

Ellis Edward Sylvester

The Wilderness Fugitives



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CHAPTER I. ALONE AND TOGETHER

The reader will recall that at the close of *The River Fugitives* the narrative left our friends in a situation, apparently, of safety; and the belief, on the part of Jo Minturn, his sister Rosa and Ned Clinton, was strong that, in their flight from the dreadful scenes of the Wyoming massacre of July, 1778, they had left all dangers behind. They were confident that, under the guidance of the matchless Mohawk, Lena-Wingo (temporarily absent in quest of food), the road to security was beset by no perils worth the mention.

But, as has also been intimated, they were altogether wrong in this belief. Brother and sister and Ned Clinton were seated near each other on a fallen tree, and it was not yet fully dark when the soft tread of a moccasin was heard on the leaves, and they saw the tall, slim figure of the Mohawk come forth like some spirit of the forest to ask them their business in thus invading his domains. The supposition was so general that he had gone in quest of food, that a common instinct led them to look to see whether he brought anything of that nature with him. There was enough light left to show that he carried nothing but his gun.

"Well, Jack," said Ned, "we thought you had gone out foraging, but if you did, you didn't make much success of it."

"Lena-Wingo didn't hunt eat – he hunt something more."

"Well, did he find it?" asked Rosa, who was more daring in her questions than the others thought it prudent to be.

"Yes – he find him."

"Why don't you bring him here, then, that we may see him?"

"He gone," was the direct but rather unsatisfactory answer, for there was no telling to what he referred.

Rosa was on the point of questioning him further, when it struck her that if he desired them to know what he had been doing he would tell them only when he chose. And so she forbore.

"I hope the result was pleasing to you," ventured Ned Clinton, on what seemed forbidden ground.

"When Lena-Wingo look for Iroquois in canoe, he take knife along."

As this remark was clearly intended in the light of a joke, all felt the duty of laughing at it, although the mirthful inclination was not very tremendous, coming from such a grim source.

"Jo," added the redskin, after waiting for the applause to wear itself out, "want to see you."

The young man thus appealed to sprang to his feet, and placed himself beside the red scout, wondering what he could have to say that he should keep from the rest. Ned and Rosa saw them talking together for a minute or two, when they turned, as if to walk deeper into the woods. At that moment, Jo looked around and called to them in a cautious voice, just loud enough to be heard:

"We won't be back for some time."

This was a curious proceeding, indeed; but there was no use of protesting against it. The Mohawk had a way of doing as he pleased about such matters, and it was useless to interfere. When they had been gone several minutes, it struck Ned that, as they would not be back for awhile, he was given a chance to converse with Rosa, such as had not been his since the invasion of the Wyoming valley.

The consciousness came upon him so suddenly that he was not a little confused by the problem of how he was to improve the opportunity. True, he had spent many hours in the company of the beautiful girl, but it seemed to him that never had he felt as he did then. He was sure that she must be aware of the unutterably tender affection he held toward her – a feeling that had grown within the last few days, until it took possession of his being. Not until the life of Rosa Minturn was placed in peril did he comprehend how much he loved her. When there was reason to fear she was in the hands of the Iroquois or the Tory colonel, and that he might never see her more, then it was that it seemed his heart must break from grief alone. And when, a short time after, she was found without a hair of her head injured, his joy was correspondingly great – so great, indeed, that he was sure all noticed it, even Rosa herself.

The couple were seated upon a fallen tree, there being some two or three feet of space between them. The twilight, which was fairly upon forest and stream, threw the faces of both in shadow, and Ned was glad of it. If there was one thing in the world of which he was absolutely certain, it was that he was never so ill at ease as he was at that moment, it following, as a matter of course, that Rosa could not but be aware of it, and that she looked upon him with pity and contempt. She was wonderfully kind, it seemed to him, and so far as he could judge, showed no consciousness of the pitiful exhibition he was making of himself.

"When we once arrive at Wilkesbarre, and you are safe from the Indians and Tories, I suppose Jack will hasten back to your parents with the tidings, for it will be a great relief to them."

"He hasn't said anything to me about it, but it will be just like him, for he is never content with anything except danger and action."

"It would have gone hard with you if you had had any one besides him to lead you through the woods."

"None is so capable as he when he chooses to exert himself; but I think he has been a little careless. There was no need of his being caught as he was in that house when you went to his rescue."

Although it was too dark for it to be seen, yet a crimson flush overspread the face of the young scout again at receiving such a compliment from those fair lips. He checked the protest that rose to his own with the remembrance of the reproof of Jo, fearing that he might appear to assume a modesty that he did not feel.

"Where one has done so much for us as the Mohawk, it would be ungrateful not to give him what assistance I could. I was as much pleased as was he that I was able to divert the attention of the Iroquois until he found a chance to get away. But, Rosa, you know as well as I that they could not have held him there, for he has been in many a worse situation than that."

"That may all be true, Edward, but you do wrong to throw aside all the credit, as you seem anxious to do. You acted bravely, and you know it. Jo has told me about it, and he said more than that, too!"

"I don't know what he could say more than that," said young Clinton in surprise.

"He told me that you had a dreadful time in getting away from the battle. You had to swim the river out to Monacacy island, and the Indians followed you, and came near capturing both. You acted very bravely again, as any one who knows you might have been sure you would, and helped him very much, indeed. I thank you for that, Edward."

"I don't want to appear in the light of disputant of all that Jo says, but he gives me more credit in that matter than belongs to me. It was all we could do, and more than appeared possible, to take care of ourselves – each of us alone, without thinking of the other. He surely helped me as much as I helped him."

"Well, I shall have to wait till I hear what he has to say about that," responded Rosa, with that persistency so charming in a beautiful woman when it is in favor of him with whom she is holding her argument.

The certainty that he possessed the good opinion of this girl, in spite of his own sense of awkwardness and embarrassment, caused more than one thrill of delight to pass through the young hero as he listened to the words – a thousand times more delightful – coming from such lips as hers.

"I am pleased beyond measure," he said, gathering courage from her utterances, and the darkness that now veiled their faces from each other, "to find that I have earned your good opinion, and all that I ask is that I may continue to deserve it."

"Why, of course you will," she was prompt to reply. "What could you do to make any one respect you less?"

"Well, I might do a great many things that I hope I won't do," he laughed. "Not to mention my own principles, the fear of displeasing you would be enough at any time – "

"Sh!" interrupted Rosa, in a frightened whisper. "I am sure I heard some one just then behind us."

CHAPTER II. SOFT AND LOW

At the mention of suspected danger, Clinton sprang up and moved in the direction whence he supposed it came, though he heard nothing of it himself. It was so dark that he could see but a little way in the woods. After stealing a few paces, rifle in hand, he paused and listened, thinking that if any enemies were at hand, they would be sure to betray themselves by attempting to advance. But the stillness remained unbroken, and he suspected that Rosa had been mistaken. Even though he knew not where Jo and the Mohawk were just then, he was sure that they were at no great distance, and the redskin was certain to discover the approach of any foe. When five or ten minutes passed he turned about and rejoined his fair friend.

"You must have been in error," said he.

"I *was* mistaken," she said, with a laugh; "and I was on the point of calling and telling you what it was."

"Well, what was it?"

"Lena-Wingo; he was here a minute ago, and said he had come to see if all was right, after which he went back to where Jo is waiting for him."

"How long before they will be here again?"

"Not very long," said Rosa. "He told me they were not quite ready to start, but would be shortly; he made a little noise when he was coming, so as to let us know he was near!"

"And I didn't hear him. If it hadn't been for you, he would have come right upon us."

Ned sat down on the fallen tree beside Rosa. Somehow or other, the space between the two was reduced almost to no space at all. It may have been that the young scout was so absent-minded, that he forgot about the respectable gap that existed a short time before. But be that as it may, Rosa herself was so absent-minded, also, that she forgot to remind him of it. So they sat, so near that they could afford to understand each other without speaking above a whisper.

Having resumed his seat, Ned sat a while trying to think of something appropriate to say, but it seemed that all his ideas were scattered to the winds. When that interruption broke in upon them, he flattered himself that he was getting along very well – that is, for him – but now – why, he was never so put to it in all his life. If the innocent cause of all this misery had not come to his relief, there is no telling how long the oppressive silence would have lasted. But Rosa was merciful, or else she became tired of waiting.

"Edward," said she, in that low, winning voice that was hers alone, "when Colonel Butler and his Tories and Indians leave the valley, what are you going to do?"

"Whatever seems the best for our country. I cannot exactly say what that will be, but I have thought I would join the Continental Army under Washington. I so love and revere that great man, that I can fight better if near him, where I can see his face and hear his voice now and then."

"I have often thought the same thing myself, but I have never seen him. Lena-Wingo told me that he has spoken to him many times, and he looks upon him as if he were some one sent by the Great Spirit to save our country."

"He means Heaven when he speaks of the Great Spirit, and he is right; for he is the man of all others to carry the colonies to their independence."

"Have you ever seen Washington?"

"No. That great pleasure is before me. But I have talked with many who have, and they have raised my eagerness to the highest point. But," he added, more thoughtfully, "it would not be right for me to go to his army and enlist just to fight under him, when I may be needed somewhere else!"

"You cannot go anywhere that you will not be needed," said Rosa, in the same thoughtful voice. "There are too many Tories and Britons, and too few patriots, in this country. If ever I wished that I was a man it is now, that I might shoulder a musket, and help fight the battles of my country."

"That you cannot do, of course, but you can encourage all who are at home and able to bear a hand to do so; if I were the greatest coward that ever lived, your words would drive me into the army, for it would take more courage to brave them than to face the cannon's mouth, or cross bayonets with the British regulars."

"You seem to place great value on my counsel, Edward."

"So I do; I would rather die than displease you in anything."

These fervent words were uttered in a low, earnest tone, that Ned would not have dared to use a few minutes before, when he first took his seat so close to the idol of his heart. As was perhaps natural, it was the girl who seemed never to lose her self-command, and who parried every attempt to broach the subject that was evidently clamoring for utterance in the heart of the youth.

"Well, if you value my opinion so highly," she answered, in that half-frivolous and half-serious tone that was especially tantalizing to one of his ardent temperament, "I shall be very careful of the advice I give."

"You couldn't advise me to do anything except that which is best for myself and country."

"I can reply as you did a moment ago – that I could easily do so, but I have no intention of trying it. Jo tells me that you and he are to go together?"

"Of course we shall. We have been friends all our lives, and we may as well stick together in the army."

"I am glad to hear that, for it has many advantages – but why talk of those things now?"

The girl looked around in the darkness, as if she wondered at the continued absence of Lena-Wingo and her brother.

"I am half tempted to lose my patience with Jack!" she said, after a minute of waiting and listening. "He doesn't seem to be in a hurry at all; we ought to have been in Wilkesbarre before daylight this morning, and here it is dark again, and there is no telling when he will be ready to start."

"I have no fear of the Mohawk," replied Ned, who thought they might find a much more interesting subject to talk about. "He will be here in due time, and is sure to do his part in whatever needs to be done. I think he has gone in search of that supply of food he was talking about a while ago. When he gets it he will bring us a good supper, which will not come amiss to any of us, although I should have preferred to eat it in Wilkesbarre."

"We may as well content ourselves here until Jack is ready," said Ned, keeping his seat as close to Rosa as he conveniently could. "Until then, remember that I am here, ready to defend you with my life."

"I know you would, Edward," she responded in a softer, tenderer voice than the last few words had been spoken. "But I do not want to see the occasion come."

"I should welcome it, Rosa, to prove my devotion to you."

"I need no proof," she answered, speaking so low that he barely caught the words.

"How happy your words have made me! Hello! here comes some one at last!"

CHAPTER III. EAVESDROPPING

Both supposed that they heard the footsteps of Lena-Wingo and Jo Minturn; but a habit taught by the hard experience of the last few days caused them to cease speaking and to listen. Only a second was needed to tell them that strangers were approaching them, although, fortunately they were not heading in a direct line for the place where the lovers were sitting. Had it been otherwise, it is hard to see how they could have escaped observation. The men were issuing from the wood and making for the shore of the river, aiming at a point a few yards above where Ned and Rosa were stationed. They were walking at a leisurely gait, evidently with no suspicion that any white persons were within earshot. Judging from the sound of feet upon the leaves, a half dozen persons were proceeding without any caution at all, talking as freely as if together at their own homes.

The feelings of Rosa Minturn, when she recognized the voice of the Tory colonel, Butler, may be imagined. He was accompanied by another white man, probably one of his officers, and several Indians, and he was talking more freely. In the stillness of the summer night, while they were so close at hand, it was as easy to distinguish every word uttered as if the speech was intended for the ears of the eavesdroppers.

"We have heard so much of the smartness of that Mohawk scout that I began to think there was something in him," said the principal member of the party, Rosa identifying him as the detested Butler. "But I have never seen anything myself that showed up very well on his part. Here he is on this side of the Susquehanna, when he ought to have been at Wilkesbarre before daylight this morning."

"We ought to have been there before that time, even," replied his companion. "I am sure we could have played the deuce with that place, a confounded sight better than with Wyoming, for they were so scared that they were on the run and that's just the time to strike, you know, colonel."

"Yes; we might have done something if we had gone over at once, but it was some time before we learned what was going on."

"I hear they are not much better yet, and it seems to me that it is not too late to slip our men across and clean 'em out."

But Colonel Butler was too wily to consent to any such project, although there was reason to believe that it might have succeeded, even though deferred till that rather late hour.

"It isn't worth our while. There's only one more of the rebels that I want to lay hands on. Let me get that one and the rest may go."

"I think I know who it is, colonel."

"No doubt you do," was the prompt reply. "Any one who has heard me speak within the last twenty-four hours has found it out. I tell you, captain, that you don't often see as pretty a rebel as that young Minturn. She slipped off last night because she found I admired her so much that I couldn't keep my eyes from her."

"You're right there, colonel, when you speak of her beauty, for I have never seen one that could surpass her; I wonder that she don't turn the heads of all she meets. Perhaps she does, though, and, if you hadn't foreclosed there, I would be tempted to make a claim myself."

"It will be dangerous for any man to interfere with me."

The individual whom he addressed as a captain was heard to laugh at the words of his superior officer, and he replied:

"I am sure there is no fear of my trying to intrude myself in that direction, for I am opposed to the thing on principle."

"I am aware of that," replied the colonel, the party having halted on the edge of the river, as if awaiting the coming of some one. "Of course I had no reference to *you* when I spoke, but I feel especially angry toward Red Jack, or Lena-Wingo, and I will give a good deal for his scalp. He has played the mischief with our plans more than once, and now, when everything is going along just as I want it to, he comes in and walks off with the prize."

"But don't you suppose he was set up to do it?"

"Certainly; and Colonel Denison was the man who put it into his head. I can see it all now, though I didn't suspect it at the time."

"Why don't you shoot him?"

"I was mad enough to do that; and I believe that if I had met him last night, after the Mohawk escaped so narrowly being cut through by my sword, I would have done it. But I have thought the matter over to-day, and made up my mind that it won't pay. There have already been some things about this Wyoming business that will make trouble. The Indians ought to have killed every rebel that wasn't shot down in battle; but they let so many get away that they will tell all sorts of stories about us, and when they get to England, they may interfere with some little plans of my own."¹

"Well, if you catch the bird that flew away, you can afford to forgive the well-intended schemes; for when she is once in your hands, what care you for others? You tell me, colonel, that the Mohawk did not reach Wilkesbarre with her to-day?"

"No. I had word from there at sunset, and they had not been seen anywhere in the neighborhood; and, as the Mohawk was observed on this side of the stream near noon to-day, he must still be here."

"It has been dark quite awhile, and he may have slipped across since the sun went down."

"He may, it is true, but it is hardly likely, for the redskins, as a rule, don't like to do their work until the latter part of the night. People are too apt to be wide awake in the earlier portion of the evening; and I am quite sure Red Jack will wait till beyond midnight before he makes a move in the business."

"The night promises to be dark, so that when he undertakes to paddle to the other shore, he will be pretty apt to do it."

"It isn't likely we could hinder him, if he was on the watch, as I suppose he will be," growled Butler, reluctant to concede to the redskin the skill and prowess that he knew properly belonged to him. "But I have figured on the supposition that he will get safely across with the girl, so it won't make much difference whether he does set foot on the other shore or not. If he *does* get there, though, he will find there is more than one lion in the path between him and Wilkesbarre. I have some of the best runners and scouts of the Iroquois on the hunt for the couple, and it is scarcely possible that they can fail. I go across myself, so as to be ready to take charge of matters the minute a competent guiding hand is needed."

"And you want me to go with you?"

"You may as well, for matters are dull behind us, and are likely to stay so for the few days that we shall yet remain. Come along with us, Captain Bagley, and you will be likely to see some sport before you get back."

"That reminds me," said the officer, whose name was just spoken, "that I heard somewhere from some one that this pretty rebel has an ardent admirer and lover in the person of a young soldier of Denison's forces, and that he and a brother of the girl fought like the very deuce in the battle –"

"And was killed?" struck in the Tory, with an eagerness that showed how intense was his hate for the one who dared to love with a pure and holy affection her whom he had selected as the object of his sinful admiration.

¹ After the Revolution, Colonel Butler tried hard to obtain the honor of knighthood from the King of Great Britain, but failed.

"I am sorry to say I cannot give you that information," said the captain, with a half-laugh at the colonel's eagerness. "Both young men, I have been told, managed to get through the battle without a scratch, and are probably somewhere in the valley at this moment – perhaps trying to help the young lady to get to Wilkesbarre."

Colonel Butler broke in with an imprecation, as he recalled the accounts he had received of the affair at the settler's house that same day, and which left no doubt in his mind that the two young rebels referred to were acting in concert with the Mohawk scout, Lena-Wingo.

CHAPTER IV. THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE

Rosa and Ned, without wish or intention on their part, were obtaining some very interesting information from the Tory leader; and, as the way was not clear as to a safe method of extricating themselves from the position of eavesdroppers, they could do nothing more than hold their peace and allow the entertainment to continue.

The Tory was enraged by the discovery that Rosa was the beloved of another, who was probably doing all he could at that moment to assist in placing her beyond his reach, and to raise himself in her affection by such a display of devotion.

"When are you going to cross over?" inquired his companion.

"Right away – we have waited too long already. The evening is well along, and we're losing time."

The sounds which succeeded showed that the party were moving nearer the river shore, having been standing a few feet off while holding the conversation. Back in the darkness of the wood, Rosa and Ned were invisible, while they were able to catch the outlines of the moving figures when thrown against the dim sky beyond. It was plain that the party meant to use the canoe in which the girl had spent a portion of the afternoon, and which, it was intended, should serve as a vehicle to carry the whites to the other side.

The redmen were heard placing the boat in position, and the splash of the paddle was noticed as all took their places, and the oarsman assumed his duty of guiding the craft, burdened to its utmost capacity, across the Susquehanna. Colonel Butler, who had been so talkative a few minutes before, and also accommodating enough to reveal his purposes to those most concerned, seemed to have gone to the other extreme, for nothing more was heard from him. Captain Bagley took upon himself the task of directing the movements of the others, whenever they needed direction. The canoe, with its occupants, left the shore and was impelled into the Susquehanna, heading for the other bank, invisible in the gloom of the night. Before the craft had vanished, however, Ned caught sight of a couple of figures on the bank immediately in front of where he was standing with Rosa.

"Sh!" she whispered, detecting the fact at the same instant; "they have left a couple behind."

At this instant one of the forms turned and advanced toward them, the distance being so short that he had taken but a few steps when he arrived.

"Did you see them?" he asked, when he was at their side.

"See them? Of course we did," replied Rosa, recognizing her brother, "and we heard them, too. They've been standing and talking together right here, close enough for us to hear every word they said."

"Well, what did they say?"

"It would be hard to tell what they didn't say," replied Rosa, with something of her old spirit of mischief. "Colonel Butler is very sweet on some young rebel, which I am afraid is about my age, and looks very much like me. He has gone across the river to catch me before I can reach Wilkesbarre, but I don't see why he need be in a hurry, for I don't think we'll see that place within a couple of weeks, unless Lena-Wingo gets in more of a hurry than he is now."

This "satirical" remark was intended for the ears of the Mohawk, who had approached during the last few seconds, and who did not lose a syllable; but it would have taken more bitter words than ever fell from those sweet lips to stir any resentful feelings in his dusky breast.

"Talk much," was the only response he made, thereby uttering a truth which not even the young lady herself would deny.

"What else did he say?" asked Jo, referring to Colonel Butler.

"Well, the substance of it all was that he had sent a lot of Iroquois across the river to cut us off before we can reach Wilkesbarre, and he has no doubt they will succeed. He goes over himself, so as to be on hand, I believe, to take charge of me – that is, when *they catch me*."

"Is that all?"

"Do you think of anything more?" asked Rosa, addressing Ned.

"You have given all that was said – that is, all that is worth telling," answered the young man, into whose brain were burned some utterances which had not been referred to by his fair companion.

"If there is anything else," persisted Jo, "why, let's have it; for though it may seem trifling to you, it may be of importance when weighed by the Mohawk. Out with all you remember!"

"I have nothing more to tell," replied Ned, feeling the situation becoming embarrassing.

"I forgot something else," added the girl, in a light manner, that sent the shivers down the back of young Minturn, for his instinct told him what was coming. "You can't ask me to tell you all the bad words Colonel Butler used."

"Not unless you would like to go over them, but let me know what it was that *caused* him to speak in that style?"

"Oh! but he had good cause for it all, for that wicked Captain Bagley told him there was a young gentleman somewhere that thought all the world of me, and of whom I thought all the world, and the idea that I liked anybody else besides him was what made him so angry. I believe you have *all* now."

"Yes, I believe I have," replied Jo, with a low laugh. "Jack and I were standing almost as close to them as were you and Ned, and we heard their conversation."

If the pretty sister had possessed a parasol, she would have made her brother's head feel the weight thereof. All this was pure jest that seemed to intrude itself by a law of physiology into the hearts oppressed so long by grief, dread and anxiety. But there was one heart upon which the airy words fell with a weight of which the speakers never dreamed. To Ned Clinton there was something cruel in this reference to his affection for Rosa. He considered it a sacred secret – perhaps dimly suspected now by Rosa herself – too sacred, indeed, to be spoken of in jest by others.

He knew that his friends meant no unkindness, but it touched him scarcely the less for all that. He and Rosa had passed a few deep, earnest words, bearing upon that dream of the future which he cherished so fondly, and not the words merely, but the tones, the manner and the occasion gave them a significance which was of the profoundest import to him; and now to hear the maiden refer to them as she did pained him. Was it, then, all a jest to her? Did she regard the picture he had faintly limned as one of those unsubstantial dreams which the young and ambitious are so fond of drawing, and which can never be realized? Did she look upon him merely as a friend – a dear one, perhaps, whom she had known and liked from their early childhood, because they had been schoolmates, and he and her brother were friends?

In short, was it not evidence that she merely *liked*, but felt nothing at all of *love* – that great over-mastering emotion that pervaded and swayed his whole nature?

CHAPTER V. A LIGHT AHEAD

On the eve of starting for their destination they were confronted by a practical difficulty, necessary to surmount before the journey could be made. Their enemies had coolly appropriated the boat in which they had intended to cross the river, and, another must be found for the use of the fugitives. Ordinarily, this would have been a small matter, but, coming as it did, it presented a difficulty not easily surmounted. Where was the canoe to be secured? Lena-Wingo was the one to whom the others looked to solve the problem, and he undertook it without delay.

"Stay here," said he. "Lena-Wingo find canoe."

"If you can manage to get back before to-morrow night," put in Rosa, "it may save us a deal of valuable time."

"Lena-Wingo come back soon as can – girl don't talk much."

"I am glad to hear you speak so encouragingly," she responded, as he moved off and instantly vanished in the deep gloom of the night.

Left to themselves, the three had little to do but to wait and hope that their dusky friend would make good the promise of returning as soon as possible.

"It is one of those things that could not be discounted beforehand," said Jo Minturn, feeling that his sister was becoming unjustly impatient. "For no one could have dreamed that they would step up at the moment we were ready to start, and run off with the boat."

"They must have known nothing about Rosa having occupied it this afternoon," remarked Ned Clinton, glad of the chance of saying something that would ward off any approach to the matter that had caused him so much pain. "Their actions showed they did not suspect what had taken place while they were gone."

"Yes; some of them must have taken that boat to the place this forenoon or early in the afternoon, with the purpose of using it to carry the colonel to the other shore."

"Suppose Lena-Wingo doesn't find another canoe?" asked Rosa, who felt anything but comfortable over the absence of the tried and trusty scout.

"It may take him longer than he wants, but he will succeed, you may be sure of that."

"I should like to know why you and he went off in that mysterious fashion a short time ago?" continued the girl, addressing her brother. "It must have been a very important errand, judging from the way you managed it."

"Well, I think it was important, for it was to find something to eat, and I notice you are pretty sure to be interested in anything of that nature."

"Well, did you get any food?"

"We got on the track of some when Colonel Butler appeared with his Iroquois, and we had to take a look after them."

"So you didn't find any, after all," she repeated. "It is about what I expected when you went away."

"Don't be too quick to judge us," replied the brother, in a voice that was meant to signify a deal more than the mere words. "You'll be surprised before long."

"The only thing to surprise me will be to see something like haste used in getting over the river to Wilkesbarre. I suspect that Lena-Wingo will wait till daylight before making the start, even if he finds a canoe, on the ground that we ought to have something to eat before starting."

A few minutes after, while the two were in an earnest discussion, the Mohawk appeared among them, and said, in his sententious manner:

"Come with me – walk still – make no noise."

The fugitives had been in enough danger to render this admonition unnecessary, but it was a warning which the Mohawk seemed to consider timely on all occasions, for he was much addicted to using it. It was so dark in the gloom of the forest that it was a matter of no small difficulty for the little party to keep together.

"Jo, you had better take my hand on one side, and you, Edward, on the other," said Rosa, "it is hard work to get along without help."

The suggestion was adopted without much perceptible increase of speed, as it still was necessary to feel their way with great caution to prevent collisions with trunks and limbs. But the bliss of Ned Clinton; who shall tell it? He forgot all the misery of a short time before when the world seemed dismal and full of despair, and was only conscious of the sweet fact that he held the hand of Rosa Minturn in his own! At the first touch it seemed that a thrill like the flash of the subtle magnetic current passed through him, and he would not have cared if the journey continued for half a dozen miles, so long as this arrangement lasted.

The admonition of the red scout was not forgotten, and when they spoke it was in whispers, while frequent pauses were made, in answer to the faintest possible "Sh!" of Lena-Wingo, who was conducting matters with his proverbial caution. Minturn saw something suggestive in the fact that their guide was leading them away from instead of toward the river, for the depths of the wood was not the place to look for the canoe, of which they stood in so much need just then. He suspected there was another reason, which would soon become apparent. Ned might have noticed the same fact and made inquiry about it, had he been capable of appreciating anything besides the delight of holding the hand of his beloved. That was happiness enough to last him at least for the time in which the journey continued, and he cared very little whither their guide led them, so long as he did not separate him from Rosa.

Where all was shrouded in such darkness, neither of the fugitives, with the exception of the Mohawk, was able to keep anything like a knowledge of the precise course which they were following. The ground was familiar to all, and indeed there was not one who had not been over it so frequently that he or she would have identified it in the daytime. But when all was indistinguishable, in the darkness of the night, they could only trust to the skill of the dusky guide, who seemed able at any time to pick his way with unerring accuracy through the trackless forest.

In the earlier portion of the evening there was no moon, but after starting a faint one was observed in the sky, and enough of its rays penetrated the branches overhead to afford considerable assistance to the three who were threading their way as best they could in the track of the Mohawk. A few minutes after the moon was noticed, all were startled by hearing the discharge of a gun at no great distance on their left – that is, away from the river. They paused and listened, expecting something to follow that would explain what the report meant. But the stillness remained as profound as that of the grave, the night being so quiet that there was scarcely a rustle among the branches overhead, while not even the soft flow of the river reached their ears.

The pause was only a few minutes in length, when the cautious journey was resumed, still heading some little distance away from the stream which they were so anxious to cross. Rosa had observed this fact before, but she felt that it was hardly the thing to criticise the Mohawk when he was at work; but she was becoming impatient, and might have said something in the way of protest, but for the discovery that a bright light was shining ahead of them, which light undoubtedly meant something of interest to them all.

CHAPTER VI. THE FRAGMENTS OF THE FEAST

The instant the light was detected, the attention of all the fugitives became centered upon it, for it was plain they were journeying in a direct line toward it, and unless a speedy turn to the right or left was made, the camp fire, as it appeared to be, would soon be reached. Viewed as they neared it, it seemed to be simply a fire, and nothing more, there being so many intervening trees and undergrowth, that nothing except the light itself was noticeable. But, as a rule, wherever there was a camp fire there were those who kindled it, and it struck Rosa that the Mohawk was reckless in advancing upon it; but she held her peace, certain he would commit no blunder.

The little party continued advancing steadily until within less than a hundred yards, when, as if by a common instinct, they halted, with their eyes bent inquiringly upon the fire. It was more plainly visible than before, and was seen to be burning brightly, showing that if no persons were near it, they had been absent but a short time.

"Stay here – I go look – make no noise."

With these words, Lena-Wingo moved toward the blaze, and his tall, dark figure was seen more than once as in its stealthy advance it came between them and the flames. But, as it neared them, he made a turn which shut him from sight until a short distance away on his return. The Mohawk had been absent but a brief time, and when he rejoined them he said:

"Come 'long – walk fast – talk if want to."

This seemed curious advice, but it was accepted, and the fugitives kept up a constant talk in low tones, until they had halted before the fire itself. The expectation of Ned and Rosa was to meet some one, most probably a party of the settlers, who were taking refuge in the woods until the Indians and Tories should leave the valley; but in this they were disappointed. Halting directly before the blaze, they looked around, but saw no one besides themselves.

"Rosa," said Jo, with a meaning grin, "do you feel as though you can do justice to a lunch?"

Then the truth flashed upon her. Lena-Wingo had brought them thither for the purpose of furnishing them with supper. A protest rose to her lips, but she checked it, feeling that she had perhaps said too much already. Certainly if any one in the world ought to have faith in the skill and devotion of the Mohawk scout, she was that one, and she resolved at the instant she drove back the complaining words that they should remain unsaid, not for then only, but for all time.

"Well, yes, Jo; I *am* hungry, and if you have anything in the way of supper, I am sure it will be welcomed by all."

"How is it, Ned? Do you feel any hankering for eatables?"

"I do."

"Well, you shall have that yearning satisfied; when Jack and I went off, it was in search of food, for we need it, every one of us. Rosa seems to think we are loitering away our time, but Jack knows what he is doing. It is an easy matter to get across the river, but when on the other side our real trouble will begin. Colonel Butler expects us to cross the stream, and he won't make much effort to prevent us, but what he means to do is to keep us from reaching Wilkesbarre, and we aren't going to get there in a hurry, either. Well, don't you see that we are likely to be in the woods a good while, and we may have to take a long circuitous route to get out? I shouldn't be surprised if we were two or three days longer on the way, for when Jack undertakes a job of this sort, he does it thoroughly, and he isn't the one to spoil it by hurry, no matter what his companions want him to do. All this being so, it isn't necessary to tell you that we must have our meals as regular as we can get them. If we eat a good supper now, we shall be able to pass to-morrow without any food, but it will go hard without anything in that line."

"If you will bring out your supper, Jo, and stop your chatter, I will agree to do the same, but I shan't believe you have anything in the way of food till I see it."

The brother kept up a stream of talk, in the way of badinage, asking his friends to name whatever article of diet they wished, as he could furnish one almost as well as another. Finally, when the thing had continued long enough, he produced the supper, and it was a surprise to Ned and Rosa indeed. While Lena-Wingo was engaged in stirring and throwing more wood on the fire, Jo removed some fresh green leaves from a package that had been lying unnoticed near at hand, and within was found a large piece of roast pig! Furthermore, it was young, tender, well cooked, juicy and clean.

The appetites of all were keen, and as they took seats on the ground and ate as well as they could, with the help of the keen hunting knives of the party, it would have been impossible to enjoy it more. Nobody but the Mohawk knew how long it was since he had partaken of food, but had the period been a week, he could not have shown a keener relish for the nourishing meat. While employed in this pleasant manner, it was explained how it came about that they were furnished with this supper. As Jo had already told his sister, he and the Mohawk started off in quest of food, when they affected such a mystery in their movements.

It was no time nor neighborhood in which to look for game, and their purpose was to hunt some farm-house, where they hoped to find enough of the stock left to furnish them with one meal at least. While on their way through the woods, they came in sight of this same camp fire, which they approached and reconnoitered. The first figure they recognized was that of Colonel Butler, and next to him was Captain Bagley, his well-chosen assistant, besides which there were four Iroquois Indians, whose principal business seemed to be that of roasting a plump pig, which they had stolen from some settler in the valley.

Colonel Butler was very loquacious, and talked so freely with the captain that his purpose of crossing the river speedily became known to the listening scouts. Some of his references to Rosa Minturn were such that Jo would have shot him as he sat eating by his own camp fire, had not the Mohawk interfered and quieted him with the philosophical observation:

"Hain't got gal yet – won't get her – talk won't hurt her."

Although it was certain that the party meant to cross the Susquehanna that night, probably as soon as the supper was finished, yet it did not occur to the Mohawk that they intended to use the canoe which was awaiting the whites. When the Tories and Iroquois completed their meal, they started for the stream, and Lena-Wingo and Jo followed, keeping them under scrutiny until they left the shore for the other side. The party went off leaving their camp fire burning brightly, and as there was no reason to believe that any of their allies were near little was feared in returning to the scene and appropriating what was left as fragments of their feast.

The friends, therefore, ate with that enjoyment which comes of a sharp appetite, good food, and the consciousness that they need be in no hurry to finish. It was the purpose of the Mohawk to place his companions on the other side of the stream before daylight, but he convinced them that there was nothing to be gained by hurrying in the business.

As the weak force at the station of Wilkesbarre would be on guard against the approach of all enemies, especially during the darkness of the night, it would be a matter of difficulty, as well as one of extreme danger, to secure admission at that time. For this reason he preferred to do that part of his work in the daytime, when he could have an opportunity to use all his senses, and not be taken at a disadvantage.

CHAPTER VII. THE REPORT OF A GUN

There was one matter that caused Ned Clinton so much uneasiness that he appealed to the Mohawk to know whether some attention should not be paid to it. That was the report of the gun which they had heard while on the way to, and only a short distance from, this place. If a gun was fired, it followed that some one must have fired it, and the probabilities were the marksman was not far away. Such was the view of the young scout when he reflected upon the affair. Furthermore, nothing seemed so likely to attract the notice of friend or foe, at night, as the blazing camp fire – the most conspicuous object possible at such a time in the forest.

Lena-Wingo was not the one to forget an occurrence like the firing of a gun, and when the question was put to him by Ned, he answered in the most satisfactory manner. Upon his first approach to the camp fire, when conducting his friends thither, he had made a complete circuit of the place, walking so far from the blazing sticks that the reconnoissance was as complete as it could be made. Failing to detect any sign of danger, he concluded that there was none. The gun whose report they had noticed he believed was fired by some white man who was lurking in the neighborhood, in the hope of being able to protect his property, or, more probably, with a view of securing something in the way of food, it might be, for a party of fugitives in hiding at no great distance.

There were many instances of such flight and concealment during the few days of, and succeeding, the massacre of Wyoming. Parties of men and women, who had not been demented by the atrocities that marked that dreadful era in the history of the settlement, were, in some instances, wise enough to seek some good hiding-place before exhausting themselves in the frantic efforts to flee.

By keeping a vigilant watch against the approach of their enemies, and by studiously avoiding an exposure of themselves, except when forced thereto, and by stealing out at night in quest of food, they were able to emerge from the reign of terror far better than hundreds of their neighbors did.

Lena-Wingo was positive that the gun which alarmed them was discharged by a member of such a party, though what his precise reason was for the conclusion was more than any of the three could comprehend or suspect, and he did not make it clear to them. And so the supper of roast pig was eaten in peace, and with an enjoyment that has already been referred to. When it was finished, Jo said:

"Now, as there is no telling when we will be able to secure the next meal – for we can't expect Colonel Butler to keep up his supply of roast pig – I think we ought to take some of this with us to provide for emergencies."

"Where shall we get it?" was the pertinent question of his sister.

"Why, take along what is left."

"Have you any left?"

"Well, no, I haven't any, but I suppose the others have."

"Take a look, and let us know how much there is!"

Jo took the look, as suggested, and the result was, as might have been suspected, there was not so much as an ounce of meat to be found. And yet, they had eaten every particle they wished, so that a more well-ordered meal could not have been furnished.

"What is the use of taking thought for the morrow?" asked Rosa. "Has not Lena-Wingo proved himself able to provide us with all we want in the way of food?"

"There is no denying that, but I only wanted to assist him in a simple matter; and if we are all to possess such appetites as we have shown to-night, it may not be an easy matter, after all, to

keep up the quartermaster's supplies. However," he added, cheerfully, "we won't borrow trouble after the great good fortune that has followed us from the beginning."

They succeeded in making themselves comfortable in this respect, though now and then the manner in which the Mohawk acted caused a doubt to rise. Instead of sitting still, as did the others, while he was eating, he frequently rose to his feet and went off in the woods, the direction from which he reappeared showing that he had been making another of his reconnoissances of their own position. Rosa explained to her companions that such was his invariable custom whenever he was in camp, and it was accepted as a way he had of conducting his own business.

As the party had secured a meal, the next thing was to find the canoe with which to cross the Susquehanna, a proceeding that had been delayed so long that more than one of the little company began to feel a superstitious fear that it might be they were doomed to stay forever on this side. This was a duty which, as a matter of course, belonged to the Mohawk, and, after his usual admonition to his friends about keeping silent during his absence, he went off again. As there was no telling how long the red scout would be gone, it remained for the three friends to content themselves as best they could until his return. This was a comparatively easy matter, or would have been, but for the memory of that single rifle shot heard but a short time before reaching this spot.

"I think the best thing we can do," said Ned Clinton, "is to let this fire go out, or leave it altogether. We are too conspicuous here, and, as the night is quite warm, we can stay in one part as well as another."

"I would rather do it than not," replied Jo, "if we had only asked Red Jack before he went away; but it seems to be always an unlucky thing for us when we disregard his instructions."

"What do you think of it?" asked Ned, turning to Rosa, who, up to this time, had held her peace.

"I suppose Lena-Wingo would not be likely to make any objection, and if he did, I don't see why we should stay here and expose ourselves to danger on his account."

"Very well, I agree to that –"

To the amazement of all, a second report, apparently of the same gun, broke in upon their startled ears.

By a common instinct, they sprang to their feet, and started off in the gloom, expecting to learn the cause of the strange firing. The sound of some one hurrying rapidly over the leaves was heard by all, and Ned Clinton whispered to the rest:

"Quick! Back, out of the way!"

While the words were still in his mouth, the three retreated into the darkness of the woods beyond the light of the camp fire, and paused, waiting, watching and listening. The rustling of the leaves, which had alarmed them so much a short time before, was heard no more, and the same oppressive, because suggestive, silence held reign. Who had fired the gun? At whom was it pointed? Was the marksman a white or red man? Were there more of the Iroquois in the immediate vicinity, and were they stealing up to this camp where the little party of fugitives had taken supper? Were the friends being drawn into a skilfully laid ambush? Such were some of the questions they asked themselves as they stood in the darkness of the forest, waiting for the cause of all this apprehension to come forth and show himself.

Suddenly the same soft rustling of the leaves was detected and whoever was the cause thereof was plainly approaching the camp fire. Then a form issued into view and paused. It was Lena-Wingo, the Mohawk. His friends instantly gathered about him to learn the success of his errand, and the explanation of the report of the rifle.

"You hear gun?" asked the red scout.

"Of course we did," answered Ned, "and what did it mean?"

The old grin came back to the face of the Mohawk as he replied: "That gun fired by white man. He aim at Lena-Wingo!" was the astounding information he gave his companions.

CHAPTER VIII. MR. ISAAC PERKINS

Grinning in his imperturbable fashion, the Mohawk turned part way round, and made a signal, evidently for some one invisible to all. Be that as it may, it was instantly responded to by the coming forward of a man in the ordinary dress of a farmer settler of the valley. He had an honest countenance, and was about forty years old. As he came into full view, so that the firelight fell full upon his face, he was recognized as an old acquaintance, named Perkins, who lived but a short distance from where the camp fire was burning.

"Wall, how are ye all?" he asked in a drawling voice and an accent that betrayed the fact that he was one of the descendants of the Connecticut pioneers that built Forty Fort, not a great many years before. "I say, how are ye all?" he continued, as he began shaking hands round. "I'll be shot if I expected to see any one of ye folks round here. I say, how are ye all agin?"

"Well, Ike," replied Ned Clinton, who was well acquainted with him, and felt authorized to answer, "we are all right, as you can see for yourself, and you seem to be equally fortunate."

"Wall, I s'pose I am," was the hesitating answer, "the main trouble being that we have been suffering for the last few days from a dreadful scare; but then we hain't been injured in any way, thanks be to the Lord for it all."

"Then you aren't alone – "

"Yes, I am," interrupted the farmer; "that is, when I'm abroad."

The precise meaning of this was not clear to the listeners, but Ned continued without noticing it:

"I did not see you in the battle, Mr. Perkins."

"No, thanks be to the Lord for it all, I was able to keep out by running away, when the battle begun, or rather a little before. I had hard work to get clear; thanks to the Lord, I managed to do it."

"Where's your family?"

"Wall, now, thar's where I've ben specially favored again. You know that there are three of us – myself, Mrs. Perkins, and Master George Washington Perkins, aged four years, so I had my hands full in looking after them; but the second Mrs. Perkins is a remarkable woman, and possesses an exceedingly powerful mind – an exceedingly powerful mind, beyond all question. I must give her the credit for the able management of this enterprise, for she deserves more credit than I. You know how brave a man I am by nature, and how I have a natural hankering for gore. Wall, that yearning to be killing some one made me furious to plunge head first into the battle when it began raging down the valley, and I started seventeen times – yes, seventeen times – to go in to do or die, I didn't care which, but Mrs. Perkins had her eagle eye on me, and every time I made a rush, she rushed also, and caught me by the coat-tails, and nothing short of an earthquake could have persuaded her to let go. Wall, to make that story short, she prevailed, and kept me out of the struggle, thanks be to the Lord for all that."

"But how did you manage to keep clear of the Indians?"

"There it was her planning again. She called to mind a spot in the woods not far away, where, when she was a sweet little girl, she used to play hide-and-whoop with her playmates, and where she was always able to secure a hiding that baffled the skill of her young friends, and straightway it occurred to her that there was the very spot in which to take refuge, and there we went."

"Any trouble in getting there?"

"Nothing to speak of," replied the farmer, in his lofty way. "Of course the Tories and Indians tried to head us off, but I had a gun, and the strength of my good right arm, and more than all that, I had Mrs. Perkins as my second in command, and where was the use of any one trying to break

such a combination as that? We were bound to prevail, and we never allowed ourselves to be turned aside by any trifles, and we reached the refuge in safety, and there we are staying, and expect to stay till things quiet down again."

"But how did you manage for food?" asked Jo, desirous of testing the accuracy of the Mohawk's judgment when he declared that the first gun fired had been discharged by a man in the situation of Perkins while searching for something to eat.

"Wall," he said, in the old drawling style peculiar to men who love to hear themselves talk, "when stealing becomes a matter of necessity, it ain't stealing any longer, and I have been in the habit of slipping out on the sly and fetching down some of the stock that's roaming through the woods without knowing who their master is – thanks be to the Lord for all that!"

"Was that you who fired off your gun a little while ago?"

"I've shot off my rifle twice within the last hour. The first time was at a hog, and I missed him, for, somehow or other, the rampaging of the Indians and Tories through the valley seems to have upset everything, the dumb animals as well – Mrs. Perkins is more nervous than usual – thanks be to the – I was about to say that the dumb critters know that something is going on round them that ain't right, and they are as wild as mad bulls, which is why I come to miss hitting that porker."

So the rather lengthy reply of the loquacious farmer proved that Lena-Wingo was accurate in his opinion as to the reason the former shot was fired.

"Was your second shot sent after another wild animal?"

At this question, Mr. Perkins looked meaningfully at the Mohawk and laughed:

"Wall, no; I don't suppose it would be safe to call Red Jack a wild animal, but when I caught sight of him, or, rather, heard him moving through the woods, I set him down as one of the Iroquois, who have made Mrs. Perkins so nervous – thanks to the – I say I set him down as one of those villains, and I blazed away."

"Did you hit him?"

"Wall, no – thanks to the Lord for it all – for, to tell the truth, I didn't try, for I don't like to pick off a man in that style without giving him a little notice, though I'm sorry to say I've had to do it more than once. I just meant to give him a scare, and I guess I made out to do that – didn't I, Jack?"

"Not much scare – don't shoot straight," was the rather uncomplimentary reply of the Mohawk.

"Wall, we won't quarrel over that, Jack, for I'm mighty glad I didn't hurt you. I would have felt very bad if I had shot such a good fellow as you."

"Do you know whether there are any more Indians in this neighborhood?"

"I don't think there are any nearer than Forty Fort; they have been rampaging up and down the valley for the past two or three days, but they must have found that I'm around, for they are a good deal more afraid than they were. But then there was quite a lot of them through these parts to-day."

"Did you see Colonel Butler and his party?"

"Oh, yes," answered the settler, as though he pitied the ignorance of his listeners, "I have had them under my eye ever since they came out of the fort. Do you know that I came very near capturing them all?"

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