and a woman came out and stood on the steps. Tom saw her turn and look down the lane. He saw the man pointing.

She was off the steps and running. He too was running. She had picked up her skirts and her hair was flying in the wind. Swiftly, yet carefully, he let his rifle slide to the grass beside the lane and held out his arms to her. She came into them, and he stood there with his lips bent to hers. They stood like that a long time. Then she drew back her head and looked up at him. Tears were flowing down her cheeks, but she was smiling. The mare came abreast of them and went by, the children calling to Jessica: "Look at us, Mis' Currie! On Old Lady! Look at us!"

With his arm around her waist, Tom started to lead Jessica up the lane. She stopped him and kissed him again. He looked up at the house again, at Ben Whittaker standing beside the kitchen steps, at the barn, at the mountains in the distance. Neither of them had yet spoken. Then, as if it were an afterthought, Tom smiled and said in a kind of wonder: "Well, Jess. I'm home."

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