

# WAR DRUMS

HERBERT RAVENEL

SASS

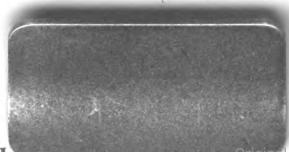


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BY  
**HERBERT RAVENEL SASS**



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**To M. H. S.**  
**COMRADE OF MANY HAPPY DAYS**



## FOREWORD

This book is not history. It is romance. But the inlets of Edisto harboured many a pirate in the old days; the traders' caravans travelled the Great Wilderness Path from Charles Town to the mountain kingdom of the Cherokees; there were wilderness hunters whose long rifles seldom missed, and pedagogues who were as clever with their swords as with their pens. On sea and land there were battles and flights and duels and ambushades. There were girls who were beautiful and brave; and there was a young chief of the Muskogee Confederacy who knew his Homer and Horace and doubtless *The Faerie Queene*—a chief who had in his veins the blood of France and Scotland and the ancient Family of the Wind. The golden spiders still spin their shining webs at "Stanwicke Hall." The egrets still whiten the trees in Great Santee. Sani'gilagi is still a noble mountain, though this, its true name, is forgotten. The time-stained books of the old chroniclers paint a marvellous wilderness, as marvellous as that which is pictured here.



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## I

**S**HE came in mid-winter, when a cold north-east wind might have been blowing across harbour waters grayer than the gray January skies. But Fate had set a trap for Jolie Stanwicke and had baited the trap with beauty. That winter day was as gentle as a May morning. When the *Queen Bess*, seven weeks out of London, sailed into Charles Town harbour with Jolie Stanwicke her most favoured passenger, a warm, odorous breeze from the south filled the ship's white sails; the waters of the wide, land-locked bay were of that luminous blue which artists try to forget; a silver haze lay like a transparent curtain over the encircling islands; and through this haze the sunlight streamed down, softer, yet somehow more brilliant and more beautiful.

Jolie Stanwicke stood on the forecastle deck, her red-gold hair bare to the sun, and gazed across the blue water at the little low-lying town which seemed afloat upon the surface of the bay. Mr. Richard Baradell of Hampshire and London, slender and elegant in orange velvet and dark green satin, stood beside her, and Mistress Wilkinson of Charles Town, in

whose charge she had made the voyage from England, sat close by.

“It is a beautiful New World,” Jolie said in a low voice. “It is almost like Paradise. . . . We are going to find Gilbert. We shall not fail.”

Yet, even as she spoke the words, her lips quivered and she marvelled at this gay courage of hers, recognizing it as a madcap thing that had no authority in reason or fact. There, beyond the blue waters of the bay, beyond the low roofs of the town, lay the wilderness—the illimitable forest of America, gigantic, formidable, unknown. Into its dim recesses had passed Gilbert Barradell, her lover, never to be heard from again. He had come, some fifteen months ago, to Charles Town in Carolina, a needy and adventurous gentleman in search of fortune; and after a little the wilderness had swallowed him, and none knew whether he was living or dead. And now she had come, a slip of a girl who knew somehow in her heart that Gilbert Barradell was still alive, to challenge the monstrous and mysterious power of that wilderness and win back the lover it had taken away.

Suddenly tears filled her eyes. It was as though steel-gauntleted fingers had tightened round her throat. For a moment Jolie saw in all its unutterable dreariness the failure of her quest. There was none to help her, none except Richard Barradell, Gilbert’s brother, who had left reluctantly the frivolities of London—which to her had grown hateful—to accompany her on a voyage that he deemed hopeless from



the start. True, her father, Edward Stanwicke, awaited her in Charles Town. But he had not bidden her come, he had not answered the letter in which she told him that she was coming. How would he receive her, this father of whom no faintest recollection lingered in her mind; this father who, soon after her mother's death, when she was still a baby crawling on all-fours, had sent her away to England to live and grow up among her mother's people there?

For a little while fear chilled her—fear of failure, fear of the unknown that loomed ahead. But as the *Queen Bess* sailed on between the islands, beauty deepened upon the harbour until all that panorama of blue sky and bluer water and hazy encircling woodland became a thing too wonderful to be believed. Little by little its magic warmed her, and in the spell of its beauty fear retreated sullenly and that high, happy courage, which was folly wiser than wisdom, returned. Her eyes shone, her cheeks were richer than pink Indian rose. Richard Barradell, standing beside her, spoke more earnestly than was his habit.

“Smite me!” he exclaimed, his gaze sweeping the placid harbour and the sunlit roofs beyond, “’Tis the sweetest haven this side of Heaven! Saw you ever bluer water or a fairer sky?”

He turned and looked at her in silence for a moment, his delicate jewelled hand stroking his smooth chin.

“Ged, Jolie,” he said presently, “I am past paying

you compliments, but I perceive that this New World air can even paint the lily. If there are young bloods in Charles Town, their hearts will beat faster when you step on shore."

She seemed not to hear.

"We are going to find him," she murmured, as though she were communing with her own thoughts. "We are going to find Gilbert."

Fate had arranged the prelude whimsically. All who were to play leading parts in the drama saw the *Queen Bess* come in except Lachlan McDonald. James Almayne, the hunter, gossiping with Jock Pearson and certain other wilderness men in front of a waterfront tavern, watched the ship's slow progress up the bay. Mr. Francis O'Sullivan, tutor and fencing master, was fishing that forenoon near Granville's Bastion and, between infrequent nibbles, saw the *Queen Bess* glide superbly past to her anchorage amid the shipping in the stream. These two looked on with languid interest, not being able to read the future. But Edward Stanwicke of Stanwicke Hall, at that moment engaged in earnest conversation in the library of his town house beyond the Governor's Bridge, bestirred himself when a negro servant brought word that the *Queen Bess* was well within the harbour.

The man with whom he had been conversing—a tall, powerful, handsome man, high-coloured and dark-moustached, whose dress and gear were those of a soldier and yet smacked somehow of the sea—

seemed annoyed at the interruption. But presently this pair drove down together to the wharves in Edward Stanwicke's coach, and they were there waiting when the *Queen Bess's* gig set her passengers ashore.

Of the meeting of Jolie Stanwicke of Hampshire and Edward Stanwicke, her father—often called Lord Stanwicke in Carolina—there is little to tell. Nor can much be told concerning the meeting of Jolie Stanwicke and the tall, full-blooded, wide-shouldered man whom her father presented as Captain Lance Falcon. They had never seen each other before. Yet, as their eyes met, something passed between them, something very subtle and strange.

If Jolie Stanwicke was aware even then, she forgot quickly. There was much to be seen as she drove through the streets with her father and Captain Falcon in the Stanwicke coach emblazoned with the Stanwicke arms—Mistress Wilkinson had been carried off by her husband, while a messenger of the Governor of Carolina had met Mr. Richard Barradell at the wharf to present His Excellency's compliments and extend his hospitality. Jolie, gazing out of the coach's narrow windows, saw the life of a new town built between the vast ocean on the one hand and on the other a forest which men believed to be vaster even than the great Atlantic: a new town which was England's strongest outpost against the power of Spain in the New World—that ruthless, implacable power which again and again had stained the shores

of Carolina with blood and which still waited wrathfully, in its impregnable fortress of St. Augustine two hundred miles to the south, for the day when Charles Town could be destroyed forever.

Edward Stanwicke spoke to her seldom during that short drive; the stooped gray man, her father, seemed wholly lacking in a father's warmth. But Captain Lance Falcon, sitting opposite in the forward seat, chatted easily in his deep voice, pointing out this and that, with a keen eye for what would be new and strange or pleasantly like England.

Jolie saw, meeting and mingling in Charles Town's streets, the life of the sea and the life of the wilderness; sun-tanned, earringed, bare-armed men of the tall topsail ships that brought merchandise from England and returned laden with pelts and rice; hawk-eyed, lynx-footed men of the forest whose lives were spent for the most part on the wilderness trails. She saw a Cherokee war captain in a black bearskin cloak attended by two tall plumed and painted braves; lean, shaggy wilderness hunters in stained, weather-worn buckskins, and packhorse men in leather jerkins and leggins fantastically beaded and fringed; Sir Robert Mapleton, of Greentree Barony, a Landgrave of Carolina, in town that morning for a conference with the Governor; a squad of sailors from the provincial scout boat that kept watch against the Spaniards of St. Augustine; a butcher's stall where whole deer hung by their hind legs and great wild turkeys were suspended by their necks;

taverns and punch houses and many little shops where blankets and beads and steel knives and hatchets were displayed.

The black uniformed driver on the gilded box in front pulled his horses to a halt. Captain Lance Falcon, plumed hat in hand, his fingers barely touching the tips of hers, helped Jolie alight in front of Edward Stanwicke's town house, with its walled garden, two black attendants standing beside the tall cypress door.

Later, when she was alone in her room overlooking that garden where strange things were to happen, she wondered a little at the coldness with which she had thanked him for his courtesy. But her thoughts dwelt only momentarily upon Captain Falcon. There was a queer, hushed, expectant happiness in her because the quest that had brought her to the wild, new land of America was fairly launched at last.

## II

**I**T WAS three months later and winter had given place to spring when Lachlan McDonald returned to Charles Town from the little settlement of Willtown, some thirty miles distant, where for a time he had been idling.

A message had reached him there; and now he had come back to Charles Town, which had been his home for seven years, to bid certain friends good-bye before setting out on a long journey.

The thought of those farewells displeased him. His old life was ending, a new life was about to begin. Eager and yet depressed, he postponed the business; and on the second day after his arrival, having nothing better to do, he rode out alone along the main road leading northward, and was an hour's ride beyond the northern boundary when sounds ahead of him roused him from his reverie.

A pack train was coming—a trader's caravan from the inner country, from some remote trading post in the vast wilderness that stretched to the Blue Mountains and beyond. At the bend of the road the head of the column was in sight, two bearded buckskin-clad hunters riding in front, their long rifles held aloft like lances. Other riders followed, eagle feathers toss-

ing on their heads; Indian braves tricked out in full panoply of plumes and paint for their entry into the white man's town. Behind these straggled a long line of laden ponies, urged on by a dozen drivers who rode beside the train, cracking long whips, shouting short, harsh commands.

The caravan filled the road, a road closely walled in by dense thickets of myrtle and the trunks of great oaks, whose branches, curtained with Spanish moss, met and mingled overhead. Lachlan McDonald touched the flank of his chestnut mare with his heel. A little ahead of him the road widened somewhat. He let the mare canter till he had reached this wider space, then pulled her up and wheeled her to the right against a hedge of holly.

There he awaited the pack train's coming; and while he waited, lounging easily in his saddle—a lean, black-haired, slightly aquiline young man, almost as swarthy as an Indian—he threw a curious glance behind him.

From that quarter three horsemen were approaching. Lachlan smiled as he watched them; smiled at their sprawling booted legs, their flapping elbows, their loose-hung cutlasses which belaboured their horses' ribs.

“Seamen out for a holiday,” he muttered. “Men from Lance Falcon's ship.” In a moment he had forgotten them, for now the pack train was abreast of him.

The two hunters riding in the van nodded but

passed on without a word—thin, leathery men, bushy-bearded, wearing raccoon caps, high leggins of deerskin, and long, fringed hunting shirts of the same material held in at the waist by broad leather belts. Their weapons were the long rifle, the tomahawk and the hunting knife; and their horses were of the Chicasaw breed, one a claybank and the other a piebald, small and wiry, but still revealing in their shapely heads and clean limbs their blooded Andalusian ancestry. Next came a squat, powerfully built Indian on a fine iron-gray stallion; a Choctaw war captain, Lachlan judged him from his paint and his silver ornaments, his mantle decked with fox-tails and the strange flatness of his forehead. He looked neither to right nor left; and Lachlan, too, gazed past him with a face grown suddenly stern, for he had no love for the Choctaws. Behind this stone-faced chief rode three other Indians of the same tribe, all well mounted, all painted and feathered, two armed with stout, polished bows and quivers of spotted fawn-skin, the third carrying a musket of French make. Followed, then, the first of the pack ponies, plodding onward under their great bundles of skins—deer skins, bear skins, even a few shaggy skins of buffalo; and riding beside the burden-bearers came the packhorse drivers, some of them Indians of the meaner sort hired with rum for this arduous service, most of them white men who seemed more Indian than white because of their fantastic Indian finery.



Dust and the shouts of the pack-horse tenders filled the air. Close behind Lachlan a driver's whip cracked like a pistol shot, and at once the chestnut mare stood on her hind legs, capering madly. For an instant it seemed that she must bolt straight into the midst of the pack train; but the thin-lipped, slender young man on her back whirled her sideways, curbed her, gentled her, kept her dancing in the small open space between the road and the holly hedge, and after a minute she was calm again.

"Middlin' good, boy!" a mud-stained pack driver shouted. "Ye're a rider! How far to Charles Town?"

"Eight miles," Lachlan answered, and said no more. He knew these traders' caravans of old. The trader himself, if he rode with his train, was often decent enough, and the hunters, who supplied meat and took charge in case of trouble on the road, were generally steady men. But the drivers were a hard lot, perhaps the worst in the New World. With them it was best to have no dealing, no talk; and especially was this true when a pack train drew near to civilization once more after a journey of perhaps four hundred miles over the lonely wilderness trails.

Lachlan knew this and held his tongue, regardless of considerable rough bantering, meanwhile keeping a tight rein on his mare. There were others who knew it not so well. Suddenly from the head of the column burst forth a tumult of oaths, while at the same moment the caravan stopped, thrown into confusion by the unexpected halt.

The last of the pack ponies had just passed Lachlan. He wheeled his mare into the middle of the road and, standing in his stirrups, grinned at what he saw.

"Sailors and packhorse men," he said softly. "Lucifer and Beelzebub."

The three seamen from Lance Falcon's ship sat their horses squarely in the middle of the road, completely blocking it. Whether they were drunk and therefore rashly belligerent, or whether they were unable to control their mounts, confused by the shouts and the cracking whips, mattered little. In an instant they were beset by a mob of pack drivers, cursing, flourishing long whips, ugly knives and tomahawks; and in another instant the three had their cutlasses out, swinging them like flails.

Sober or drunk, they handled themselves well. Their horses—nags hired in Charles Town—reared and pawed the air; but, bad horsemen though they were, they hung on somehow, as sailors will, and not only kept their seats but plied their weapons so vigorously that the pack drivers fell back before the flashing arcs of steel.

The lull gave the two hunters in charge of the caravan their opportunity. They jumped their horses between the combatants, and while one of them faced the seamen, the other wheeled his mount, held his rifle high over his head, and shouted, "Clear the road!"

There were mutterings, curses, but, as the hunter rode forward, a path opened through the throng of

the pack train drivers, and along this path behind the man in buckskin rode the three seamen, scowling and defiant, the other hunter bringing up the rear. Oaths were flung at them a-plenty, but no driver struck at them with his whip or hurled tomahawk or knife. In two minutes they were past the last of the pack ponies, and the two hunters, wheeling their horses without a word, set themselves to the task of getting the pack train in motion again.

The thing had been neatly done. In a twinkling, by quick, cool work, a riot which threatened bloodshed had been nipped in the bud. Lachlan's black eyes followed curiously the two quiet men who had dealt with the emergency. They interested him, however, as individuals, not as types. If there was romance in these fringed and beaded hunters with their long rifles, in the half-naked plumed and painted Indian warriors who rode with them, in the train of pack ponies that had come with their burden of skins perhaps a hundred leagues out of the heart of the wilderness, he was not aware of it. These were the common things of life, the things that he had known all his life long. It was not of them that he dreamed when the hours lagged in Charles Town, and he beguiled them with idle imaginings.

The pack train was moving off, with a mighty cracking of whips. Lachlan spoke to his mare and rode on slowly in the opposite direction. Ahead of him at a brisker pace jogged the three seamen, bare elbows flapping awkwardly, earrings flashing, the

gaudy red scarves on their heads glowing in the sun. He held his mare to a slow walk so that they might draw well ahead, but his eyes followed them until they disappeared around a bend of the road. They were rather ridiculous figures on their trotting nags, these equestrian mariners, but to Lachlan they brought visions of far seas, golden cities of the Indies, the glittering lights of London. From them his thoughts roamed to their leader, that Lance Falcon, half soldier of fortune, half sea captain, of whose exploits on many seas and in many lands strange tales were told in the waterfront taverns. And from Lance Falcon they passed to another figure scarcely less glamorous—a slim, dandified exquisite from London, befrilled and periwigged, dressed in the extreme of the English fashion, whom he had seen that morning mincing along the street towards the Governor's Mansion.

His thoughts played with these men. Here was Romance! Here were mind-pictures of far-off wonderful seaports of the fabulous East; of fleets and armies and treasure ships and Old-World castles and tall towers; of courts and kings and high-born silken ladies whose eyes outshone their jewels.

It was April, the flood tide of spring, the season of dreams. For a while Lachlan McDonald dreamed. He turned his mare presently and rode slowly back to his lodging in town. That evening he dined alone. Having paid his score, he sat for a time in Marshall's

inn, turning over in his mind the matters to be dealt with during his last two days in Charles Town, for he had fixed his departure now for the third day.

These matters were chiefly personal. He must say good-bye to James Almayne, the hunter, his father's old friend; to Mr. Francis O'Sullivan, his former teacher; to several influential gentlemen of the Colony to whom he was indebted for courtesies and favours; to three or four young ladies and to certain young men. These farewells spoken, there would be little else to engage him.

He rose presently and, with a nod to Jem Marshall, went out into the street. From the wide thoroughfare along the waterfront, thronged with seamen from the ships in harbour, he turned into a dark cross-street and thence into a narrow lane under a garden wall; and suddenly, as he walked briskly along this deserted lane, he was aware of two songs floating over the wall on the soft, sweet-scented April air—the song of a bird and the song of a woman.

Something in the sound stopped him. Head back, lips parted, he stood listening; and for as much as a minute the song of the woman went unheeded, and he heard only the song of the bird.

It was the first sanguilla of the spring, and in an instant its music caught him up and whirled him far. For a little while his thoughts lingered in a green country where he had first heard the sanguillas sing. Then the woman's voice, richer and sweeter even than that of the black and russet bird, brought him re-

luctantly back to the dim lane where he stood beside a high-walled garden.

Slowly that voice won its way into his consciousness. He had listened to the Muskogee girls, daughters of the Wind and of the White Deer, singing in the moonlight beside the clear rippling waters of Tallasee, but they had not sung as this woman was singing. He was aware suddenly that there was a kinship between the woman's song and that of the sanguilla, that somehow this singing woman had caught the very spirit of the singing bird; yet he was aware, too, that while the bird's song was wholly joyous, in the woman's there was a note of yearning and of sadness.

The rich tones stirred him strangely. He stood entranced, enthralled, scarcely breathing, his lips parted, his black eyes aglow. It was dim dusk now, and the air was heavy with the breath of wild blossoms. There must have been some strange prophetic magic in that moment. Somehow Lachlan McDonald knew that he stood at the threshold of a rare adventure.

This knowledge came to him suddenly, mysteriously as he listened bemused and fascinated; and it cleared his brain instantly, so that at once he grew alert and eager and fiercely joyful, all his senses keyed to the utmost. His eyes shone with an intenser light; his lean, dark face relaxed in a smile.

"Lady of the divine voice," he murmured, "the Lady Sanguilla, till I know your name: I think——"

A new sound startled him into silence. The song

ceased in a little frightened cry. Lachlan heard a man's voice spit forth an oath, then in a moment heard the rasp of swords. Almost at once a deeper voice flung out an exclamation of triumph. There came another cry from the woman, a short, loud cry of terror; and Lachlan, crouching an instant like a poised panther, leaped upward with outstretched hands, and, putting all his wiry strength into the effort, drew his spare, supple body to the top of the wall.

What he saw sent the blood leaping in his veins. It seemed to him that this shadowy garden was a stage set for the fulfilment of his dreams. Before him were the two men about whom his dreams had lately centred—the slim, periwigged exquisite from London whom he had seen that morning mincing towards the Governor's Mansion; and the tall, mysterious sea-wanderer, Captain Lance Falcon, whose brig, the *Good Fortune*, lay in the lower harbour and who, if the tavern gossips were to be believed, had cruised in the Red Sea and plundered the treasure ships of the Great Mogul. There was one other also,—a woman, slim, graceful, richly dressed in filmy white.

At a glance, while he crouched on the top of the wall behind a magnolia bough that screened him from view, Lachlan's black eyes took in these three figures in the garden, and at a glance he knew the essentials of what had happened. The gallant from London lay upon his face in the grass, and near him, its hilt almost touching his outstretched hand, lay his slender sword. Ten paces from him, erect, aloof, insolent even

in its stillness and silence, loomed Falcon's powerful form. The dandy's light dress sword had been no match for his opponent's long, straight rapier. Plainly the foppish Londoner had gone down at the first onset; yet Lachlan could detect no trace of blood on Falcon's blade.

For a fraction of a second Lachlan's eyes scanned the steel for a tell-tale sign; then the slight figure of the girl, moving forward slowly as though in a daze, fixed his attention. He saw her stoop beside the prostrate man and bend low above him; and as she bowed her head, Lachlan dropped lightly to the ground within the garden.

A low hedge of evergreen cassena skirted the wall, forming an admirable screen. His footfalls made no sound as he ran swiftly parallel with the wall, bending forward to keep his head below the level of the young cassenas. Only a man trained in the woods could have stolen so silently through the dense clump of stiff-leaved canes close behind Captain Lance Falcon. When Lachlan leaped from the cover of the canes, he leaped upon an antagonist to whose ears no faintest warning had come.

Yet almost at once Lachlan knew that all the skill of his approach had not assured him the victory. His onset all but hurled Falcon to the ground; his long, sinewy arms pinioned those of his opponent. But the surge and heave of that wide-shouldered, long-muscled frame brought instant revelation of such strength as Lachlan had never before encountered.



Lachlan was strong as the catamount is strong, but the tall man with whom he grappled—older, bulkier, heavier—seemed as strong as a mountain bear. The struggle was short. Presently Lachlan was reeling backward towards the cane thicket, hurled thither by a mighty heave of his foeman's arms as Falcon tore himself free.

Panting, dishevelled, bleeding from a scratch on his forehead, Lachlan steadied himself at the thicket's edge and stood there half-dazed, awaiting the onslaught that must come. Falcon, his sun-tanned face a flaming red, his white teeth gleaming under his thick moustache, ran to the spot where his sword had fallen. Snatching up the weapon, he started furiously forward. But the woman, rising quickly from beside the fallen man, gripped his arm.

He halted and stood breathing hard, while she spoke rapidly, pleadingly, peremptorily, in tones so low that Lachlan could distinguish only a few disconnected words. At last Falcon nodded and answered her briefly in a deep voice that had in it the rumble of thunder or the surf. Deliberately he raised her hand to his lips and kissed it, despite her effort to draw it away. Then, without another glance at Lachlan, he strode off along a winding pathway of the garden.

Lachlan watched him go, then turned to face a worse ordeal than his struggle with Lance Falcon. He knew that, acting upon a sudden inexplicable impulse, he had done an amazingly foolish thing. He

had hoped—he did not know why—to play the hero before this girl; but now he stood before her, beaten, outdone, humbled. He saw, or thought he saw, scorn and anger in her eyes as she began to speak. Yet chance gave him a brief respite. The man lying on the grass behind her moaned, stirred, and almost instantly sat upright, looking about him with blinking, uncomprehending eyes. She paused to address him.

“You are not hurt, Richard,” she said, and it seemed to Lachlan that her tone was not only faintly contemptuous but that there was in it also a strange despairing bitterness. “You have a bruised eyebrow, that is all, but it will spoil your beauty for some days.”

She turned to Lachlan where he stood against the canebrake, still panting a little but clear brained now and ready for what would come. It came—without delay.

“And you, sir,” she said coldly, her head high, her large eyes narrowed, “perhaps you will be so good as to make known to me who you are, and why you take it upon yourself to assault my—my friend (she hesitated a little at the word) here in my garden.”

Mr. Francis O’Sullivan, the expatriate Irishman, who had schooled Lachlan McDonald in manners and in fencing (both verbal and with the rapier), to say nothing of history and the arts, would have been proud of his pupil at that moment. There was a deep purpose in Lachlan’s answer, and that purpose his answer was most skilfully designed to achieve.

He bowed courteously, yet with a certain stiffness.

“Mam’selle,” he said, “with pleasure I do your bidding. My name is Lachlan McDonald, and I am a Scotsman, a Frenchman, and an Indian, a Prince of the Muskogee Nation, a Chief of the Family of the Wind. I entered your garden thinking to be of service, because I heard a clash of swords and saw you bending over a fallen man. I regret that my interference was untimely, and I bid you good evening.”

He bowed again and, stepping swiftly backward, was lost in the gloom of the canes.

### III

**T**HE shadowy garden, more shadowy than ever now as the dusk deepened, lay around him like the impalpable landscape of a dream. At the outer edge of the little cane thicket, through which he had passed as soundlessly as a lynx, Lachlan paused and stood motionless, listening. In front, under tall magnolias and slim-stemmed sycamores, he saw clumps of myrtle and small-leaved cassena and arbours of wild jessamine and Indian rose. The air was drowsy with the scent of blossoms, and behind him the long, slim cane leaves shivered with faint, mysterious rustlings. Over all, in the dim late light, hung a translucent silver haze; and it seemed to him suddenly that not only this shadowy garden, but all that had happened in it, was as ephemeral as moonlit mist.

He stood for a few moments at the edge of the cane thicket, drinking in the perfumes of the garden, considering his next move. His decision was reached quickly. After a swift glance around him, he passed noiselessly amid the myrtles towards the high wall looming beyond. Leaping upward, he clutched the lowest branch of a young sycamore and swung himself to the top of the wall.

The narrow, unlighted lane outside was empty, and

the foliage of the sycamore made a screen between him and the garden. Lachlan perched comfortably on the wall, his knees drawn up under his chin, his lean brown hands clasped about his ankles. He sat silent and motionless for many minutes, his eyes narrowed, his forehead wrinkled in a frown. At last his thin lips moved.

“Now here,” he said to himself, “is Mystery.”

He shifted his position slightly and looked up at the moon just rising above the trees. Yet, though he seemed to study the face of the moon, he did not see it, for his thoughts dwelt upon another face, one that perplexed and troubled him. For some moments he puzzled over the mystery of that face—a face which, beneath the scorn and anger that it had assumed, had revealed also unmistakable fear and a poignant, pitiful distress. Then his brow relaxed and he smiled—a smile of boyish, reckless abandon which obliterated in an instant the accustomed gravity of his lean, sharply chiselled face.

“I fought badly,” he muttered, “but i’faith, I think I talked well. It is not every night that a Prince and a Chief of the Family of the Wind drops from high heaven into My Lady’s garden.”

A murmur of voices checked him. He sat bolt upright on the wall, listening; and in a moment he made sure that the voices were those of the lady and the young gallant whom she had called Richard.

The two came on slowly. Tall hawthorns hid them from him so that only once could he catch a gleam of

her white shawl in the moonlight; but presently they were so near that he could hear every word. It was the girl who was speaking, and Lachlan's eyes brightened as he listened.

"A Prince of the Muskogee Nation," she said, "and a Chief of the Family of the Wind. Lord! Lord! Here is the very soul and essence of romance. A handsome boy, too, and a fearless one. He fought a better fight than you did, Richard, against that ruffian."

Again there was that mocking, faintly contemptuous note in her voice; and Lachlan marked it well. If this young London gallant was her lover, so far he had wooed in vain.

"Odds my soul, Jolie!" Richard answered, "I was blind with rage, I think. I had told the scoundrel that if he came again when I was with you I would run him through; and when, in the midst of your song, I looked up and saw him standing there with his supercilious sneering smile, I rushed him instantly. Alas, my little bodkin was not meant to parry a bravo's rapier."

She laughed, and once more there was mockery in her tone. But in the middle the laugh broke, became almost a sob.

"O God! God! Richard!" she cried, "I am in terror—terror of the shame that may come. Falcon grows importunate. And I am losing hope of finding Gilbert . . ."

They had passed around a bend of the path. Lachlan, keen of hearing though he was, could hear

only an indeterminate murmur which in a moment died into silence. For some minutes he kept his seat on the wall, hoping that the pair would make another circuit of the garden paths before entering the house. He heard the voices no more, however, and presently a door slammed shut beyond the shrubbery. Lachlan jumped lightly down into the street and set off eastward at a brisk pace.

His course took him towards the waterfront of the town. The narrow lane beside the garden wall was deserted, but when he reached the wide thoroughfare fronting the wharves, he found it even more crowded and more lively than usual. Two ships from Barbados had come into harbour that day, he recalled, while in the late afternoon another pack train had arrived from the mountain country of the Cherokees. Sailors and pack-horse drivers, relieved at last from the long tedium of the empty sea and the weary miles of forest path, would own the town that night, or at least that quarter of it where the tavern lights twinkled in the dark. Those of the townsfolk who disliked brawls would keep to the quieter streets or retire discreetly within doors; and there would be work for the men of the watch before morning—work and perhaps some broken heads.

Ordinarily Lachlan would have considered this prospect with a little thrill of joyful excitement. But on this evening other matters engaged his thoughts, and he walked on swiftly, careless of the strange faces that he saw on every hand.

They were, most of them, the faces of sailors and pack-horse men, with now and then the stern, impassive face of an Indian and the lean, weather-beaten face of some buckskin-clad hunter. A few of the latter Lachlan knew; and twice, as he passed an Indian, an almost imperceptible signal of recognition and of greeting flashed between him and the red man. But he stopped to talk with no one amid the groups that he passed strolling along the street or loitering about lighted doorways; and a frown of annoyance clouded his brow when suddenly his way was barred by a stream of men issuing pell-mell from a tavern in front of him, crowding and jostling one another and crying out as though in terror of something behind them.

As they poured out of the doorway, they blocked the path along the street, and Lachlan halted perforce. They were pack-horse men, he noted at a glance, wearing the fantastic half-Indian livery of their profession. He saw, too, that some of them had been roughly handled in the house which they had just vacated in such haste; that the jackets of one or two of them were torn, and that one—a hulking, scowling youth in a yellow jerkin—nursed an ugly cut on his forehead.

This one, as soon as he had gained the open street, seemed smitten with new courage. He yelled to his comrades to stop; and they, no longer hemmed in by four walls, rallied round him, muttering, cursing, and flourishing their fists, some few of which held evil-looking knives, at the house in front of them.



Lachlan had stepped back a pace or two to avoid being caught in the turmoil. Yet he stood nearer the door than any of the others, and he heard before they did the sound of footfalls just beyond the threshold. At once he jumped back into the dark shadows under the wall of the house; and next moment he saw a tall man standing in the doorway, a man whose face and form he was likely to remember. His lips tightened as he recognized Captain Lance Falcon.

For a moment Falcon stood motionless in the doorway. His handsome, full-blooded face was flushed, his thick, red-brown hair was dishevelled, his buff jacket was twisted awry under its showy blue sash. No sooner had his eyes grown accustomed to the dim light without than he clapped his hand to his hilt and half drew the blade. Yet the next moment he thrust the weapon back with a clang and stepped down into the street bare-handed.

“So!” he shouted, “you’re waiting for me, are you? You want some more o’ the same physic? Aye, aye, you scum, you shall have it!”

The big pack-horse driver in the yellow jerkin—he with the bloody forehead—had a knife. He held his ground, but his comrades, less angry and less earnest than their leader, fell back. The street was in a hubbub now. From all sides men rushed to the scene, and at any moment the watch might come, summoned by the disturbance. In a deserted street Falcon might have fared badly, but as it was he faced only one enemy. And that one he disposed of quickly.

The man with the knife, confused perhaps by the clamour of the swelling crowd behind him, waited too long to strike. His wrist was caught in an iron grip and the knife was wrenched from him. Next moment Falcon had him by the collar, shaking him. The crowd roared and laughed its approval; and, after a little, Falcon thrust the man from him, turned his back, walked slowly across the street, reëntered the house and slammed the door after him.

Lachlan, still standing in the shadows apart from the throng, heard a quiet chuckle close to his ear. He turned to face a tall, thin man, white-haired and white-moustached, brown as old leather, and wearing the fringed buckskin shirt, high leggings and raccoon cap of a hunter. Lachlan's eyes lit with pleasure.

"Almayne!" he exclaimed. "The very man! I've been looking for you."

"You'd have found me sooner, boy," the other replied, "if you had not been in so huge a hurry. I've trailed you the length of the street. What think you of our gamecock yonder?" and he jerked his head towards the doorway where Falcon had just disappeared.

Lachlan hooked his arm through the tall hunter's elbow.

"I would talk with you, Almayne," he said, "about that same gamecock and about certain other more peaceable birds—to wit, a singing sanguilla and a bright-plumaged popinjay from London. Come, let's be going. Jem Marshall's inn is a quiet place, and you like his ale."

## IV

**O**F THE three," said Almayne, when his second mug of ale was half gone and Lachlan had told as much—and as little—as was necessary in order to gain the information that he sought, "I take it that the sanguilla is of first importance. The gamecock and the popinjay are interesting only because they happened to be in the sanguilla's garden?"

Lachlan nodded, smiling.

Almayne eyed him sharply, then frowned.

"And why do you come to me for knowledge of these matters?" he asked. "I am a man of the woods, a follower of the wilderness trails. I know the savannahs of the Santee and the peaks of the Blue Mountains better than your Charles Town streets."

Lachlan smiled again, more broadly.

"So you like to pretend, old war horse," he said, "but I know you as well as you know those blue Overhills of the Cherokee. The gossip of Charles Town is not beneath your notice; and for three months you've been idling here with nothing to do but use your ears. I'll warrant you've used them well."

"While you," grumbled Almayne, "have been idling in Willtown."

Lachlan laughed.

“Behold the proof of my statement,” he cried. “Your ears have even caught gossip about my humble self. Now this girl of the garden—this Lady Sanguilla, as I have named her. Who is she? Whence came she? Who is this Gilbert that she is seeking? What is she doing in old Stanwicke’s garden where a petticoat was never seen before?”

“She is Lord Stanwicke’s daughter,” said Almayne quietly.

“His daughter! I did not know that he had a daughter.”

“That is not strange,” the hunter muttered, and buried his face in his cup.

“Your tongue’s lazy, Almayne,” said Lachlan impatiently. “I’ll liven it if it takes a hogshead of Marshall’s ale!” He gave an order to the black boy in attendance. “Now what of this mysterious daughter of old Stanwicke, who calls himself a lord? Has he kept her hidden all these years in some dungeon of Stanwicke Hall?”

“He has kept her in England,” Almayne answered slowly, “with her mother’s kinsfolk there. It is her first taste of this raw New World. She arrived on the ship *Queen Bess* in custody of Mistress Wilkinson just two days after you rode to Willtown. On the same ship came Mr. Richard Barradell, of Hampshire and London, whom you miscall a popinjay. He is not the lady’s lover and he returns to England on the *Sea Swallow* to-morrow, so you can dismiss him from

your mind. So far she has remained in Stanwicke's town house, and all Charles Town is agog with her beauty. But she goes to Stanwicke Hall shortly."

"That's better," said Lachlan. "We are getting the story now and I perceive you know all that's worth knowing. And your pardon, old friend, for my jest about the ale. You will tell me of this lady for friendship's sake and because of the days we've spent together."

Momentarily the hunter's gray-blue eyes, deep-set under shaggy white brows, twinkled humorously. Yet his countenance was grave.

"It might be better if I told you nothing," he muttered under his breath.

He fell silent a moment; then continued more briskly:

"Listen, lad. Take my word for it, you will not like this girl, this Jolie Stanwicke. She is proud and overbearing and short-tempered. She has been much in London, and holds herself a great lady, and all that she has seen in Charles Town she laughs to scorn."

"She did not laugh to scorn," Lachlan said thoughtfully, "a Prince of the Muskogee Nation and a Chief of the Family of the Wind. Nay, the titles seemed to please her. And though she saw him defeated, she was gracious enough to call him—behind his back—a handsome youth and a fearless one, and to praise him for the fight he had made."

Almayne seemed struck by a sudden thought.

“When do you go to Tallasee?” he asked hopefully. “Your warriors have arrived. I have seen them in the streets.”

The young man smiled.

“I had intended leaving on the third day from this, but the journey may be postponed. My father bids me come to him, but not in haste. As for my braves, they can rest here for a while, and await my pleasure.”

Almayne drummed restlessly on the table, pursed his lips, then raised his eyes suddenly to meet the other's gaze.

“Lachlan,” he said earnestly, “it is time you started for Tallasee. Your father awaits you there, your mother is eager for your coming. In all the Muskogee towns the Red War Club has been set up. The Bloody Stick and the Chips of Wood have been sent to twenty chiefs. There is war in the wind—war with both Choctaws and Chicasaws and perhaps with a great tribe from the West. Your father has sent for you, and you must go.”

Lachlan met the other's gaze gravely.

“It is strange, Almayne,” he said. “I never before have known you show such eagerness to be rid of me.”

The hunter's face took on a troubled look.

“Lachlan,” he said slowly, “I will tell you again what you already know because the telling of it now may serve a good purpose. When your father came here from Scotland in his youth, many years ago, I

fell in with him and a great friendship grew between us. We followed the wilderness trails together as hunters and as scouts against the Yamasees and the Spaniards at St. Augustine. When your father became a trader and the owner of a pack train, I was his partner; and I went with him when he established his post at Tallasee, in the country of the Muskogee.

“I was with him when he met Sehoy Tourville, the daughter of the French Captain, Louis Tourville, and a Muskogee princess of the Family of the Wind. I was present when he married Sehoy, and I know that he married her for her loveliness and goodness, and not, as some say, in order to gain the power that afterwards came to him. I was with him when the Muskogee chiefs made him High Chief of all the tribes. I know what he has done since then for the people whom he has ruled. And I know that he has always looked to you to carry on that work when he is gone.”

The hunter was silent for a moment, as though his thoughts ranged far. Presently he continued:

“On only one point we differed. Your father thought that in order to fit you for that work you must be sent here to school in Charles Town. I held the opposite opinion. I said that you must remain in Tallasee; that you must grow up there; that if you were to rule the Muskogee nation as its High Chief or King, you must grow up a Muskogee brave and not a young English gentleman.

“In the end we compromised. Until you were eigh-

teen Tallasee was your home. Your father was your teacher and he taught you all that an English school could have taught; yet you were an Indian and your friends were Indians. But at eighteen your father sent you here to Charles Town to Francis O'Sullivan, whose pupil you have been for seven years, and from him you have had an education such as few other men in this New World can boast."

Almayne dug into his pouch for his clay pipe.

"Now," he said, "all that is over. The time of your training is ended. The time of your work draws near—the time when you must take up the task for which your father relies on you. He has spent half his fortune on you so that you might be fitted for that work. And now, with war threatening his people, he says to you 'Come,' and sends his warriors to escort you home like the Chief that you are."

Once more Almayne paused, his keen eyes suddenly alight. He leaned forward and struck his fist upon the table.

"What are you, boy?" he demanded fiercely. "Are you Lachlan McDonald of Tallasee, War Chief of the Muskogee Confederacy? Or are you Lachlan McDonald, Gentleman, of Charles Town, with time to waste on every pretty girl who crosses your path?"

A long silence followed. It was the younger man who broke it.

"Thank you, Almayne," he said slowly. "You were always my friend, and you have said to me what needed to be said."



He paused as if to choose his words with even greater care. Then, a faint smile on his dark, finely chiselled face, he continued:

“I will answer your question. I am Lachlan McDonald, War Chief of the Muskogee. And I am also Lachlan McDonald, Gentleman. Because I am the former I shall go home to my people. Because I am the latter, I hope to perform before I go a certain duty which chance has laid upon me here.”

His black eyes searched the other's face. He leaned forward across the table.

“There is a lady in Charles Town who is in trouble,” he said slowly, “the loveliest lady that I have ever seen, the lady Jolie Stanwicke. With or without your help, Almayne, I shall see what may be done for her.”

The hunter's answer came quickly.

“You'll get no help from me!” he cried angrily. “The matter is no concern of yours. And for your own good——”

He stopped short, perhaps realizing that he had said what he had not meant to say; and Lachlan was quick to take advantage.

“Ah!” he cried, “the secret's out now. It's for my own good, is it, that you would hurry me off to Tallasee? The mystery deepens. Is Mistress Jolie Stanwicke so dangerous a person that I must flee from her into the wilds? Come, man, you've whetted my curiosity now and you must tell me all.”

“I'll tell you nothing,” Almayne growled.

"All the more credit to me when I have solved the mystery unaided," cried Lachlan lightly. He called the black boy to him, paid his score, pushed back his chair and arose.

"Good-night to you, Almayne," he said.

"Where now?" the hunter asked gruffly.

"The night's young," answered Lachlan. "There's time to make a beginning in this affair of Mam'selle Jolie Stanwicke, whom I still prefer to call the Lady Sanguilla. I think I shall pay a visit to a certain Captain Lance Falcon in his room at Ramage's tavern. Perhaps I can learn from him what I have failed to learn from you."

Almayne's eyes narrowed. "He'll twist your neck," the hunter said briefly.

"It's a tough neck and will endure considerable twisting," Lachlan answered. He turned and moved towards the door.

Almayne spread his hands in a gesture of resignation.

"Sit down, Lachlan McDonald, Gentleman," he said gloomily, "I am in charge of the affair of Mistress Jolie Stanwicke, and Captain Lance Falcon is her enemy and mine. Since you are bound to meddle in what does not concern you, there are certain things that you had better know."

V

**A**LMAYNE rapped on the table, ordered more ale and drained the cup to the dregs. He sat silent, glaring at Lachlan, his eyes gleaming under their shaggy brows. The younger man laughed in his face.

“Almayne,” he said, “I can read you like a book. This Mam’selle Jolie is beautiful and you would keep me from her because you are afraid that I shall lose my heart. Is it not so, old friend?”

Almayne nodded. “I am thinking of your father,” he grumbled, “and what he expects of you.”

Lachlan’s lips tightened.

“I have told you, Almayne,” he said gravely, “that I am going home to Tallasee—to my people. No English girl will make me forget that trust. Now will you tell me of this very lovely lady about whom you seem to know so much?”

“Yes, boy, since you will have it so,” the hunter answered slowly, and plunged into his tale.

✱ Mistress Jolie Stanwicke, he said, had come from England to Charles Town in search of a young gentleman of Hampshire whom she was to marry—one, Gilbert Barradell, who had come to Carolina a year and a half before to seek his fortune in the peltry

trade and had disappeared in the interior some months after his arrival. With Jolie had come Richard Barradell, Gilbert's brother, and Richard had engaged Almayne to assist in the search for Gilbert. All this had happened while Lachlan was in Willtown. Now, after three months spent in following false clues, Richard Barradell, convinced that his brother had perished in the wilderness, had decided to return to London immediately, leaving Almayne to continue the search in Jolie's behalf.

So much Lachlan learned quickly. He learned, too, as the old hunter warmed to his theme, that within the past week Almayne had hit upon a clue to which he was inclined to attach some importance—that an Englishman, agreeing in some respects with the description of Gilbert Barradell, had been seen some eleven months before in the country of Concha, chief of the Appalaches, a friend of the Spaniards of St. Augustine and an enemy of the Charles Town English. Almayne had traced the wanderings of this Englishman to within a day's journey of Concha's town, and there he seemed to have vanished.

Two other facts also Lachlan gathered as the hunter talked, and some instinct told him that these were perhaps the most important facts of all: first, that Jolie's father, Edward Stanwicke of Stanwicke Hall, and Captain Lance Falcon, who was constantly at Stanwicke's side and seemed to have much influence over him, had opposed from the beginning the search for Gilbert Barradell, declaring him undoubt-

edly dead; and, second, that Almayne had conceived a deep distrust of Falcon and believed (although he seemed to have nothing definite upon which to base this belief) that Falcon knew more than he was willing to tell.

"You have it all now," Almayne concluded gruffly. "This man who may have been Gilbert Barradell wandered into Chief Concha's country about eleven months ago, and as like as not they killed him. It would be foolish to go there after him unless we can learn something more. And I can learn nothing. There's something back of it, boy, and I believe it's Falcon."

Lachlan nodded slowly. He was thinking of that moment in the Stanwicke garden when Falcon had kissed Jolie's hand and she had tried to draw it away; and he was thinking, too, of the fear that he had seen in Jolie's face and of certain words of hers which he had overheard as he perched on the garden wall.

"Did Mistress Jolie Stanwicke know Captain Falcon," he asked, "before her arrival in Charles Town?"

"She had never seen him until she came here," Almayne answered quickly.

Lachlan pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"Well, after all," he muttered, "that proves nothing. She has been here in Stanwicke's town house for three months now and Falcon has seen much of her in that time. He wants her and wants her badly, and that's motive enough."

He frowned as a new thought came to him.

“But Gilbert Barradell disappeared,” he said, “before Falcon had met the lady. Falcon had no reason then——”

“Aye,” Almayne interrupted, “but since then he *has* met her. If Barradell is alive and Falcon knows where he is, d’ye think he would be likely to tell us? Not for all the gold in Carolina!”

Lachlan shrugged his shoulders.

“You are getting off the path, Almayne,” he answered dryly. “You have nothing to show that Falcon knows where Gilbert Barradell is. Probably Barradell is dead. Probably he was dead months before Jolie Stanwicke came to Charles Town—before Falcon ever saw her. As for the Englishman who disappeared in Concha’s country, he might have been Barradell or he might have been someone else, but in any case the chances are that Concha’s braves have his scalp.”

He pushed back his chair.

“I am sleepy, old friend,” he said. “My brain is getting weary. When I asked you to tell me about this Jolie, this Lady Sanguilla, I did not foresee such a puzzle as this. We will meet here to-morrow and go further into the matter. Good-bye till then.”

If he was sleepy, the cool night air outside in the empty street quickly dispelled his drowsiness. He wanted to think and he could think more clearly alone. He was not as contemptuous as he had seemed

regarding Almayne's suspicions of Falcon—he knew the old hunter too well to dismiss lightly any idea of his.

Yet, studying this one carefully, Lachlan could find no tangible foundation for it in the facts that Almayne had made known to him. Plainly Falcon was in love with Jolie—Lachlan had divined this much in the Stanwicke garden when he had seen Falcon kiss the girl's hand. But he could see no reason for believing that Falcon knew anything about Gilbert Barradell's disappearance or present whereabouts, if he were still alive; and it seemed unlikely, on the whole, that the Englishman who had been seen nearly a year before in Concha's country was Gilbert Barradell. Lachlan's thoughts had strayed to other aspects of the problem—aspects concerned chiefly with Jolie Stanwicke herself—when, on his way to his lodgings, he passed by Ramage's tavern where, earlier in the evening, he had seen Falcon rout the pack-horse drivers.

Falcon lodged there when he slept in town instead of on his brig; and as Lachlan walked slowly along the deserted street, he watched curiously a lighted window of an upper room, thinking possibly to catch a glimpse of a man with whom he had already had a somewhat memorable passage and who might become even better known to him in the future.

The man interested him keenly. None seemed to know certainly who Lance Falcon was or whence he

came. He had appeared in Charles Town not more than four months before, and Lachlan, having spent most of the intervening time in Willtown, had seen him on only a few occasions and knew him chiefly by repute.

This last was of a mixed quality. Falcon had dined at the Governor's Mansion and was in high favour with His Excellency, and he had made many friends in the town. Yet it was well known that his brig, the *Good Fortune*, was in reality a ship of war, well armed, well manned, with a crew of cutthroats rather more desperate and decidedly better disciplined than the crews of most ordinary privateersmen. Charles Town had known many ships that were not what they seemed and had found it profitable not to inquire too closely, for such ships were often valuable customers. But some who remembered the pirate wars whispered that Charles Town might find one day another Stede Bonnet on her hands and prophesied a time when Captain Falcon and his men would dance on air at Execution Dock where Bonnet and his crew had danced so grimly.

Lachlan had passed by now some yards beyond Ramage's tavern so that he could see over his shoulder not only the east window fronting the street but also another window in the south wall of the house, facing a small courtyard. Suddenly this second window, which also opened upon the corner room occupied by Falcon, fixed his attention. In the bright moonlight, as he glanced over his shoulder, Lachlan



saw a small white object like a little ball shoot upward from the courtyard towards this south window, strike against the wall of the house just below the window sill and drop back into the yard.

Lachlan halted, instantly alert. A high fence separated the courtyard from the street; but his ears were the ears of an Indian hunter, and presently he heard faintly, yet so distinctly that there could be no mistake, the sound of someone moving in the courtyard. He knew then what was coming moments before it happened.

This man, whoever he was, who lurked in the darkness of the inn yard, was searching in the grass that grew there for the little white ball which he had tried to throw into Falcon's window. Presently he would find it; and when he found it, he would throw it a second time.

Some minutes passed. Then upward into the moonlight soared the little white ball again. This time the thrower had evidently stationed himself directly below the window; and this time his aim was better. The white ball soared a little above the window sill, then dropped upon it and rolled inward.

Lachlan, from his watching place in the street, could see what the thrower of that mysterious missile could not see. To the latter, peering straight up at the window above him, it must have appeared that the white ball had dropped from the sill into the room; but Lachlan knew that it had not fallen into the room—that it still rested on the sill some inches

from the edge. He could see, moreover, that it quivered slightly in the light breeze as it rested there; and at once a faint hope stirred in him.

His eyes remained fixed on the window, while his hearing groped for each stealthy sound that came from the courtyard beyond the fence. He heard the man who had thrown the little white ball make his way out of the courtyard through a gate that opened on an alley behind the inn. Each moment he expected to see Falcon appear at the window; but the small square of light remained empty, and presently Lachlan knew that fortune favoured him so far—that if the occupant of the room was in it at the time, he remained unaware of the white ball that had been tossed upward out of the darkness and that now rested precariously on the sill of his open window.

Lachlan realized that he could only play a waiting game. He chose to wait, however, in the now empty courtyard instead of in the street where some belated passer-by might interrupt his vigil. Scaling the fence, he dropped to the ground on the other side, and finding a seat behind a holly bush, he remained in that leafy ambush, hoping that some lucky chance might solve his problem for him.

For a long while thunder had been muttering in the distance, and Lachlan knew that sooner or later a squall would break. In this squall, he judged from the direction of the thunder, the wind would blow from the east; and it was for this that he waited,

faintly hoping yet not venturing to expect that out of this circumstance he might gain his ends.

At last the squall burst—with a sudden glare of white lightning and a thunderclap like a frigate's broadside; and it was from the eastward that the wind came, a mighty gust too violent to last. Lachlan, peering upward from the shadowy courtyard, saw that the curtains of the lighted window above him were blowing outward in the breeze that swept through the other window into the room. From his post in the courtyard he had not been able to see the little white ball on the sill; but he knew that it was there no longer. He had seen it quiver in the light airs before the squall came. Beyond a doubt that first gust blowing through the room from the east had blown it outward from the window sill.

The next task was to find it, and in the blackness that the squall clouds made this was no easy matter. Yet he figured accurately that it would have dropped almost straight downward, and just as the first volley of rain began to fall he lit upon it in the grass. Stealthily, yet swiftly, he made his way out of the black courtyard through the gate opening on the rear alley and hurried homeward through the rain to examine his prize.

It was far better than he had dared hope for. The white ball was a bit of white cloth tightly rolled and bound with a light cord. Within the ball was a closely folded square of paper. Eagerly he spread this

out upon the table in his room and read by the light of his candle the following, in Spanish:

Antonio the Indian will deliver this in the usual way. It will make known to you Don Ruy Ortiz, now my lieutenant, who but recently arrived at St. Augustine from Barcelona. By Don Ruy I send you news of Chief Concha's prisoner, and Don Ruy will request certain information that I would have from you.

His sloop will enter the River of Stono. You will anchor your brig in midstream in the River Ashley off the old Cypress Wharf. At 12 o'clock of the night after this is delivered to you, Don Ruy will come by canoe to your brig. See that you display two lights, one above the other, for his guidance.

The letter was signed "J. M."—plainly the initials of Don Joachim de Montiano, the Spanish commandant at St. Augustine. Lachlan noticed that the "12" and the words "display two lights" were underscored.

He read the letter twice, whistled softly and smiled, his black eyes shining.

"So," he murmured, "Captain Falcon is on good terms with the Spaniards and will receive a distinguished visitor from St. Augustine to-morrow night."

He pondered briefly, with pursed lips and narrowed eyes.

"And he is much interested in someone whom Chief Concha holds as a prisoner? A strange coincidence, that, and one that would interest Almayne."

For a while he sat frowning, putting two and two together, going over in his mind the facts that Almayne had made known to him. Suddenly the frown vanished. For some minutes he studied a plan

that had leaped full-formed into his brain. Then he went swiftly to work.

Carefully, with a knife-point, he erased the 2 in the numeral 12, then with his quill and ink inserted in its place a cipher, so that the 12 became 10. This accomplished to his satisfaction, he refolded the paper, replaced it in the cloth, rolled the latter again into a ball and bound it with the cord. He then blew out his candle and went down once more into the street.

The squall had passed but the moon had not yet emerged from the clouds. A few minutes' walk along unfrequented ways brought him to the alley behind Ramage's tavern. He entered the courtyard through the small gateway and saw at a glance that the light still shone in Falcon's window. If the latter had closed it against the shower, he had subsequently opened it again.

Lachlan smiled, interpreting this as possibly meaning that Falcon expected a message. With greater skill than the first messenger had shown he threw his little cloth ball and saw it pass through the window; and watching from the cover of a cassena bush, had the added satisfaction of seeing Falcon appear at the window for a moment and wave his hand.

Lachlan, invisible in the blackness below, bowed with mock courtesy.

"Good-night, Captain Lance Falcon," he whispered. "Good-night and good luck until we meet at the Sign of the Two Lights at 10 to-morrow evening."

## VI

**L**ACHLAN slept late the next morning. When he had arisen and had breakfasted, he turned his back on the April sunshine which made Charles Town as fair as Eden, climbed once more to his room, and sat down at his table with quill, ink and paper before him.

For some minutes he sat idle, gazing out of the open window where a willow-oak limb swayed slightly in the breeze. Below, a negro gardener chanted a barbaric hymn as he hoed his weeds. Faint and far, from the direction of the harbour, sounded the song of sailors toiling at the halliards of the ship *Sea Swallow*, whose sails were set for London. These human voices supplied the undertones, but they could scarcely be heard for the music of the birds. The whole bright April air, rich with the scent of innumerable blossoms, was a-ripple with bird music—music of mockingbirds cardinals and wrens, and gorgeous blue and green and crimson nonpareils.

Lachlan heard and yet did not hear, for his thoughts were busy. But when of a sudden a black and russet oriole of that slim, graceful species which was called *sanguilla* in Carolina, burst into spirited song in the oak just outside the window, he seemed to waken

from his dreams. A quick smile lit his face. Bending his head, he began to write.

To Mistress Jolie Stanwicke:

I must ask your pardon at the beginning for addressing you thus boldly upon an acquaintance which was due to accident. I shall risk your displeasure for a reason which you may perhaps deem sufficient—to wit, the fact that I am now engaged upon your service, and in your behalf shall this night hazard my life.

I have learned from the hunter Almayne, my old friend, of your predicament and of your quest, and we are become allies in serving your need. Thus I know that you have come to Carolina seeking that lost lover of yours, Gilbert Barradell, who has your heart and who came to Charles Town a year and a half ago. I know that he vanished in the wilderness some months after his coming here; that his brother Richard, who sails this day for London on the *Sea Swallow*, has engaged the services of Almayne as your best hope of finding him, and that your father, for reasons of his own, disapproves your quest. All this Almayne has told me, and he has acquainted me with all that he has done.

It may be—and I pray God so—that I can help. Almayne believes, as you are aware, that the man Captain Lance Falcon has knowledge which we need. Last night chance permitted me to confirm (I hope) this suspicion in some measure, and at the same time opened to me an opportunity of learning more.

To-night, at some risk, I shall grasp that opportunity. This letter will come to your eyes only if misfortune befalls me. If all goes well with me, I shall reclaim it unopened from Almayne, to whose safe-keeping I entrust it.

Thus far Lachlan had written smoothly, rapidly, without pause. Now he hesitated, puzzled for a moment. Something within him urged him to say more; at the least, the custom of the time called for a flowery concluding phrase. But something more potent impelled him to make an end; and suddenly he grasped his pen again, signed his name "Lachlan McDonald,"

and affixed the date; then, when the ink had dried, folded the paper, addressed and sealed it.

He sat, then, for a while considering what he had done.

Why had he written this letter? And why, he asked himself, was he about to venture his life for this girl whose loveliness was not for him because it was already pledged to another?

He was fully cognizant of the risk he would run. He was not unacquainted with danger. At Tallasee in the country of the Muskogees his training in wilderness warfare had begun early. Nor had his student life in Charles Town been wholly studious. There had been occasions when his skill with a gentleman's weapons had stood him in good stead—a tavern brawl or two; a bloodless but thoroughly businesslike affair of honour with an officer from one of His Majesty's sloops of war; a meeting, by no means bloodless, with a bullying soldier of fortune from New York, which had ended only when he had run his man through the shoulder.

He was aware, without conceit, of his own coolness, his quickness of wit. But in the game of wits that he planned to play that night the odds would be heavily against him. If his deception were discovered, what chance would he have alone on Falcon's brig, with that crew of cutthroats? He believed himself—thanks to Mr O'Sullivan, his Irish teacher—to be one of the best swordsmen in the New World. But one rapier could not withstand forty cutlasses.



Yet he was going. He was going, in the guise of Don Ruy Ortiz, to meet Falcon on his ship and learn from him, if he could, whether that prisoner of Chief Concha, mentioned in Montiano's letter, was Gilbert Barradell, Jolie Stanwicke's lover.

He believed that the letter afforded a definite lead towards solution of the Barradell mystery. Putting together all the facts that Almayne had made known to him and linking with these the hunter's conviction that Falcon had knowledge of Gilbert Barradell, it seemed possible—more than possible—that Montiano's letter supplied a clue. There was only one way to explore this clue, and he, Lachlan, alone was capable of the task.

So much was clear. Yet the question that he asked himself remained unanswered: the question why he, who had nothing to gain, was willing to risk so much to promote this girl's happiness.

Curiously, his thoughts turned to Almayne, to the unwillingness that the hunter had shown at the outset to tell him anything about Jolie Stanwicke or her affairs. He understood Almayne's attitude perfectly, for he had noted the same thing before this. Almayne, the elder McDonald's bosom friend, was obsessed by the fear that Lachlan would fall in love with some English girl, and the hunter saw this possibility as a threat to his old friend's hope that Lachlan would succeed him as head of the great Indian Confederacy which composed the Muskogee Empire and over which he ruled as High Chief or King.

Lachlan smiled. Almayne was one in a thousand, the best wilderness hunter in the Province, and, unlike most wilderness hunters, a man of good birth and education; but concerning women and all that had to do with women his ignorance was profound. He distrusted them all—except Sehoy McDonald, Lachlan's mother—and the greater their charm, the greater his distrust.

Lachlan's smile became a trifle rueful. Even the fact that Jolie Stanwicke was pledged to another had failed to render her harmless in Almayne's eyes. Because she was more beautiful than most, Lachlan reflected, Almayne saw her as a particularly deadly menace to his old friend's son.

Was she so beautiful—this Lady Sanguilla, as he had named her? In the dim garden, where he had seen her for the first and only time, Lachlan had not been able to distinguish her features clearly. Her hair, he had thought, was red or bronze-gold; he had been thrilled by the richness of her voice; she had moved with indescribable grace, and she was slender and of more than middle height, and there had been something about the way in which she carried her head. But as for beauty—well, Almayne, who had described her grudgingly as a miracle of loveliness, might not be a trustworthy judge. Yet, even in that dim garden—

He mused for a long while at his writing table, curiously considering these and other matters. At last he arose, slipped under his belt the sealed letter ad-

dressed to "Mistress Jolie Stanwicke," and went out to find Almayne.

He spent some hours with the hunter, for there was much to be argued and discussed, and there were certain things to be done in preparation for his enterprise. He talked also with two tall young Indians, Muskogee warriors from Tallasee, who had arrived in Charles Town two days before to accompany him on the long and dangerous wilderness journey to the Muskogee capital. In the late afternoon, after dining sparingly at Marshall's inn, he returned to his room, and for a while was very busy there.

It was at ten o'clock that he was to meet Falcon on the latter's brig. Having concluded all his preparations, Lachlan wrote a short letter to his mother, to be delivered to her in case anything happened to him. Three quarters of an hour before ten o'clock, he went very softly down the stairs and into the street.

## VII

**T**HE moon and Lachlan McDonald were good friends. He had upon various occasions celebrated her pale beauty in highly decorated verse to which Mr. Francis O'Sullivan, perhaps a partial critic, had given unstinted praise. Yet he was glad to note that on this night she hid her face.

Had she peeped out from behind the gray clouds drifting slowly from the east she might not have recognized at once the young fashioner of rhymes to whom she owed those lyrics. Never before had she seen Lachlan McDonald as he was now—a swaggering young soldier of fortune. A red feather nodded in his broad-brimmed hat; a scarlet sash was wound about his buff jacket; a serviceable rapier swung at his side. Withal, there was something foreign about his gear or about the way in which he wore it—something that smacked not at all of Charles Town or the English folk who dwelt there.

That foreign touch was the result of more than a little thought on Lachlan's part, assisted by certain suggestions from Almayne, who knew something of Spanish styles and tricks of dress as manifested in St. Augustine. What manner of man was Don Ruy Ortiz of Barcelona Lachlan did not know. But since

Montiano had stated in his letter that Don Ruy had only recently arrived from Spain, it was fairly certain that Lance Falcon had never seen him; and all that was needed, therefore, was to simulate a type—the type of young Spanish gallant seeking profit and adventure in Spain's great New World. Swarthy as the swarthiest Spaniard, lean, lithe and straight as a sapling pine, Lachlan McDonald on this night might well have been Don Ruy Ortiz to any man to whom the latter was unknown.

There was one disagreeable possibility that might spoil everything at the start—the possibility that Falcon might recognize this false Ortiz as the man with whom he had wrestled in the Stanwicke garden. Determinedly Lachlan put this thought from him; and logic seemed, in a measure at least, to be on his side. He had leaped upon Falcon from behind. The latter had not seen his assailant's face until after some minutes of desperate struggle, and by then that face was grimed and bloody. He had seen it, moreover, only in the half-light of dusk. He would hardly recognize it, Lachlan told himself, when he saw it again.

There was no time to lose. At 12 o'clock the real Ruy Ortiz would board Captain Falcon's brig at her anchorage in midstream off the old Cypress wharf; and before that hour arrived the false Ortiz must have concluded his business and bidden his host good-bye. Two hours, supposing that all went well, should allow ample margin; but all might not go well.

Lachlan walked swiftly, therefore, by the most

direct course, towards the place for which he was heading, passing presently beyond the old city wall and out upon the meadows and commons to the west of it where as yet only a few houses had been built. A creek made in here; and at a small-boat landing on the shore of this creek a tall figure loomed suddenly in the darkness and held out a hand in greeting.

It was Almayne—no longer clad in hunter's garb, however, but looking a nondescript seaman in soiled, open-necked shirt and loose trousers, a blue handkerchief about his head, a cutlass strapped to his belt. A few words passed between them; then they dropped from the end of the landing into a long cypress pirogue that waited there. Amidship sat two figures almost indistinguishable in the gloom, the two Muskogee warriors of Tallasee. To these Lachlan whispered a grave greeting in their own tongue.

“Striking Hawk—Little Mink, my brothers,” he said, “you have come, as you promised. It is well.”

He stood before them a moment, looking from one to the other.

“My brothers,” he continued, “we are Muskogee warriors of the Family of the Wind, but this night we must seem to be what we are not. I, Lachlan, am become a Spaniard of St. Augustine, and you, my brothers, are Appalache warriors, the Spaniards' friends. And we came here in a Spanish sloop that lies in the River of Stono, beyond the Wappoo marshes, so that she may not be seen from the town.”

The two Indians nodded gravely. Lachlan passed

on and took his seat in the stern. Almayne loosed the rope which held the pirogue to the landing, pushed the boat clear, and seated himself on the forward thwart. In a moment the long paddles wielded by the two Indians were driving the canoe swiftly and noiselessly down the winding creek towards the river.

Across the broad Ashley opened the mouth of Wappoo Creek, connecting the Ashley and the Stono. So that they might seem to have come from the direction of Wappoo they headed well out into the river. Then they swung to the left and dropped straight down the Ashley toward two lights, one just above the other, that glimmered faintly far out in the stream.

Suddenly the brig loomed black before them, not ten yards distant. Lachlan had expected a hail, but it appeared that in the darkness their approach had not been observed. In a whisper Almayne suggested that they hail the brig; but Lachlan shook his head. Silently they ran under the vessel's stern, then eased the pirogue along to the ship's waist where her rail was nearest the water-line.

No sound came from her. Lachlan rose, placed his foot in Little Mink's cupped hands, reached upward and grasped the bulwark. Next moment he stood on the brig's deck.

He stood silent, watchful, his back to the bulwark, his hand on his sword-hilt, his eyes searching the gloom. He saw nothing, heard nothing. The dim deck lay empty before him; ahead and to his right he could barely discern the foremast towering upward like a

pine. If there were any living thing on Lance Falcon's ship, it kept itself hidden and it made no sound. Yet somehow Lachlan knew suddenly, with a queer tingling of his spine, that unseen eyes were fixed upon him.

The knowledge startled yet steadied him. His left hand left his sword-hilt and, sweeping off his hat, he bowed low.

"By our Lady, Captain Falcon," he said in Spanish, "yours is a merry ship! For a moment I thought I had stepped into a tomb."

There followed several seconds of silence. Then a tall form detached itself from the shadows, and a deep voice spoke out of the darkness.

"Welcome, Don Ruy Ortiz," it said. "I have been waiting for you. It is generally the custom of my visitors to ask my permission before they tread my deck."

Lachlan laughed easily.

"A thousand pardons," he replied, "if I have transgressed a rule of the sea. I know little of such matters."

His tone changed suddenly, became stern and hard as steel.

"As for your permission, Captain Falcon, I came not here to seek favours. If you like not the manner of my coming, there are those who, perhaps, can alter your tastes."

It was a bold stroke. For a tense moment Lachlan awaited its effect, his hand once more on his sword-



hilt, his face close to that of the tall man who confronted him. He could hear the latter's quick, hard breathing, could almost see his lips frame an oath. But it was a short-lived crisis. Almost instantly the oath became a laugh.

"My faith, Señor, I had not meant to ruffle your feelings," exclaimed Falcon, "but only to give you friendly counsel. He who boards a ship unannounced in the night may find his head split by a cutlass before he can speak his name."

Lachlan bowed gravely.

"I shall treasure your advice, Captain Falcon," he replied. "And now to business. The sooner it is despatched the better. My paddlers will await me in their canoe."

He had hoped that that business might be conducted in the darkness of the brig's deck; but Falcon led the way aft, and Lachlan followed perforce. Falcon entered the cabin ahead of him, lit lamps, poured red wine from a handsome silver vessel, and motioning him to a chair beside the table, seated himself opposite.

"I have sent my men ashore, Señor," he said, "except three or four who are asleep below deck. My crew will return in an hour, and till then we shall not be disturbed. . . . By my faith, Don Ruy Ortiz, I think I have somewhere seen you before."

Lachlan looked his host coolly in the eye.

"It is not likely, Captain Falcon," he replied, "unless you have travelled in Catalonia or Valencia or

have visited the Sicilian coast where I served in Gonsalvo's command. I came only last month to St. Augustine, and I have yet to pay my respects to the English in Charles Town."

For a long moment he endured the ordeal calmly, while Falcon stared at him frowning; then the latter smiled and made a gesture with his hands as though to dismiss the matter.

"'Tis some trick of the memory," he said lightly, "some whimsy of the mind. And now, sir, to our affair. You have certain tidings to give me, I believe."

## VIII

**L**ACHLAN played with his glass, lowering his eyes lest his elation might be visible. So far, matters had progressed better than he had dared hope. He had expected to invade a nest of enemies, and, instead, the ship was almost empty. He had feared that Falcon might recognize him at once, and now that danger was past. There remained a contest of wits in which he would have need of all his shrewdness; but he began that contest with a light heart. It was with easy confidence that he improvised his answer to the other's question.

“I hope, Captain Falcon,” he said, “that my news is more valuable to you than it appears. It is brief enough. My colonel, Don Joachim de Montiano, bade me tell you that Chief Concha, the Appalache, still holds his prisoner and that the latter's health is good.”

Lance Falcon nodded slowly, twisting the end of his stiff moustache.

“And what of the affair of Chief Concha's daughter?” he asked eagerly.

Lachlan reached beneath his sash for a kerchief, pretending to rub a spot on his sleeve. He was in deep water at the very start.

He knew nothing save what he had learned or sur-

mised from the letter that had been tossed into Falcon's window at Ramage's tavern. There had been no mention of Concha's daughter in that letter, and though in the brief half-second while he fumbled with his kerchief, he searched his brain for a clue, he could not conceive what Falcon meant by this query. There was nothing for it but to strike out boldly.

He lifted his shoulders in a shrug and spread his hands in a gesture which might have meant anything.

"As to that, Captain Falcon," he said, "I am given to understand that it progresses very slowly."

It was a blind stroke delivered with a silent prayer that it might not be a blunder. Its effect was startlingly dramatic.

In an instant Falcon's face was convulsed with rage. His thick brows drew together in a black scowl and his closed hand struck the table with a crash. Lachlan's muscles tightened and he pushed his chair back a little that he might more quickly leap to his feet if the need arose; but in a moment the man opposite him seemed in a measure to regain his self control.

"I knew it," Falcon growled. "I knew that nothing would come of it. I was a fool to listen to Montiano. Henceforth I do what my own judgment tells me."

Again Lachlan plunged blindly.

"You are too hasty, Captain Falcon," he remarked quietly. "I did not say that the affair was at a standstill. I said that it progressed slowly. Is not that something gained?"

The question seemed in some measure to renew Falcon's anger.

"Upon my life, Señor Ruy Ortiz," he cried irritably, "I do not know, and I am not likely to know so long as I trust to your commandant, Montiano, in this matter. Why he should be so tender towards this Gilbert Barradell I cannot guess. But this I will tell you—that I am done with dallying and paltering. The matter is my private affair. It is no part of my bargain with Montiano that I should follow his wishes in this business. I shall defer to him no longer. Within the week I shall set sail for the southward, and when I reach Concha's town I shall deal with Barradell as I think best."

At the first mention of Barradell, Lachlan's heart had given a mighty leap. It was true, then. Chief Concha's prisoner was indeed Jolie Stanwicke's lost lover! What had been hitherto mere conjecture was now a certainty; and even if nothing else were learned from Falcon, priceless information had been gained. That there was much more to be learned was obvious; but it was obvious, too, that an effort to learn more would be desperately dangerous and might undo all that had been won.

All this Lachlan realized in a flash; yet, yielding to impulse, he ventured greatly.

"So be it, Captain," he answered suavely. "It is not for me to dissuade you."

He lifted his wine to his lips.

"To your success!" he murmured, and drained the

glass. Idly he played with it for a moment. Then, with a quizzical smile, he said softly:

“There is a proverb in my country which affirms that when you have dealt with My Lady’s lover, you have still to deal with My Lady. Will that be easy, Captain?”

He did not know what storm this rash impertinence might provoke. He had scarcely spoken the words before he regretted them. Yet, to his amazement, Falcon smiled. Perhaps in some subtle way the query appealed to his vanity and thus pleased him.

“I perceive,” he said, “that Don Joachim de Montiano has told his lieutenant much but not all. There will be no trouble about the lady, Señor.”

He paused, as though reflecting, and Lachlan saw his gray eyes harden while the blood mounted slowly to his cheeks. He held out his left hand palm upward and tapped the palm with the forefinger of the other hand.

“I hold her father there,” he said slowly. “I can crush him when I choose.”

He broke off suddenly. The hard light faded from his eyes, the tight lips relaxed in a smile. He reached for the wine and refilled his glass.

“But enough of this matter, Señor,” he said. “I see that you have nothing more to tell me regarding it, and that Montiano’s object in sending you here was to prevent me from acting upon it in my own way. In that object he has failed. As I told you, I shall sail southward within the week.”

He raised his finger as Lachlan started to speak.

“Spare me your remonstrances, Señor,” he exclaimed. “My mind is made up and I shall come. If Don Joachim values my services to him here, he will not seek to thwart me.”

“Your services have indeed been valuable, Captain Falcon,” Lachlan murmured. “I make no doubt they will be suitably rewarded.”

“As to that,” replied Falcon briskly, “I ask but little—though I might ask much, not only for what I have done for the King of Spain in Charles Town, but also for what I have refrained from doing to him upon the seas. I carry letters of marque, as you doubtless know. But since my bargain with Montiano I have touched no Spanish ship; and some that I might have taken were well worth the taking.”

Lachlan smiled. Here was a new lead, worth following.

“And your work in Charles Town?” he asked not too eagerly. “You were mistaken in your surmise as to my commandant’s object in sending me on this voyage. His real object was to learn from you how our interests prosper here.”

“The time is not yet ripe,” Falcon answered. “It is not ripe, but it is ripening. The defences of Charles Town are weak and they are not being strengthened. The Cherokees grow more and more angry. They will rise when Spain gives the word. The aid you have promised them at Fort Prince George——” He paused and seemed to ponder for a moment.

“But let that wait, Señor Ruy,” he said at last. “I

shall visit your commandant within the fortnight and shall tell him many things. He can wait until then for the information that he desires."

"As you will, Captain Falcon," said Lachlan easily. "So short a delay can be of little moment—though, if you have nothing to tell me, I might have been spared this journey."

He pushed back his chair and arose.

"I think, then," he continued, "that I shall bring my visit to an end. My sloop lies in the River of Stono, and it took my paddlers an hour of steady work to bring me here. With the tide ebbing, 'twill take them longer to return."

"Aye," said Falcon, "and 'twill be well if you get to sea before daylight. Your Spanish sloops, no matter how disguised, still look like Spaniards."

He rose, put on his hat and took a step forward, as though to pass around the table to the door; but midway he halted suddenly. A murmur of voices came from the deck without. Lachlan heard them also, heard them with a sudden thrill which set his heart beating faster.

"My men from below deck," growled Falcon irritably. "They are faithful scoundrels, but I prefer that they shall not see you."

He stood, his head cocked on one side, listening. Next moment a hail rang out from the deck and was answered from the river.

"Strange," muttered Falcon. "The time has passed more quickly than I thought."



He turned to Lachlan.

“We will wait here a little, Señor Ruy,” he said. “Apparently my crew are returning from the town, and when they have come aboard, perhaps I can get you off unobserved into your canoe.”

Lachlan nodded slightly and for some moments they waited in silence. His keen ears told him when the approaching boat ran alongside the brig, but he listened in vain for the loud jests and laughter that he thought would mark the return of Falcon’s crew. At last came the sound of footsteps, the footsteps of three or four men. They came straight to the cabin door and halted just outside; then, after a moment, a loud knock sounded on the panel.

Falcon, frowning, muttered an oath.

“Come,” he growled.

The door swung open. Without stood three of Falcon’s crew, evidently the men who had been sleeping below deck; while in front of them, framed in the doorway, stood a short squat Spaniard, bearded and swarthy, one hand raised to his plumed hat, the other resting lightly on his rapier hilt.

He lifted his hat and bowed to Falcon. He did not see Lachlan because the latter was hidden from him by the door, which opened inward.

“I am an hour before the appointed time, Captain Falcon,” he said smoothly, “but my paddlers made a swift journey from the River Stono. I am Don Ruy Ortiz of St. Augustine.”

## IX

**F**OR a long moment silence reigned. Falcon stood beside the table, swaying slightly, as though he had been dealt a blow. Lachlan leaned against the wall, aware only of the pounding of blood in his temples and a sudden weakness in his limbs. Yet, perhaps because his need was greatest, he was the first to recover his faculties.

He leaped toward the table and seized the empty wine pitcher which stood there. In the same instant he poised it and hurled it straight at Falcon's head. It was a deadly missile at that close range. But for his thick felt hat, Captain Lance Falcon might have closed his eyes at that moment for the last time. As it was, he dropped like a felled ox.

Lachlan had not waited to see the effect of that first swift blow. Lithe as a panther, he wheeled, whipped out his rapier and, with its point aimed at the Spaniard's throat, sprang towards the door.

He dealt, however, with a cool man and a quick one. The Spaniard sprang backward in a long leap, landing lightly as a cat; and he had scarcely landed before his sword was out. The moon had broken through the clouds and the deck was bathed in light. For the moment Lachlan faced only one enemy, since the three men of Falcon's company were as yet weap-

onless. They stood gaping, bewildered at the sudden apparition of an armed man leaping from the doorway of Falcon's cabin; and Lachlan, turning his back on them, drove for the Spaniard with a shout.

With a clash the swords crossed. The Spaniard gave ground, fighting carefully, devoting himself wholly to defence. He, too, was bewildered—not only bewildered but alarmed; and in an instant Lachlan read the man's mind, understood that he believed himself in a trap.

It was no time for hair-splitting niceties. Lachlan knew that he must win his way quickly to the brig's stern, where he had told Almayne to hold the canoe in readiness, for in a few minutes at most Falcon's seamen would join the fight. Between thrusts, he taunted the Spaniard in his own tongue: "Spanish spy," he said, "we have you now and you'll hang for it." Then in a louder voice, as though addressing men behind the Spaniard, "Close in, lads! Take him alive." And all the while he drove fiercely forward, thrusting, thrusting, thrusting, forcing his opponent backward step by step towards the brig's stern.

Yet Don Ruy Ortiz fought well. Convinced that he had stepped into an ambush and that he was assailed by many enemies, he did the one thing that he could do, dealt with the only enemy that he saw. He fought a wary battle, giving ground freely, taking no chances. At Lachlan's shout, "Close in, lads!" he leaped sideways, placing his back against the cabin, so that he might not be taken in the rear by new foes; but when

no new foes appeared, a light seemed to break upon his understanding.

He smiled—a slow, crafty smile. He was an old soldier and he saw through Lachlan's stratagem; perhaps he himself at one time or another had employed the same trick. Plainly this swordsman who had leaped from the cabin doorway was alone; plainly, too, he was not happy just now, otherwise he would not pretend to have allies when he had none. The Spaniard's quick mind darted here and there, nimble as his nimble sword. He could not know all that had happened; but he knew now that it was not he who was in a trap.

He shifted suddenly from defence to offence. For six paces he gained ground before a prick in the shoulder halted him. After a minute of quick hot work, he realized that his skill was overmatched, and again he fell back slowly, on the defensive once more.

Suddenly Lachlan sprang backward, jumped across a hatchway, darted around the cabin and raced towards the brig's stern. From the direction of the fore-castle the three men of Falcon's crew were coming armed with cutlasses, and behind them ran three other men who had clambered up to the brig's deck from the Spaniard's canoe.

In Lachlan's canoe, also, under the brig's stern, the sound of the swords had been heard. Almayne and the two Muskogees had gained the deck, and now they came running to meet Lachlan. He waved them back and the four dashed aft together.

"Into the canoe," Lachlan panted. "I'll hold them. . . . Quick, man!" he shouted. But the hunter shook his head.

There was no time for talk. The Spaniard and the three cutlass men were at hand. Yet before they closed Almayne spoke a guttural word, and the two Indians dropped over the stern.

Out of the corner of his eye Lachlan saw that Almayne carried not the cutlass with which he had equipped himself, but one of the long paddles of the canoe. Next moment, as the Spaniard and one of Falcon's seamen rushed, the tall hunter smote with this weapon as though it were a flail.

Don Ruy Ortiz, catching the blow squarely on his shoulder, was hurled sideways and fell sprawling. He fell, as luck would have it, directly in front of the foremost of Falcon's seamen, and the latter, stumbling over him, reeled sideways, staggering drunkenly as he tried to regain his balance.

Almayne gripped Lachlan's arm, nearly dragging him off his feet.

"Now, lad," he shouted. "Overboard!"

Next moment he stood on the brig's bulwark, Lachlan beside him; and in another instant both plunged into the river.

Almayne sat hunched in the canoe's bow, as angry as the proverbial wet hen. In truth, no hen was ever wetter. He had plunged, it seemed to him, almost to the bottom of the river, and, being but an indifferent

swimmer, he had not enjoyed the experience. His head had hardly bobbed above the surface when one of the Indians laid hold of him, and a moment later he was safe in the canoe, into which the other Muskoguee had already hauled Lachlan.

There had ensued a few minutes of some anxiety, during which the Spaniard and one of Falcon's men had peppered the water round about with musket balls. The shots had done no damage, however, and by now the two Indians had driven the canoe out of range.

The danger was over. In the stern Lachlan McDonald, as wet as Almayne, laughed softly to himself and whistled the first bars of a song. But the tall hunter saw nothing to whistle about and grumbled his discontent in a monologue curiously punctuated with English, French, and Spanish oaths. Lachlan he ignored, addressing his remarks to Little Mink, who sat nearest him.

"A fool's errand," he growled, "a crazy, crack-brained, chuckle-headed venture! Damn near stabbed and damn near drowned, and damn near shot, and 'twould have served us right. And nothing gained except a belly full of salt water. Listen, Little Mink, my brother. From this time forward, Almayne follows his own judgment and not that of any mad boy whose tongue bewitches his wits. I give you that pledge, Little Mink, and if I break it, my best knife's yours."

Lachlan grinned.

“Mark the pledge well, Little Mink, my brother,” he said; “Mark the pledge well. And choose the silver-hafted knife that he won from the Frenchman at Fort Prince George.”

Again he fell to whistling, and for some minutes, for the joy of it, he let Almayne grumble and snort. Then, having had enough of foolery, he said in a tone of mock reproach:

“Old friend, if you had taken the trouble to inquire what happened in Lance Falcon’s cabin, perhaps you would see some sunshine in this sad world.”

Almayne grunted and was silent for a moment. Then: “What happened?” he asked grudgingly.

“Two things,” Lachlan answered. “Captain Falcon got a knock on the head that put him into a sound sleep from which I think he has not yet awakened. But before he was put to sleep he told me something.”

There was that in his tone which aroused Almayne’s suspicions.

“What did he tell you?” the hunter asked with an eagerness which he could not conceal.

“That Gilbert Barradell is alive,” Lachlan answered, “and that he is a prisoner in Chief Concha’s town.”

## X

**T**HE next morning—a Sunday—dawned clear and warm. Lachlan had crawled into bed not more than two hours before sunrise; yet before the sun was an hour high he opened his eyes and was instantly wide awake. For a while he lay thinking—thinking chiefly of two things. He had learned that Gilbert Barradell was alive, had learned where he was. That much of the problem was solved. But that was only the beginning. There remained the task of bringing him back to Charles Town where Jolie Stanwicke awaited him.

Yet it was not with that task that Lachlan's thoughts chiefly concerned themselves. His interview with Lance Falcon had disposed of one mystery, but it had revealed two other mysteries. What was the power that Falcon possessed over Edward Stanwicke of Stanwicke Hall, Jolie's father? And what was that mysterious "affair of Chief Concha's daughter," concerning which Falcon had so eagerly sought news?

For many minutes Lachlan studied these two problems to little purpose. Then he rose, dressed quickly and walked to the inn where he usually breakfasted. A half-hour later he knocked on Almayne's door, at the house where the hunter lodged.



A gruff voice bade him "Come" and, finding the door unbolted, he entered.

"Plague on you!" growled the hunter from under his sheet. "I had thought to sleep till noon to make up for last night's frolic and you wake me at cock-crow. What want you?"

"My letter," said Lachlan briskly. "The letter that you were to deliver to Mistress Jolie Stanwicke in case I came to harm on Falcon's ship."

Almayne jerked his head towards a rough closet built into a corner of the room. Lachlan crossed the floor, found the letter and thrust it beneath his coat.

"That's finished," he said. "Fortunately I'll not need your services as letter-carrier. I can make my report to the lady in person."

Almayne chewed the end of his white moustache.

"You mean," he asked, "that you will call on Mistress Jolie Stanwicke?"

Lachlan nodded. Almayne, sitting up in bed, seemed to consider.

"That's fair enough," he said presently. "It was you that discovered Barradell's whereabouts. It's only right that you should give her the news. Wait till I've eaten and I'll take you to her."

"Thanks," replied Lachlan dryly, "but I'll not trouble you. Much as I enjoy your company, I prefer to see the lady alone."

He moved towards the door, but paused on the threshold.

"Almayne," he said thoughtfully, "I shall return

here later and we can plan what's to be done next. We must move swiftly."

For some minutes after the door had closed Almayne sat motionless in the bed, frowning and chewing his moustache. Slowly the frown faded.

"By Zooks!" he muttered, swinging his long legs out of the bed, "the young cock partridge is in fine feather now! He's taken command, and Almayne's a private in the ranks."

Lachlan McDonald had not the honour to be included among the friends of Edward Stanwicke of Stanwicke Hall. Hitherto he had not counted this a misfortune. Old Stanwicke—Lord Stanwicke, as he was often called—was a power in the Province, a great landholder, the bearer of a title in that strange system of Colonial nobility established by the Lords Proprietors of Carolina and not yet wholly obsolete. Yet, because of his evil temper and his avarice, which were notorious in the Colony, few sought his favour or his company. Lachlan was not of those few, and now for the first time he half regretted it.

He wished to see Jolie Stanwicke, to talk with her at some length, to tell her of what he had learned and of what he now planned to do in the matter of Gilbert Barradell. Because he wished to see her alone, he had declined Almayne's offer to accompany him to Stanwicke's town house. He was turning over in his mind the problem of how to gain entrance there when something plucked lightly at his sleeve.

He half turned and saw a small negro boy wearing the Stanwicke livery. For an instant the round black face grinned up at him, white teeth gleaming. Then the thick lips framed the word "Come," and the boy passed on ahead of him, walking rapidly.

A few townspeople were abroad, citizens with their wives and children on the way to church. So quickly had the black boy delivered his message that Lachlan was sure the incident had passed unnoticed. He quickened his pace slightly, nodding or bowing now and then to someone that he knew, following his diminutive guide at a distance of about a hundred paces; and his heart beat faster when presently he made sure that the boy was leading him by a somewhat roundabout way towards the Stanwicke house.

It was not the house itself, however, that they finally approached, but the spacious wooded garden, the black boy leading the way at a brisk pace along the narrow lane fronting the garden wall.

Lachlan's thoughts sped back to the moment two evenings before when he had stopped in that lane and listened to a woman singing; but he had little leisure now for meditation. The black boy slackened his pace, halted, motioned to Lachlan to hurry. There was none to see them. The lane was little used and was now empty.

"Ober de wall, master," said the boy. "Me fust."

Lachlan cupped his hands and the little negro mounted and scrambled upward. For a moment he sat on the top of the wall, peering this way and that;

then, evidently satisfied, he nodded to Lachlan and immediately dropped out of sight within the garden.

Lachlan waited, listening intently. There flickered in his mind for an instant a doubt as to where this adventure would lead. Who had sent the black boy, and why? Who was waiting there in the shrubbery of the walled garden? It was perhaps a subtle forewarning of peril. Yet he crouched, sprang upward with outstretched hands, and in a moment was perched on the wall's summit.

He saw her instantly. She was seated on a cane bench in a little recess in the shrubbery, a book in her lap. She wore white with a green shawl about her shoulders. Lachlan knew now what he had only vaguely guessed at their first meeting in the dusk of evening—that her hair was of a most wonderful red gold in which the entangled sunlight worked miracles. He knew now also that her eyes were not gray but gray-green with yellow-tawny lights and very large, and that, in spite of those eyes and that hair, she was not fair-skinned but richly dark.

At that first meeting in the dusk he had been thrilled by her voice, by the grace of her slender form, by the poise of her head. But he had not really seen the brilliant beauty of her, beauty that could shine with its full radiance only when there was light to glorify her hair and reveal the sparkling depths of her eyes. Now, for the first time, he saw her.

It was not strange, perhaps, that he was unaware of the signal that her eyes flashed to him—that he sat

motionless, absorbed, until he was roused by a sudden imperious movement of her head which more plainly than words bade him descend.

He did so, with something less than his usual agility, since as he leaped downward a vine caught his foot and nearly threw him. He stumbled, then turned to find that she had risen and was moving towards him.

“I will read your thoughts, sir,” she said in low, clear tones, full of a mock humility. “You are thinking what a monstrous unmaidenly thing it is that I have done in bringing you here over a back wall to a meeting with me in this secret place.”

Lachlan smiled.

“It happened,” he replied, “that when the black boy plucked my sleeve, I had been searching my brain to find a way in which I might come to you, and I had already decided to try the garden wall. It had served me once and might serve again.”

She flushed. Perhaps the answer displeased her. It seemed to Lachlan that her tone was colder as she bade him take seat beside her.

“I brought you here,” she said, “to offer my apologies, to make amends for my ungracious conduct on that occasion when you so gallantly came to my assistance, thinking me in distress. Believe me, sir, my scant courtesy then has troubled me ever since. I could not rest until I had spoken these words to you in person, and I knew no other way to accomplish it save this.”

“It was nothing, Mam’selle,” Lachlan said quickly.

"I interfered in what did not concern me and you sent me about my business. It is I that owe you thanks, since your intercession saved me, an unarmed man, from Captain Falcon's sword."

He hesitated, then continued, smiling: "It may interest you to know that since then I have squared my account with that gentleman."

She caught her breath.

"You mean?" she asked.

"It is a long story," said Lachlan, "and there is something else that I would tell you first, something of much importance to you. I think you are not the kind to swoon with excess of joy, so I come to the point quickly. Gilbert Barradell is alive, and within the week Almayne and I will go to him."

She rose with a stifled cry, her hand at her forehead, her bosom heaving. Cheeks aflame, eyes big with amazement, she stood before him, swaying slightly. She opened her lips to speak, but no words came; and suddenly her eyes, wider than ever now and wildly staring, were full of terror.

Those eyes looked past Lachlan and over his head where he sat on the bench leaning forward a little and looking eagerly up into her face. Suddenly his own eyes narrowed. Perhaps it was wholly the fear in her face that warned him; perhaps his keen ears had caught some slight sound behind him.

He gained his feet, but only for an instant. There was a crash, the world went black, he was falling, falling, falling an interminable distance.

## XI

**L**ACHLAN McDONALD sat in Captain Lance Falcon's cabin on the brig *Good Fortune*. Across the table sat Falcon, and between them stood the same silver wine pitcher that upon another occasion had served Lachlan as an effective weapon at close range. It was half full of red wine now, but Falcon, smiling grimly, picked it up and held it in his hand, testing its weight.

"Odds Fish!" he exclaimed, "the marvel is you did not kill me. 'Twas my hat saved my life. And your own head? How does it feel?"

"There was some pain," answered Lachlan soberly, "but it has passed. It must have been some hours ago that I was struck down."

Falcon poured wine for himself and pushed the pitcher towards Lachlan.

"It was on Sunday morning," he said, "and this is Monday forenoon. Meanwhile, you have enjoyed a long sleep here on my brig, and I rejoice to see that you have awakened refreshed and quite yourself again. When I bade my men bring you here to my cabin from your sleeping quarters in the hold, I did not know whether they would bring a live man or a dead one. On the whole, I hoped for the former, so I felicitate myself as well as my guest."

He sipped his wine; then, pushing back his chair, swung his booted legs up on the table. He was in high good humour evidently.

“You must admit,” he said pleasantly, “that my little plan was skilfully conceived and that I worked fairly fast.”

He paused as though expecting a reply, but Lachlan held his tongue. There was little for him to say. He knew only that he had awakened in the dim hold of a ship at sea; that presently two seamen had brought him food, which had not only assuaged his savage appetite but had also in large measure stilled the throbbing of his head; that, hours later, two other men had conducted him from the hold to the deck whence he could see far away to the right a long low line of forest marking the coast; that he had been led without delay to the ship’s cabin beside the door of which stood Captain Lance Falcon.

He knew then what he already suspected—that he was a prisoner on Falcon’s brig; and he was not deceived in the slightest by the elaborate courtesy with which Falcon had ushered him into the cabin to a seat at the same table where he had sat once before. His head still ached slightly, but his mind was very active, very clear. He knew as he took his seat that the man opposite him meant to kill him.

“It was a pretty plan,” Falcon continued, “yet I owed something to luck. Perhaps you have not yet quite grasped all that has happened to you?”



He paused, his eyebrows lifted, and, at Lachlan's nod, proceeded briskly:

“Of course, it was necessary for me to lay hold of you at once. It was a clever game that you played as Don Ruy Ortiz and you played it well; aye, and fought well, too, they tell me, after you had put me to sleep. In truth, it grieves me to interfere with the designs of so promising a young man. But you learned too much here in this cabin that night, and, although you could hardly prove your tale, I thought it best to get my hands on you before you could go to the Governor with your story of Captain Lance Falcon as an agent of the Spaniards. In the nick of time, Mistress Jolie Stanwicke's black boy, who is in my pay, brought me word that at a certain hour you would be in the Stanwicke garden. This was a stroke of fortune. It is a secluded secret place, safe from the public eye. I regretted the necessity of rough work in the lady's presence, but that could not be helped.”

He refilled his glass and drained it; then, perceiving that Lachlan's glass stood empty, he leaned forward and filled it also.

“Drink, sir,” he exclaimed with a gleam of strong white teeth under his thick, reddish-brown moustache. “Drink while you may! Since no travellers return from that mysterious country, we do not know whether or not they quaff wine there to the thrumming of the angels' harps.”

He smiled more broadly. “Your pardon,” he said,

“for the intrusion of an unpleasant thought. To continue my explanation of how you happened to become my guest—I have in my crew three Indians of the Mohawk nation who, long ago, while I lay in New York harbour, foreswore the forest for the sea, but who still retain their skill in woodcraft. They were the very men for my little enterprise, being expert in the laying of ambuscades and having the Indian faculty of moving soundlessly through shrubbery where an Englishman would make as much noise as a cow. Besides, I did not wish to appear in the affair myself, and I did not wish the lady to know that my men were concerned in it. She knows only that, while you sat talking with her in her garden, you were set upon by three Indians who leaped suddenly from the bushes. Being new to Charles Town, and thinking us even more barbarous than we really are, she had no difficulty in believing that your assailants were Indians of some tribe hostile to the Muskogee nation, of which I understand you are a chief.”

Lachlan had followed the narrative with close attention. He frowned. The plan had been well made indeed. Yet there were details as to which he felt a certain curiosity.

“I congratulate you, Captain Falcon,” he said steadily, “upon your strategy. You have been frank in telling me how the trap was set and sprung. One thing more. After your Mohawks had knocked me down, what happened then?”

“The lady rushed into the house, crying for help,” Falcon answered at once, “but for some minutes she could find no one, and when she returned, you and my fellows had vanished. I had, of course, foreseen the difficulty of getting you through the streets to the river front in full daylight. Townspeople who saw my Mohawks pass perceived that they were carrying on their shoulders a small boat’s mast and sail. None knew that under the folds of the sail a handsome youth was lying unconscious.”

Lachlan nodded. The story was complete, and he detected no flaw in the execution of the plan, no mischance upon which he might hang some faint hope. Almayne might suspect what had become of him, but Falcon had covered his tracks well.

Falcon, eyeing him keenly, seemed to read his thoughts.

“You observe,” he said gravely, “that the business of getting you away was managed exceedingly well. This was the difficult part and it is disposed of. The rest is both simple and safe. If I now decide to let my men drop you into the ocean, I can do so without fear of embarrassment later on.”

Lachlan poured a glass of wine and swallowed it. His hand shook a little, sweat stood on his forehead. Falcon had lowered his legs from the table and sat upright, staring at him intently; and suddenly something in the man’s eyes, some expression of hateful, triumphant expectation, stabbed Lachlan like a sword.

He had been near to failure. He had held himself in check until now; but now at last his tautened nerves threatened to give way. Falcon was waiting and watching for this, was expecting it. It was the look of expectancy in the man's eyes, the cool confident look of triumph and of faint scorn which stabbed and stung Lachlan like a knife or a whip.

A sudden hot anger blazed in him because this man had expected him to falter, anger which was all the hotter because he knew that for an instant he had faltered. He was afraid, but he knew now that fear would not master him, and with this knowledge a savage, reckless happiness surged in him.

He leaned across the table and struck Falcon across the mouth with the back of his hand.

"You call yourself a soldier," he said hoarsely. "If you have a soldier's pride, you will wipe out that stain before your seamen throw me to the sharks."

Falcon did not move. There was a fleck of blood upon his mouth, but the lips were smiling. At last he brought his open hand down upon the table with a crash.

"Well done, Lachlan McDonald!" he cried. "Well done, and well spoken, and a happy, happy thought—a flash of inspiration, no less! A thrust through the heart or lungs in fair fight is not murder, and it is a more gentlemanly way of killing a man than dropping him overboard."

He rose and, still smiling broadly, bowed; then

suddenly extended his long arm across the table and tapped Lachlan's chest with his forefinger.

"An hour from now, sir," he said, "I shall take great pleasure in placing my sword-point there."

Again his forefinger tapped Lachlan's chest above the heart.

## XII

**A** SPACE had been cleared on the brig's deck between the masts. Around it in a circle were gathered the vessel's crew—some fifty seamen, English for the most part, but many of them sunburned as dark as Spaniards. In the centre Captain Lance Falcon stood, his hand upon the hilt of his rapier, the point of which rested upon the deck in front of him. A little behind him stood Lachlan McDonald, pale but level-eyed and cool, in his right hand a rapier somewhat more slender than Lance Falcon's.

There was a silence broken only by the swish of the water, the creaking of rigging, the harsh cries of a few circling gulls. On every sun-tanned face in that crowding, eager circle was written a savage, joyous expectancy. Some were bare-headed, some wore scarves of red or blue or yellow upon their heads, all were bare-armed and bare-chested, many had hoops of gold in their ears. There was scarcely one that had not a long knife in his belt, and some wore cutlasses and carried pistols thrust through their sashes. Even in harbour, where their commander enforced upon them certain rigid rules of deportment, the men of

Captain Falcon's crew were not pleasant-looking customers. When once they had gained the open sea they became in appearance and demeanour the sea-wolves that they were.

In that interval of silence Lachlan's black eyes swept round the circle of faces. He saw there what he might have seen in the faces of men gathered around a cockpit: no hint of mercy or compassion; only blood-lust flaming in hard, relentless eyes; the seething, passionate excitement of savage men about to witness that which their stern souls loved most to see. He expected nothing else, but his hand tightened upon his sword-hilt until the finger nails pressed deep into the flesh.

A mist swam before him. It cleared in an instant; but he no longer saw that fierce-eyed circle of ruthless, wolfish faces hungry for blood. He looked beyond them now and saw the blue sky, the bluer ocean, and the white gulls white as snow against the blue. The wind had dropped and the Atlantic was like a sleeping giant breathing gently. To the eastward a dense fog-bank lay upon the waters, a gray wall shutting off his view. He turned his head impatiently and looked to the west where he could still distinguish, low on the horizon, the purple line of woods that marked the coast.

Falcon raised his hand, although there was no need to command silence. He stood bareheaded and coatless, his arms bare to the elbows, his white shirt open at the throat; a tall, broad-shouldered, immensely

powerful man, yet so perfectly proportioned that, for all its weight and bulk, his body had something of a tiger's grace. For a moment he held this pose; then in a deep booming voice he began to speak.

"Gentlemen of the brig *Good Fortune*," he said, "we have with us Mr. Lachlan McDonald of Charles Town. As some among you know, this is not his first visit to our hospitable vessel. It pleased him to favour us with his presence some nights ago, and upon that occasion he learned from me certain things which he is unfortunately not able to forget.

"I know that long-winded explanations are little to your taste. Suffice it, then, to say that, in consequence of this inconvenient knowledge that he has acquired, I am compelled to regard Mr. McDonald as an enemy and to deal with him as such. My poor imagination had hit upon no better scheme than the rude and simple plan of dropping him over the ship's side here in the open Atlantic. His genius and, I may add, his courage, have revealed a better way.

"We will fight, therefore, with the swords that we hold in our hands, within the circle of your sympathetic faces, no quarter asked or allowed. Fortunately the wind has lulled and the deck is fairly steady. I have given him the choice of the weapons on the brig, and he has found one that pleases his fancy. He has, it seems, some reputation with the rapier—a reputation not ill deserved, as he proved on this deck not many nights ago.

"It is altogether a happy solution of the problem,



gentlemen, and I beg you give him credit for it. No honest-minded man can apply the detestable word murder to the outcome of a fair fight, man to man and steel to steel; and this fight will be fair. I appoint you, Diccon Drews, and you, Richard Ludlow, to act as Mr. McDonald's seconds, and I give you authority to split with your cutlasses the head of any cowardly dog who hampers him in the work he has to do.

“Unfortunately, the entertainment with which we are about to provide you will be brief. In a few minutes we shall run into the fog-bank yonder, and before that happens Mr. McDonald and I must make an end. One word, and I am done. When he has run me through and you have consigned my carcass to the fishes, you will see to it that Mr. McDonald is conveyed with all honour to Charles Town to receive the felicitations of his friends.”

A roar of exultant merriment greeted this conclusion. It told Lachlan more clearly than words that not one man in all that ship's company entertained the slightest doubt as to the outcome. They knew Falcon. They had followed him for months, some of them perhaps for years, and it was plain that they considered him a master-swordsman.

Lachlan's lips tightened. Except Mr. O'Sullivan, his teacher, he had not yet met his equal with the rapier; but the world was wide, his corner of it was small. Knowing his own powers, he was nevertheless aware that he faced an antagonist whose experience was far greater than his. Yet his hand was steady as

he placed himself on guard. Now, as always, the feel of the sword gave him courage.

Falcon had turned and was facing him, his weapon raised in salute. Lachlan, on guard, watched him closely—watched, waited—was struck with sudden wonder.

Gradually, yet swiftly, Falcon's countenance was undergoing an astonishing metamorphosis. The sneer was fading from his lips; the tan of his cheeks was deepening to a purplish-red; on his forehead the veins were swelling; into his eyes had crept a look of rapt, incredulous amazement.

He stood as though paralyzed, mouth open, eyes glaring; and those eyes looked past Lachlan, stared wildly, fixedly, as though they saw a ghost. In an instant Lachlan knew that this was no trick, no stratagem; yet, resisting the impulse to turn his head and glance behind him, he kept his own eyes fixed upon those of his adversary.

So for some seconds they stood, strangely rigid and immovable, like men suddenly frozen to stone. Then from some seaman in that part of the circle behind Falcon burst a hoarse cry:

“The *Merry Amy*! Black Lowther's ship!”

The spell was shattered. The circle of fierce faces, which a moment ago had awaited in tense, avid silence the first clash of the blades, was now a milling mass of men who surged this way and that, cursing, shouting, craning their necks, staring towards the east. Another moment, and the circle broke as most

of the seamen rushed to the rail. Lachlan, nearly swept off his feet in the tumult, turned.

Out from the heavy fog bank ahead and to the eastward had burst a great ship, a ship of towering masts and tapering spars, high-sided, her black hull pierced with gunports like a frigate. She flew no flag. Her wet, bellying sails shone like silver in the sun; her white decks were dotted with men running to and fro. She was sailing on a course that would bring her presently across the brig's bows; and even as Lachlan watched her, there came a puff of smoke from her forward deck, and a ball struck the sea ahead of the *Good Fortune*.

Close behind Lachlan a thunderous voice bellowed a command. Falcon stood there, his face aflame with excitement, his eyes blazing. Still grasping his sword, he shouted orders with his bull's voice, turning now forward and now aft; and almost in an instant Lachlan saw chaos magically transformed.

Hubbub ceased, confusion vanished. Men ran to the ropes; suddenly, with a mighty flapping of canvas, the brig swung round into the wind, careening so sharply that for a minute Lachlan, struggling to keep his footing, thought that she must capsize.

She righted herself, her sails filled, slowly she gathered headway, her stern now turned to the great ship that had come out of the fog. Lachlan, gazing aft, saw that the ship also was turning in a manœuvre as swift and daring as that in which Falcon had turned his brig. Beside him a harsh voice croaked

an oath—a one-eyed, earringed seaman, teeth bared in a snarling grin.

“By the Pit!” the man growled, “Black Lowther knows his business, too. Here’s Hell’s soup now!”

A hand fell on the seaman’s shoulder and sent him spinning. It was Falcon. “Come aft, sir!” he snapped at Lachlan, and strode towards the stern, shouting orders as he went. Lachlan followed, saw Falcon snatch the wheel from the helmsman, stood by with thumping heart and parted lips as the tall man before him, oblivious of his presence, dealt with the peril that had burst upon him out of the fog.

He crowded sail on the brig until she was carrying every inch of canvas. He sent men aloft with buckets to wet the sails so that they would hold the wind. Meanwhile he prepared for battle. Lachlan saw that men were busy at the broadside guns, that ammunition was being brought from the magazine, that cutlasses, hangars, and pikes were stacked upon the deck.

Then, after half an hour of feverish activity, of ceaseless bellowing of orders, a strange stillness and silence fell. Lachlan knew that for the present all that could be done had been done, that the issue rested with fate.

Falcon turned to him then with a smile as bland as that of a courtier in a ballroom.

“You have most damnably good luck, Mr. McDonald,” he said slowly. The smile became a laugh.

“D’ye know why we are put to all this pother?” he asked. “D’ye know who our friends are yonder?” He jerked his head towards the pursuing ship.

Lachlan shook his head.

“That ship,” Falcon continued, “is named the *Merry Amy* and she is commanded by a gentleman of some fame upon the seas. From his amiable disposition he is known as Black Lowther, and, like myself, he is a privateer of somewhat easy conscience who does not quite understand where privateering ends and piracy begins. Once, in the Gulf of Florida, I stole from him a prize that he had taken, and he swore by his favourite saint that he would cut off my ears and feed my heart to his pet dog. His ship being twice as large as the *Good Fortune* and carrying eighteen guns to our eight, he conceives that he has his opportunity now.”

He ceased and stood silent a few moments, his hands gripping the wheel, his narrowed eyes fixed on the sea ahead. He glanced aloft, shouted an order, then turned again to Lachlan.

“It may happen after all, sir,” he said calmly, “that I shall have to drown you like a rat instead of killing you like a gentleman. If I am forced to that necessity presently, you will please blame this inconvenient fellow, Lowther, who has interrupted our little affair.”

### XIII

**I**T WAS an hour after noon when the *Merry Amy* burst like a phantom ship out of the fog and the chase of the *Good Fortune* began. Two hours later it was plain that the chase could have but one ending. Black Lowther's ship was gaining. At first, while the breeze held light, she had dropped a little behind; but the *Good Fortune* belied her name; luck, or fate, turned persistently against her. The fog bank to the eastward, in which Falcon had hoped to lose his pursuer, lifted and disappeared, and simultaneously the breeze freshened.

The *Good Fortune* sailed well in any wind. She gathered speed as the breeze increased, and Lachlan, standing beside Falcon at the wheel, marvelled at her swiftness as she leaped quivering through the seas.

"I think we shall win, Captain Falcon," he said presently.

The tall man smiled sourly. "A landsman's opinion," he replied. "In light airs we could outpace her. In a stiff wind the *Merry Amy* is the fastest vessel on the Western Ocean."

For a while he said no more, and Lachlan, watching the ship behind, soon saw that he spoke truth. Little by little the *Merry Amy* was creeping up.

Black Lowther, too, had crowded on all sail and he took in none as the breeze freshened. From truck to rail his ship was a towering mass of canvas. Beside Falcon, who still handled the wheel, now stood Diccon Drews, his second in command, a short, broad, hairy, tattooed ruffian, stripped to the waist, his sash bristling with pistols.

Lachlan, listening to the talk between them, learned something of the fine points of this deadly game—learned, too, what Falcon planned. They could never win back to Charles Town Harbour, he gathered; long before then they would be overhauled. But the game was not hopeless; there were several cards to play.

Lowther's tremendous press of canvas was straining his tall masts and tapering spars. Again and again Diccon Drews, a long glass pressed to his glowering eye, studied the *Merry Amy's* bellying sails, and any moment he hoped to see a topmast snap. Falcon, knowing Black Lowther's seamanship, dismissed this possibility, but turned his head at intervals to gauge the lessening distance between the two vessels.

Good shooting was impossible in such a sea, but a little later, when the range would be shorter, a lucky shot from the long gun at the *Good Fortune's* stern might give that slim foretopmast a fatal wound. It was one chance in a hundred; and even then with half a gale blowing the ship would outsail the brig. But the chase would last longer and there might be time to play the last card.

With a quickening pulse Lachlan learned what that last card would be. If they were not overhauled meantime, Falcon would head in for the coast opposite Edisto Inlet and either wreck his brig on the treacherous shoals at the inlet mouth or by some miracle of luck and seamanship drop anchor safe in Edisto River where his pursuer could not come.

An hour passed, and always the wind rose higher and the waves grew mightier, so that the *Good Fortune* plunged and leaped from wave to wave, burying her prow deep in the crested combers, her decks awash with brine and foam. She still carried all her canvas, but Lowther had shortened sail. Yet the *Merry Amy* still gained, was now within easy gunshot. For half an hour the long gun in the brig's stern had been sniping at the pursuer's spars. Shooting from that plunging deck was like shooting in the dark. Every shot had gone wild; and if a hit were ever made it would be due to chance and not to marksmanship. Nevertheless, Falcon held his gunners to their task, laughing, cursing, swearing that the next shot would do the work.

Above the roar of the wind Lachlan heard a hollow booming sound that seemed miles away. Lowther had opened fire with his bow-chaser. At the same moment there ran up to the tip of the *Merry Amy's* mainmast a small black square of bunting. At the sight a deep-throated shout burst from the *Good Fortune's* crew, and Falcon laughed grimly and bellowed an order forward, his bull's voice roaring above the wind.



Three minutes later, a black flag blazoned with white crossbones and skull climbed to the *Good Fortune's* main peak.

Falcon spoke over his shoulder to Lachlan standing just behind him.

"He is a brutish clodpole, this Black Lowther," he said, "but he has a certain wit. In these tame times the Black Roger is seldom flown because most rovers have grown too discreet to proclaim their profession. But when two gentlemen of that profession meet to settle a quarrel, it is fitting that they should meet under the good old flag."

He had scarcely finished when the gun at the brig's stern roared again. Suddenly Diccon Drews, who had been gazing at the *Merry Amy* through his glass, leaped into the air, clutching wildly at one of the pistols in his sash. He jerked it out and fired it above his head, then dashed it to the deck.

"A hit, by Judas! A hit!" he shouted. "Square in the foretopmast."

A great shout, exultant yet half incredulous, rose from the brig. To the unaided eye there was nothing to show that the man spoke truth, but almost instantly came the proof. On the deck of the *Merry Amy* there was a sudden activity. Yet swift as Lowther was to act, he was too late. Before he could shorten sail to relieve the strain, the wounded spar snapped with a report louder than the *Merry Amy's* cannon, swayed drunkenly and toppled to leeward, its ripped canvas fluttering and streaming in the wind.

Falcon's great voice boomed out above the gale and the yells of his men:

"Lance Falcon's luck, my bullies! It's never failed us yet."

A seaman sailed the *Merry Amy* and the men who sailed with him were seamen. To clear the wreckage of that fallen topmast in so heavy a sea was no light task; yet within a few minutes it was done. Diccon Drews, watching through his glass a short thick man on the *Merry Amy's* deck who directed the work, bestowed various foul epithets upon Black Lowther that were eloquent, though indirect, compliments to his skill. Falcon gave him more candid praise. There were two men on the Western Ocean, he told Lachlan, whose handiwork that might have been. One was Captain Lowther of the ship, *Merry Amy*; the other was Captain Falcon of the *Good Fortune*, brig.

Then suddenly the easy nonchalance that had sat so well upon him vanished. With the frenzy of a madman he threw himself into his work, straining at the wheel, cursing with fearful blasphemies the gunners who still plied the stern gun as fast as they could ram each charge home, bellowing hoarse orders to the seamen forward and in the vessel's waist. And as Falcon's frown blackened and his vehemence increased, the leering smile on Diccon Drews' powder-blackened face widened until at last the hairy lieutenant's satisfaction found utterance.

“He knows there’s a chance now,” Drews growled in Lachlan’s ear, “an’ he’s begun to fight.”

But the chance was slender. To Lachlan there came within the next half-hour conviction that the race was lost.

The *Merry Amy* still gained—less rapidly than before, but steadily, surely. It was not only a race now but a battle, for Black Lowther was firing from his bow-chaser and from two of his forward ports; three guns against one, since only the long gun on the *Good Fortune’s* after-deck could be brought to bear. As yet no material damage had been done, but already there were three great holes in the *Good Fortune’s* sails. The *Merry Amy’s* fire was more accurate than the brig’s; being much larger, she was a steadier gun-platform. She out-pointed the brig, too, and while she gained, she crept slowly to windward. A little while more and Lowther would be able to train his port broadside on his adversary.

All on board the *Good Fortune* knew what that would mean. The brig would be hammered to pieces, smashed little by little into kindling wood by an overwhelming rain of iron.

A round shot struck the water just behind the *Good Fortune*, so close to her that Lachlan felt the spray on his cheek. Next moment, with a whining, humming hiss, a ball passed not six feet from Falcon where he stood at the wheel and, ranging diagonally forward across the deck, nicked a great chunk out of the port bulwark.

Lowther had changed his tactics. Hitherto he had been shooting at the *Good Fortune's* spars. Now, with the race as good as won, his target was the brig's deck. Diccon Drews croaked a savage imprecation. "We'll get it now," he growled. "He's started to hull us."

For a while, though both vessels fired steadily, there were no more hits. Then a cheer rose from the *Good Fortune*. One of her shots had gone home. It had struck the *Merry Amy's* deck squarely just as the ship plunged into a hollow between two waves, and it had worked havoc. Lachlan saw men running to and fro on the ship's forward deck, and Diccon Drews, peering through his glass just as the shot struck, swore savagely that the crew of the *Merry Amy's* forward gun had been wiped out.

"First blood!" roared Falcon. "By——"

A rending crash drowned the oath. Behind and to the right of Lachlan the brig's bulwark had been ripped asunder. A splinter struck him between the shoulder blades, though without inflicting a wound, and he staggered and almost fell. Recovering himself, he sickened at what he saw. Forward in the waist of the ship, where the ball had ranged, five men were down and one of them lay sprawled across a gun-carriage, blood spurting from the place where his arm had been.

Above the yells and groans of the wounded, Lachlan heard a whining, a humming. It was so loud, so near, that this time he was sure his end had come; but the ball passed him, passed Drews and Falcon

and the men of the after-gun and smashed into the *Good Fortune's* waist near the port rail as she rose on a billowing wave. Thence it ranged forward along the deck, its force almost spent, and Lachlan saw it and saw the devastation that it wrought.

Men went down before it like ninepins in some bowling game of the giants—man after man in swift succession until six men had fallen. Far forward the ball struck the carriage of one of the bow guns, knocked it sideways and, being deflected to the right, rolled across the deck, breaking another man's legs before it came to rest. Of the seven who had fallen only one man rose, and he ran screaming towards the cabin, his hand pressed to his side, crying that his back was broken. He slipped in a pool of blood, fell sprawling, and lay still; and behind him another fallen man stirred, reared slowly to his knees, toppled backward.

Falcon gripped Diccon Drews' arm, bade him take the wheel, then strode forward along the heaving deck. Lachlan followed, not knowing why. Close to the mainmast Falcon halted.

"Men," he roared, "a half-hour more and we can run for Edisto Inlet. It will be a half-hour of hell. Will you stand the gaff till then, or will you hoist the white flag?"

He quelled with his raised hand the shout that arose.

"Surrender'll mean life to most of you. Black Lowther wants me and Diccon Drews and half a

dozen others, but he'll let the rest of you go. We'll die, but most of you'll live."

He ceased, but no answer came.

"Which shall it be?" he bellowed. "The white flag or fight?"

From far forward a deep voice made reply. "To hell with Black Lowther!" boomed the words above the din of the gale, and the cheer that greeted them was half a cheer and half an unearthly laugh.

Falcon whirled and strode aft again, his eyes ablaze. In Lachlan's eyes, too, as he followed, a strange light flamed.

## XIV

**T**HE half-hour had nearly passed. The *Good Fortune* was a ship of blood, a habitation of death. Sailing almost abreast of her and scarcely more than a pistol shot away, the *Merry Amy* had poured broadside after broadside into her. Against the ten guns that Lowther's vessel brought to bear—eight on her gun deck, one forward, and one aft—the brig could utilize only five, and now three of these were silent. But for the heavy seas, in which marksmanship even at close range was difficult, the *Good Fortune* could not have lived so long.

But she did live, and her masts still stood, and Falcon still held the wheel, though Diccon Drews was dead. Lachlan McDonald had taken his place. In his bull's voice Falcon still shouted his orders forward, but to Lachlan he gave his instructions for the powder-blackened men who worked the after-gun. He was very cool and calm now, the fury had gone from him; he smiled often. Once, when the *Good Fortune* still reeled under the shock of another broadside, he slapped Lachlan's back and congratulated him on becoming first mate of a pirate brig.

To Lachlan the thing seemed somehow not unduly strange—not stranger than all that had happened

in the past few days, though all that had happened seemed a dream.

He had forgotten self. He had forgotten all that had gone before. He was one now with this crew of cutthroats, this crew of heroes. He was Lance Falcon's man.

He had been Falcon's man since the moment when Falcon had made that speech beside the mainmast. He had been afraid, weak with fear, sick with the sight of blood, bewildered by the incredible, infernal din of the fight—the thunder of the guns, the crashing of rent timbers, the cries of wounded men. But all this had passed; he was as cool now as Falcon himself. He loved every cursing, powder-blackened, blood-spattered human devil on the brig, and for Falcon himself he would fight till the deck sank under him.

The battle was in his veins. He was drunk with the stark, incalculable courage of these men who fought and cursed and died and still yelled above the tumult, "To hell with Black Lowther!"

There was blood on his sleeve and on his face, but it was not his blood. So far he had suffered not a scratch. He was grimy with powder and wet with spray and sweat. He had worked with the crew of the after-gun until (when a flying splinter had pierced Diccon Drews' throat) Falcon had shouted for him. Thenceforward he stood by the commander's side, passing his orders on to the crew of the long gun, and twice making his way forward to deliver instructions.

In place of the fear that for a while had gripped



him, a fierce gladness flamed in him. He was happy, more passionately happy than he had ever been before. Yet he was perfectly aware that the end was near. He would never have believed that any ship or any crew could stand such punishment; and he knew that it could last only a little longer.

From the *Merry Amy* another broadside roared, and this time, whether by design or accident, the shot went high. From aloft came a loud crack and a great spar hung dangling, the sail that it had supported flapping loosely.

Falcon bellowed an order. To Lachlan it meant little, but he saw that men left the guns and leaped to the ropes. Suddenly Falcon threw his weight on the wheel and the brig swung to port, turning directly away from the *Merry Amy*, racing, with the wind behind her, straight for that distant purple line of trees which marked the coast.

There was still spirit enough in what was left of that battered crew for another cheer, and they cheered and Lachlan cheered with them. Yet he at least knew—for Falcon had told him—that they were going now to destruction almost as certain as that which in another half-hour Lowther's guns would have dealt.

Ahead and plainly visible was a gap in the far-off line of woods—Edisto Inlet. It seemed a broad, fair opening and behind it was safety; but minutes ago Falcon had informed Lachlan very calmly that there was one chance in a hundred of winning through.

The inlet mouth was flanked and dotted with dangerous shoals; the tide, though flooding, was still very low; there was water in the brig's hold so that her draught was greater than normal and she steered sluggishly. It was all but certain that she would smash upon the reefs.

"I am saved the trouble of dropping you overboard," Falcon had said carelessly. "A little while now and we shall all be frolicking among the fishes."

Lachlan looked astern. The *Merry Amy* had come about and lay broadside on. Then slowly her bow swung landward, her yards were squared, and the chase was on once more. But Lowther was shortening sail rapidly now, and Lachlan saw a seaman in the ship's bow heaving the lead.

"He'll follow us in till the water shoals," growled Falcon. "Then he'll tack and watch us drown."

The minutes passed. Lachlan heard the hiss of the waves, the whine of the wind, the wailing of a wounded man somewhere forward, the groaning and creaking of the brig's straining spars. Yet, now that the guns were still and there came no more the crash of timbers disintegrating under a hail of iron, it seemed to him that they moved through a silence, grim, unnatural, unbearable.

It was more terrible than the tumult of the fight, this silence; it was portentous, black with fate; somehow he knew that it could not last and that after it would come the end.

A loud crack, followed by others in quick succession, shattered it. A rending, rushing sound filled the air. Its shrouds and backstays long since shot away, the mainmast had broken fifteen feet above the deck, snapped by the prodigious pitching of the brig as she plunged head-on into the rollers. It fell forward, fouling the fore-yards; and in that moment the *Good Fortune*, already a wreck below from Lowther's guns, became a wreck above also, a helpless plaything of the waves.

A cry rose from her deck—a cry that was not a cheer—a hoarse, long-drawn moan of dismay. Slowly she fell off until she lay in the trough of the seas, wallowing heavily, rolling her ripped and shattered bulwarks under. No spar ever fashioned could stand such a strain. Within three minutes her dreadful wallowing fairly jerked the foremast out of her.

She lived a half-hour longer. Wind and tide and on-rushing combers drove her drunkenly towards the coast. When she perished she perished utterly. The sea raised her high and flung her down upon an invisible reef, raised her once more and a second time flung her down. To Lachlan it seemed that she went to pieces as suddenly as though some monstrous cannon in her vitals had exploded and blown her into atoms.

Lachlan lay on his back in a shallow hollow amid low sand hills. He raised his head slowly and looked

about him. Four men, naked or half-naked, sprawled near him breathing heavily. In the east the sun stood an hour high. The air was very still.

Against the blue sky a white-headed eagle circled on motionless wings. In a small gray-green bush across the hollow a wren sang merrily. Above a ridge of sand thirty feet away Lachlan saw the head of a whitetail buck appear, heard the buck's snort of astonishment as he wheeled and vanished. From beyond the dunes came the continuous moan of the surf. Suddenly Lachlan remembered.

It came crowding back into his mind—a torrent of memories, confused yet vivid. Most vivid of all was one.

He was in the water fighting his way towards a great floating timber, a fragment of the *Good Fortune*, to which several men were clinging. He knew that he could not reach it, but he fought on.

At last he clutched for it, missed, and knew that he was done. But a hand reached out, grasped him, drew him up on the timber. Later he realized that the man next to him, the man who had saved him, was Lance Falcon.

All this seemed vastly remote, as though it had happened months ago. He remembered vaguely that, after an eternity, the sea had cast them ashore in the dusk, that they had staggered across the narrow beach to the sandhills beyond and had flung themselves down on the soft sand.

Lachlan got slowly to his feet. He felt somewhat

light-headed, his limbs were stiff and sore, he was cold. He swung his bare arms—his only garment was his breeches—to warm himself, and discovered suddenly that he was weak and very tired. Without a glance at the four sleeping men, he walked a few steps to the top of the sand ridge in order to get a view of his surroundings.

Fifty yards away on the beach he saw Falcon, coatless and hatless, his white shirt hanging in ribbons, gazing out over the ocean.

Lachlan stood for some moments watching him. Presently Falcon turned, saw Lachlan standing on the dune, and beckoned him; and Lachlan walked slowly down the slope of the dune and across the beach. As he approached, he saw that Falcon was smiling; and this smile filled him with a dull surprise, a vague, ill-defined horror.

“Give you good morning, Mr. McDonald,” Falcon said briskly as Lachlan drew near. “I have been mourning at the grave of the *Good Fortune*, and now my faithful first mate has come to shed a few tears on her watery bier.”

It was the tone, the sneer on his lips, that made a hard, loathsome jest of the words. Yonder beyond the breakers was a vast grave, a grave where more than forty men were sleeping; and standing beside this grave, this man, their captain, jested and smiled. Lachlan stepped back a pace, his face suddenly white; but Falcon continued calmly:

“She was a staunch brig, but too small and not

fast enough. As for my crew, they knew too much about me, and it was time I was rid of them. It may be that Providence, acting through Black Lowther, has done me a good turn."

The thought seemed to amuse him. He smiled more broadly, then added thoughtfully:

"It happens that the four who are saved are very faithful dogs whom I can trust and use. Else it might be well to finish what Lowther and the ocean between them could not quite accomplish."

He paced to and fro on the beach, while Lachlan watched him in silence. Presently he halted and stood facing the younger man.

"I have a bargain to propose to you, Mr. McDonald," he said, "though why I bargain with you I hardly know. You are alone with me on a lonely shore. Man to man, you are not my match. I am heavier and stronger. You are weak from last night's ordeal. You are not fit either to fight or to run. I have no weapon, but I can easily kill you with my hands or with that piece of driftwood yonder.

"My proposal is this: You will forget what you learned in my cabin about my dealing with the Spaniards. You will forget, too, that you saw the black flag flying at my peak or that I am aught else than an honest privateersman. You will give me your word of honour that you will not use these things against me in any way."

He ceased abruptly and stood searching Lachlan's face.

“Your answer, sir,” he said brusquely. “Time presses.”

Lachlan looked past Falcon over the leagues of ocean. Again there came crowding into his mind a host of memories: the din of the sea fight, the roar of the guns, the crash of shattering timbers, a great voice booming above the gale. He lifted his eyes and met Falcon's gaze.

“I agree,” he said in a low, lifeless tone.

He felt suddenly very tired. He turned his back on Falcon, walked to the sand ridge above the beach, and sat down on the sand.

## XV

**T**HE beach upon which they had been cast lay not more than thirty miles down the coast from Charles Town. Scarcely a mile away opened Edisto Inlet, and at Lachlan's suggestion they walked the strand until the calm blue waters of the inlet halted them. In an hour or so they saw a large plantation pettiauger coming down the river to the inlet mouth to fish. They signalled the boat and she came to them where they waited on the smooth sandy shore.

While the gaping negro oarsmen looked on in wondering silence, Falcon told the white man in charge—a plantation overseer—a story of how the *Good Fortune* had been wrecked in the blow of the night before. There were food and drink on the pettiauger and an hour's row up the inlet and the river behind it brought them to Mr. Paul Hamilton's plantation house. Hamilton received them hospitably, provided them with clothing, ordered his eight-oared cypress barge manned, and, holding the tiller himself, brought them through the winding, marsh-bordered inner waterways to Charles Town.

He set them ashore and, being busy with his crops, cast off at once for the return trip. Lachlan stood



watching as the black oarsmen pulled away, then turned to find Falcon's eyes fixed upon him.

"You will not forget, sir," said Falcon slowly, "our conversation on the beach?"

"I shall remember it," Lachlan answered, "and certain other things."

They bowed stiffly and went separate ways.

Lachlan had slept throughout the long row through the placid inland marsh-creeks from Edisto to Charles Town. He had intended finding Almayne immediately but walked first to his lodging to get into a suit of his own clothes. In his room irresistible weariness came upon him suddenly, the cumulative effect of physical and mental strain. He lay down on the bed for a ten-minute rest and slept for twelve hours.

It was near ten o'clock of the following morning, therefore, when he sat down with Almayne at Marshall's tavern and told as much of his story as he was free to tell. Almayne, of course, already knew all that had happened in Falcon's cabin during Lachlan's first visit to the brig; and Lachlan, mindful of his subsequent pledge to Falcon, bade the hunter keep these matters to himself. Almayne sat silent for some moments when Lachlan had finished, his lips puckered under their thin white moustache, his long brown fingers drumming on the table.

"By Zooks!" he exclaimed. "An astonishing bird, this Falcon!"

Lachlan nodded. "On the brig," he said, "I would

have died for him. On the beach, if I had had a pistol, I could have shot him down."

"In that case," said Almayne glumly, "I am sorry you had no pistol."

Lachlan arose.

"We must move quickly," he said, "for Barradell's rescue. I must see Mistress Jolie Stanwicke at once."

"If you see her, you will be more fortunate than I have been," Almayne growled.

"What do you mean?" Lachlan asked quickly.

"That I am denied access to her," the hunter answered; "that I am forbidden to speak with her. But I had best start at the beginning. I have a story to tell also."

He told it, briefly. Towards noon on Sunday he began to wonder where Lachlan was. He looked for him at his lodging, in the streets, at the house of Mr. O'Sullivan, Lachlan's former tutor, at a cabin outside the town's boundary that the two Muskogee warriors, Striking Hawk and Little Mink, occupied as a temporary lodging. Then the hunter went to the Stanwicke house. The negro servant, to whom he announced his wish to speak with Mistress Jolie Stanwicke, returned in a few minutes to say that the lady was ill and could not be seen.

He wandered about the town for some hours, his anxiety growing, returning at intervals to his lodging to see whether Lachlan had called there. The fact that early in the forenoon Falcon's brig had weighed

anchor and stood out of the harbour strengthened a suspicion which had already taken root in him. That Lachlan was on the brig seemed a remote possibility, but less remote than any other theory that the hunter could devise.

Next morning he made another attempt to see Jolie Stanwicke. Her father, Edward Stanwicke of Stanwicke Hall, met him at the door, forbade any further communication with Jolie, and all but ordered him from the house.

Almayne, though well aware that Stanwicke disapproved of the search for Gilbert Barradell, was surprised at the man's sudden violence. He reminded Stanwicke that Richard Barradell had engaged his, Almayne's, service in behalf of Mistress Jolie, whereupon Stanwicke informed him hotly that Richard Barradell was, fortunately, on his way back to England, that he, Stanwicke, was responsible for his daughter, and that Almayne's services were no longer required. He then tried to shut the door in the hunter's face.

Almayne, in a fury at this insult, kicked the door open before the latch caught and delivered himself of considerable strong language before realizing that he was making a mistake. In the afternoon came a summons requesting his presence at the Governor's Mansion. His Excellency (with whom he was already on bad terms because of certain matters relating to the trade in peltries) looked him coldly up and down, informed him that complaint had been lodged against

him by Mr. Edward Stanwicke of Stanwicke Hall, and forbade him to approach the Stanwicke house or have any communication with its occupants.

Almayne had already considered laying the matter of Lachlan's disappearance before the Governor. He had decided against this, however, because he did not believe that anything would come of it. Seeing that Stanwicke had the Governor's ear and that he himself was more than ever out of favour—knowing, too, that Falcon was well thought of by His Excellency—Almayne kept his troubles to himself and left the Governor's presence to seek out Striking Hawk and Little Mink.

They had learned nothing. Neither had Mr. O'Sullivan. Lachlan had vanished without a trace.

Monday afternoon passed and Monday night. On Tuesday morning Almayne saw a chaise draw up at the front door of the Stanwicke house. Immediately Jolie Stanwicke, her father, and a dark, thick-set man, the plantation overseer at Stanwicke Hall, entered it. They drove to a small-boat landing on the western waterfront of the town, where the plantation barge, manned by six negro oarsmen, awaited them. Almayne kept out of sight until they had embarked and then, as though by accident, walked out to the head of the wharf. The barge had cast off and the negroes were bending to the oars, but Jolie Stanwicke, seated at the stern, saw him and recognized him. Immediately she rose in her seat.

“Why have you not answered my message?” she

cried across the widening space of water. "Is he safe?"

"I got no message," Almayne shouted. "Tell me quickly, do you know aught of Lachlan McDonald?"

She uttered an exclamation of amazement, then shot a swift angry glance at her father, who sat beside her, apparently dumb with surprise.

"He was set upon by three Indians in my garden," she cried in a high, clear tone that carried far. "They——"

By now Stanwicke had recovered his wits. He spoke a quick word to the negro oarsmen, and at once their voices rose in unison, chanting the unintelligible words of one of those barbaric rowing songs with which the black boatmen of the coast plantations were accustomed to lighten their labours. The loud melodious chime of their voices blotted out the voice of the girl. Almayne could hear no more of what she tried to tell him.

He saw her turn with a gesture of furious protest upon her father, who sat grim-faced and silent, staring straight ahead. The barge crossed the Ashley and entered the mouth of Wappoo Creek, evidently heading for Stanwicke Hall, Edward Stanwicke's country seat on Stono River.

"There's little more to tell," Almayne concluded. "I spent the rest of the day running in circles on a false scent, and I should have gone to the Governor this morning, much as I dislike him, had you not re-appeared."

He rapped on the table for the black attendant and ordered more ale.

“Well, what next, lad?” he asked gruffly.

“Her message,” said Lachlan, frowning thoughtfully. “She sent you a message which you did not receive—evidently a message telling you that I had been attacked in her garden.”

“Aye,” Almayne answered.

“Stanwicke suppressed that message, letting her think that it had been delivered.”

“Aye,” said Almayne again. “So I figured it.”

“He is Falcon’s tool,” Lachlan continued. “He is against her. And he is in Falcon’s power—you remember Falcon told me that he held Stanwicke in the hollow of his hand. She will be in danger at Stanwicke Hall with those two men.”

Almayne spread his hands in a gesture of irritation.

“That is not my business,” he said impatiently. “My business is to get Gilbert Barradell and bring him back to Charles Town. Jock Pearson’s pack train is starting for Fort Prince George. I shall ride with them to the Fort and then push on to Chief Concha’s town—it is best to take the upper route because the rivers to the south are in flood. You’ll be starting for Tallasee, no doubt, and since your road is the same as ours, you had best ride with us.”

Lachlan nodded absently. “Good,” he replied, “but there’s work to be done here first.”

For some moments he was silent, frowning and tapping on the table with his fingers.

“Does Pearson’s wife still ride with the pack train?” he asked presently.

“Always,” Almayne growled. “Ugly Meg is Jock’s right-hand man—be damned to her, though she’s better than most women.”

Lachlan smiled. “You were always a hater of women, Almayne,” he said, “which is unfortunate, seeing that there will be two women with us on this journey.”

“Two women!” the hunter exclaimed. “Meg Pearson and who else?”

“Mistress Jolie Stanwicke,” Lachlan answered.

Almayne’s eyes widened with amazement.

“Eh, lad, are you daft? In the first place, she would not come. In the second place, how do you propose to get her out of Stanwicke Hall? And in the third place——”

“She will come,” Lachlan interrupted. “As for the other problem, we must find a way.”

“So!” said the hunter dryly, and shouted to the black boy to bring the ale.

## XVI

**E**VEN to-day they tell some strange stories of Stanwicke Hall. There is no truth in most of them. Yet, if you will visit Stanwicke Hall to-day, following the moss-curtained roads some twenty miles from Charleston (which is the modern spelling of old Charles Town), you will half believe the tales that are told.

The place is not beautiful like most of the old plantation manors of lowland Carolina that have come down from Colonial times. It is grim and forbidding and lonely. Its brick walls are still solid, having survived hurricane, earthquake and war. But its panelled rooms are a wreck; its lawns and gardens have vanished; there are great gaps in its noble avenue of live-oaks; of the secret underground passage which once, according to tradition, extended from the mansion to the river and through which smugglers and pirates are reputed to have passed, only a trace remains.

You cannot make your way through that mysterious tunnel now, for its walls have caved in and the falling earth has closed it. But there is a straight, narrow path, hedged in by trees and shrubbery, leading from the house to the river; and strolling along



that path, you will find, here and there under foot, ancient bricks which came—if you can believe the negroes who live near by—from the roof of the secret tunnel. And there is another thing that you are likely to see as you walk that abandoned promenade above the old underground passage on a late afternoon in summer when the nighthawks are already flying and perhaps the big swamp owls are hooting dismally in the distant woods. You may see, ahead of you, spanning the path and shimmering like a golden disc in the late light, the huge, wheel-like silken web of the great golden spider.

In all that country there is no other creature so horrible to look upon. It is as large as the palm of a man's hand—a golden-speckled, hairy monster, barred and spotted with black and dark brown, as hideous as its silken house is beautiful. It inhabits the forests of lowland Carolina within a few miles of the sea, but it is very rare except in certain localities, so that many have never seen it, and consider it a myth.

It is no myth, however, as you are likely to discover if you will search the tangled shrubbery around the ruins of Stanwicke Hall. There the golden spider still spins its glistening golden webs, three feet or more in diameter, and the negroes know it well and fear it as they fear the rattlesnake. But if you ask them to tell you the story of the man who once lived in Stanwicke Hall and whose black slaves called him (behind his back) the Golden Spider, because of his

passion for gold—the man about whom a grim prophecy was spoken—they will gaze at you stupidly, for, though other legends of the place survive, this tale has been forgotten.

That man was Edward Stanwicke, Jolie Stanwicke's father. Dusk of the day on which they had conferred at Marshall's inn found Lachlan and Almayne in the deep woods about a mile from Stanwicke Hall. There they left their horses and a third horse, which they had led from Charles Town, and pushed on through the forest on foot.

They wore buckskins and moccasins and each carried, besides knife and steel tomahawk, a long rifle. At the edge of the woods they waited until no more lanterns or torches moved about the plantation yard. Then they crossed the open stealthily, two dim, almost invisible shapes in the faint moonlight. Lights burned in the great central room on the first floor of the house. Presently Lachlan and Almayne stood in the deep shadow on the front porch or piazza close to the lofty double door opening into the room.

It was a large room, handsomely furnished, and lighted with tall candles, its wide deep windows open to admit the sweet-scented April breeze. In a high-backed chair beside a long table sat Edward Stanwicke, a tall, stooped, gray man of some sixty years, whose craggy face would have been both handsome and strong but for the loose under-lip. He was richly dressed, as became his station in the Province, for the Master of Stanwicke held himself second to none

in the New World. In front of him, wearing white with a green silken shawl about her shoulders, stood Jolie Stanwicke, his daughter.

A liveried negro servant had just placed a decanter and glasses upon the table and had withdrawn.

Lachlan, watching from the darkness without, saw that Stanwicke sat in a strangely hunched position in his chair, his head lolling forward on his chest. For some moments he sat thus without moving, his eyes apparently half-closed. Then he roused suddenly and with shaking hands filled a glass. As he lifted it from the table, the lace of his sleeve brushed against the other glass, overturning it so that it smashed to atoms on the floor. Instantly he broke out in a high-pitched, tremulous wail.

"See," he cried, his voice as shrill as a woman's. "See what all this has done to me. I am a wreck, a shell. I cannot pour wine for the shaking of my hands. And you stand there and there's no pity in you."

The girl moved a step nearer, resting her hand upon the table.

"Pity!" she said slowly in a low voice. "There is no room for pity."

He seemed not to hear her. At a gulp he drained his glass, filled another and drank that also. He cleared his throat and opened his lips to speak, but she cut him short.

"I have something to tell you," she said quickly, "and I must ask you to listen to me now. I do not

know whether this illness which affects you like palsy is real or feigned, but I know that you give way to it only when you wish to work upon my sympathy. I think you have begun to realize that there is in me no particle of pity for you and that, therefore, you will try some other way if I remain longer in this place. I shall return to Charles Town to-morrow."

Stanwicke smiled. Seeing that smile, Lachlan realized that his first surmise was mistaken. The man was not drunk. When he spoke his voice was deeper and steadier and his hands no longer trembled.

"My dear daughter," he said, "and how shall you return to Charles Town if I do not choose to send you there?"

She started and stepped back a pace. "You would not dare keep me!" she exclaimed.

"You are my daughter," he replied suavely. "You are still my daughter although you have not chosen to honour my poor house with your presence. Now that you have come to me at last, it is both my duty and my privilege to take care of you, to protect you, to compel you, if need be, to do what is necessary for your well-being. You have been away from me so long that you do not remember a father's authority. You might appeal to other authority, I suppose, but I think the Governor of Carolina, who is my very good friend, would not deny my right to the custody of my child."

Suddenly his gray face flamed red. He brought his hand down upon the table with a crash.

"Listen, my pretty," he said, and it was passion which now shook his voice. "I am done with soft words. You are not in England now. You are not even in Charles Town. You are at Stanwicke Hall, and here my word is law. You did not know when you came to me what manner of man I am. Well, you are learning now; and you will learn that I will be obeyed."

He paused for breath, for the words had been pouring from him in a torrent. Something in the girl's face added fuel to his rage. He spat out an oath, and the flush in his cheeks darkened.

"You can be obstinate—you have shown me that," he cried hoarsely. "You have no love and no pity for me, your father, and you care nothing for the honour of my name and yours. I have asked little. I have asked only that you treat the man with ordinary civility, that you refrain from angering him, that you grant him the privileges of a friend. You have refused. Well, I am not to be ruined by your damned obstinacy. If it were left to me, I would know how to deal with you, but he does not desire that—yet."

Again he paused for breath. Jolie Stanwicke, eyes bright with anger, bosom heaving, opened her lips, but he cried her down.

"I owe you nothing," he screamed, leaning far forward in his chair, his voice again shrill and tremu-

lous. "You are my daughter, but all your life you have kept away from me, preferring England and your mother's kinsfolk there. God knows I did not ask you to come, but now that you have come, you will lie in the bed I make for you. Who are you to thwart me? Why should I let Falcon destroy me because of your mad infatuation for this Barradell who, I tell you, is dead in the wilderness? You will stay here, here at Stanwicke Hall. And when Captain Falcon comes——"

His words ran suddenly together, became an unintelligible jumble of low sounds. The colour drained from his face; his eyes widened, stared fixedly past the girl. Slowly, very slowly, as though the arm were made of lead, he raised his right hand and pointed.

"Good God!" he whispered hoarsely. "The black hag's prophecy!"

Jolie Stanwicke turned quickly, uttered a low cry, and jumped away from the table. Lachlan saw that Stanwicke was pointing at something on the table, but the girl intercepted his view. He moved noiselessly through the darkness of the porch to the other side of the doorway.

He saw then that the thing at which Stanwicke pointed was a huge yellow and black spider moving along the table straight towards the pallid staring man who sat slumped in his chair, his trembling arm still raised.

Slowly that arm sank until it rested on the table; and slowly, steadily the monstrous spider came on.

Jolie Stanwicke stood as though turned to stone. Over Lachlan, also, there swept a sudden surge of horror. He knew the golden spider well, had admired a hundred times the shining golden discs that it spun in the woods. Despite its great size and its ugliness, he had never feared it before; but fear and loathing held him rigid now.

The thing never swerved, never paused. Slowly it moved along the table straight towards Stanwicke's hand resting on the table's edge. The hand did not move. Lachlan, staring in new horror at Stanwicke's colourless face, saw that the man was past movement, past consciousness.

The creature's hairy legs touched the fingers, the swollen, mottled body mounted upon the wrist. Slowly it moved up Stanwicke's arm to his shoulder, along his shoulder to his chest. From his chest it passed to the death-like mask of his upturned face, and there it halted, its long, hairy legs spread wide. So huge was it that the legs stretched from cheek to cheek; and as it sat there, hiding half the face of the man, its great bloated, spotted body moved up and down, up and down, as though the creature were sucking blood.

It was Almayne who broke the spell of horror that had been cast upon them all. With a low cry, he sprang through the doorway into the room and, snatching off his cap, swept it across Stanwicke's face. The huge spider fell to the floor. Almayne crushed it with his heel, then bent over the man in the chair.

Meanwhile Lachlan had leaped to Jolie Stanwicke's side and had grasped her arm, for she stood swaying perilously.

She seemed scarcely aware of his presence; yet it was to him that she spoke.

"The prophecy!" she whispered dully. "It has come true. An old black slave woman told him once that he would die of the bite of the golden spider."

"He is not dead," said Almayne, his voice shaking. "It is a swoon, I think. Quick, some wine."

Jolie, freeing her arm from Lachlan's grip, filled the glass and handed it to the hunter. In silence they stood and watched the life come back to the man they had thought gone forever. The eyes opened, stared vacantly; the lips moved. Suddenly Jolie turned to Lachlan.

"Thank God, you have come!" she said in a low, steady voice. "Take me away."



## XVII

**T**HEY waited only long enough to allow the girl to run to her room and slip into some garments better fitted for a journey through the woods. And even this short delay was a mistake. They had believed Stanwicke to be still helpless from shock, but suddenly, while their backs were turned for an instant, he was out of his chair and halfway to the closed door leading to the rear. They overtook him when his hand was reaching for the door, and Almayne's palm across his mouth choked the cry that would have summoned his servants.

They got him back to the chair, struggling with surprising strength for a man who, but a few minutes before, had been sunk in stupor, and, first gagging him securely, they bound him to his seat with a bell-rope cut from the wall.

Jolie, returning, stood for a moment looking down at him, while he glared up at her, hate blazing in his eyes. The cord was tight. Jolie stooped and loosened it; and Stanwicke, suddenly swinging his bound legs sideways, almost knocked her from her feet.

With a little sob, she jumped back from him, turned and, without a glance behind her, passed out of the door opening on the porch, Lachlan at her heels. A

moment later Almayne followed them—after tightening again with one deft and savage jerk the cord that Jolie had eased.

Outside it was pitch-dark. There were no stars. Away to the right a lantern flickered across the plantation yard, coming toward the house. From the porch they moved around the south end of the house, the girl walking between the two men, each of whom gripped one of her arms. She was like a blind woman in that utter blackness, but the men with her moved swiftly, unhesitatingly, and she went forward between them, stumbling seldom. For some minutes, glancing back, she could still see the lights of Stanwicke Hall, but shortly they entered the woods and the lights were blotted out.

Here the going was rough. Presently Almayne spoke briefly to Lachlan, handed his rifle to the younger man, then, with a "By your leave, lady," took Jolie in his arms. For perhaps two hundred yards the tall hunter carried her thus, placing her on her feet again when they had left the thickets behind them and had come to open pine forest where no underbrush grew beneath the trees and the ground was carpeted with pine straw. She went forward, as before, between the two men, speaking no word. The pace was fast and she needed her breath; and somehow she realized that, although these men apparently had eyes that could see in the dark, they needed all their faculties to guide them through that maze of pine trunks which to her eyes were all but invisible.

Thus they came, with scarcely a word spoken, to the place where the horses were tethered. Here at last Almayne's gruff voice broke the silence.

"You can walk very well for a woman, Mistress," he said. "Now can you ride?"

His tone was a challenge. He was seldom at pains to disguise the contempt he had for women.

"I can ride," she answered shortly, and they helped her to mount, then swung to their own saddles.

"A loose bridle, Mam'selle," said Lachlan. "Your horse will follow in the track of Almayne's." With the hunter leading the way and Lachlan in the rear, they began the second stage of the night's journey.

As before, they rode in silence, save for a whispered inquiry now and then from Lachlan regarding her comfort. Had she been dying of fatigue she would not have confessed it in Almayne's hearing. There was a question which rose again and again to her lips, but she never uttered it. Still their way led them through unbroken woods, but after an hour or so they came out into an open space, and directly ahead she saw a light glimmering. They rode towards this light over boggy ground where marsh grass or tall rushes brushed their horses' flanks, and came presently to a small hut at the edge of a river.

"It is the ferry, Mam'selle," Lachlan told her, "and the flat-boat is ready, for we are expected. We must dismount now. Once we are across the river, we can rest a while."

A white man and a negro operated the flat-boat,

and there was room on the clumsy craft—built for the accommodation of plantation wagons and coaches—for all three horses as well as their riders. Almayne and Lachlan manned the extra sweeps and the broad, placid stream was quickly crossed.

They remounted then and rode on for perhaps a half-hour, at first following a winding road, but soon turning to the left into the woods. Far away she heard the hunting cry of a wolf pack and shivered, although she could only guess what the sound was. It was inexpressibly wild and strangely fierce, but she held her tongue and learned that wolves were abroad only when Almayne growled some comment on the increase of these animals. She was chilly and hungry. She wondered what had become of Lachlan's promise of a rest once the river had been crossed. As if in answer to the thought, he spoke to Almayne and they halted, dismounted and helped her to alight.

"We are safe, now, I think," he said. "On this side the river they could not tell what course we would take. We will have a fire and something to eat and drink."

The warmth of the fire, the sweetened cornbread, the wine from Lachlan's flask dispelled her fatigue. For all its slimness, her body was well-knit and very strong, and in England riding had been her favourite pastime, so that this night's ride had tired her little.

A strange exultation mounted in her. The hunting wolves, though still far away, had drawn somewhat

nearer. Their voices made music, savage and unearthly, but softened by the distance. The glow from the fire turned the massive pine trunks to bronze and the hanging Spanish moss to silver. Fifty feet away in the gloom she saw, for a moment, two round orbs which glittered in the light like emeralds, and she knew that they were the eyes of some great beast of the forest. Yet she was not afraid. Somehow all this seemed fitting, natural, vaguely familiar; and somehow it was fitting and natural, too, that she should be here in the depths of the midnight forest with these two men in buckskins, who seemed as much a part of that forest as the trees.

Over and over again she had pictured some such scene as this, constructing it out of vivid details in the letters that Gilbert Barradell had written to her after his coming to America. Always she had loved the open, had found delight in birds and other wild creatures, in trees, flowers, and the things of earth. In England she had dreamed of days and nights in the vast American woods, had lived them in spirit with Barradell as her companion. This that was happening now was all as it should be, all as she had visioned it—except that, instead of Gilbert Barradell, her companions were the tall hunter, Almayne, whom she disliked vaguely because she was aware that he disliked her, and the dark youth who had come so strangely into her life on a certain evening in her father's garden in Charles Town.

These thoughts came and passed swiftly. Almayne was busy with a loose saddle girth; Lachlan was adding fuel to the fire, and in the brief interval since they had halted few words had been spoken. Lachlan rose and stood before her where she sat at the base of a gigantic pine.

“Mam’selle,” he began.

She checked him with a gesture. She could wait no longer to ask the question that a dozen times that night had been on her lips.

“Some nights ago, in my father’s garden,” she said, “a moment before you were struck down, you told me that Gilbert Barradell was alive and that you would go to him. I have not seen you since. I have not been allowed to communicate with Mr. Almayne. You will tell me more now about him—about Gilbert—before we speak of any other thing?”

“He is a prisoner,” Lachlan replied, “in the town of Concha, Chief of the Appalaches, on the western borders of the Spanish country of the Floridas. He is safe for the present, but there is one who hates him, and we must lose no time. We must go to him at once and attempt a rescue.”

She was silent a moment, as though studying his words.

“When you go,” she said quietly at last, “I will go with you.”

Almayne had come up and stood close behind Lachlan.

“D’ye know what that would mean?” he asked

brusquely. "Hardships, dangers, long weeks in the rough wilderness—enough to try the body and soul of a strong man."

"I am strong," she replied. "I am not afraid. I will go."

Almayne slapped Lachlan between the shoulders.

"By Zooks!" he exclaimed. "You were right, lad, after all."

## XVIII

**T**HEY rested an hour by their fire in the forest. The wolves scented them and made a circle around them in the gloom, invisible except their glittering eyes; but the two men gave them little heed and Jolie knew, without asking, that there was no danger. There was much to be said and the hour passed quickly.

Jolie heard the story of Lachlan's adventures on the *Good Fortune*—all, that is, that Lachlan felt free to tell her in view of his compact with Lance Falcon. The tale, thus expurgated, puzzled her at times, but she restrained her curiosity and sought no further explanation. Nor did she ask Lachlan about himself, although to her he was still a mystery—himself and his interest in her affairs. She learned that they would join Jock Pearson's pack train next day at a point agreed upon, and she heard, without much interest (for the fact seemed to her of slight importance), that Jock Pearson's wife would be with the train.

On her part she said but little at first, and Lachlan asked no questions of her. But a remark of Almayne's brought from her certain facts. The hunter had kept silence, but when Lachlan had concluded the story of his adventures, Almayne put in a word.

“You will give my young friend credit, Mistress,



for one thing," he said, "and I know not whether he will be glad or sorry for it hereafter. It is he that is bringing you on this journey into the wilderness. I should have left you at Stanwicke Hall, or, since we've got you out of there, I should now take you to Charles Town. He was of the opinion that you had best come with us and that you would wish to come. I said that, being a woman, you would be afraid."

"He was right," said Jolie quietly. "I am not afraid of the wilderness. I could not remain at Stanwicke Hall, and there is no one in Charles Town who could keep me safe."

She paused, then continued, speaking very softly:

"I am not sure how much of my unhappiness is already known to you. I came to Charles Town not knowing what my father was. Weeks ago I learned that Captain Falcon had some mysterious hold upon him, that he feared Falcon because of something that Falcon knew. I did not know what this thing was, but now I know—or, at least, I can guess.

"There is a secret passage at Stanwicke Hall, an underground way which leads from the house towards the river. I have not seen it, but a black girl, who was my servant and is more intelligent than most, told me of it. She said that strange men came through that passage at night bringing casks and bales and sometimes gold, and that Falcon came with them. They had come three or four times, she said, for others among Stanwicke's servants had seen them.

"She herself saw them once—one dark night when

she had gone down to the river to keep a tryst. The black boy whom she was to meet was not there, and she was mortally afraid because a storm was brewing and all that part of the river bank was known to be haunted. As she waited, trembling, there came a long flash of lightning and she saw the boy coming towards her; but suddenly he stopped and threw up his hands as though in terror, and dark figures rose round him and one of them struck him down.

“She was too frightened to move; and soon, in another bright flash of lightning, she saw men passing close by her—seafaring men with scarves around their heads, and cutlasses and pistols. There were six of them, and Captain Falcon walked in front; and two of them carried the body of the black boy, and she heard the splash of his body as they threw it into the river. She knew then that the stories which she had heard were true—that these men had come out of the secret passage which led from the house nearly to the river and were now returning to their boat, after leaving their booty at Stanwicke Hall.”

Jolie was silent, twining and untwining her fingers nervously.

“At first,” she continued presently, “I did not believe all this, but the more I thought about it the more clearly I saw that it was true, for the black girl could not have invented the tale. I do not know what these men were or what was the nature of the goods that they brought into Stanwicke Hall by night through that secret passage from the river; but I

know that they came by those goods in some evil way—through piracy, perhaps—and my father has been in league with them, and now Falcon holds him in his power and can ruin and dishonour him.”

Her voice sank almost to a murmur and her eyes were lowered.

“I think he cares little for his honour,” she said, “but his wealth, his gold is his lifeblood. That is why his servants have named him the Golden Spider after that insect which spins golden webs in these woods. There is a story whispered among the blacks at Stanwicke Hall. An old African slave woman, whom he had slashed with his riding whip, pronounced a curse upon him and prophesied that he would die of the sting of that same golden spider for which the blacks have named him. To-night he thought that this prophecy would be fulfilled.”

For a moment she stared gravely into the fire. Lachlan saw that her eyes were moist.

“You do not think it strange, do you,” she continued in a low voice, “that I left him as I did—without farewell, without pity for his plight? The fear of Falcon hangs over him like a sword, and at times it seems to stab his very soul and he shakes as if with palsy. Oh, I pitied him at first, and I tried to do what he asked so that Falcon would not be angered. But when I realized what he expected of me, what he would presently force me to do—that he would sell his daughter to save himself—then pity died in me.”

“He is a black-hearted villain,” Almayne ex-

claimed, "and you are well rid of him. I like plain speech, Mistress, and now I would ask a plain question. Captain Falcon desires you, and to save himself your father would give you to him?"

She nodded.

"I am not such a fool as I look," the hunter grumbled apologetically. "Long ago I guessed it. But I was ever a bungler with women and I wished to be sure."

He jabbed the fire with a broken pine branch.

"This Falcon, now," he continued reflectively. "He is something of a man in his way. He will not give up easily. I think we shall hear from him before our journey is over."

The moon showed her face as they remounted and suddenly the forest was bathed in ghostly light. Jolie, sitting her horse beside the embers of the fire, saw dimly in that pallid radiance the spectral circle that ringed them round—wolves gray and black, long-jawed and bushy tailed, prowling restlessly. Only for a moment did she see them. They had been bold in the blackness and had come close in, ranging themselves just beyond the fringe of the firelight. But as the moonlight brightened, they drew back, fading into the shadows, and when Almayne wheeled his horse and the cavalcade started, scarcely one was in sight. Once, however, Jolie glanced back and saw dim, gaunt forms creeping toward the fire, nosing here and there in quest of fragments of food.

For hours they rode on slowly but steadily, Al-

mayne in the lead. By the magic of the moonlight the forest, which before had been hideous and menacing in its blackness, was transformed to soft and silvery loveliness. Through this shimmering beauty they passed in silence, their horses' hoofbeats muffled by the thick carpet of pine straw covering the ground. A light breeze blew in their faces, so that their scent was not wafted on ahead of them; and again and again they came within sight of grazing deer.

Once, Jolie, glancing down a dim forest aisle between rows of column-like pines, saw a great beast that was like a lioness sitting on its haunches, staring fixedly with eyes that were glowing coals—a panther, Lachlan called it; and once, just in front of them, there was a sudden commotion in the moonlit woods, a bellowing as of bulls, a tossing of sharp, curved horns, a confusion of big, dark bodies lurching upward from the ground and rocking away amid the crowding trees. At this she cried out in excitement, believing that she was looking for the first time on that half-fabulous beast, the buffalo, but Lachlan laughed the notion away.

“Black cattle,” he said, “wild black cattle, strays from the plantations. There are hundreds in these low country woods. We'll see no buffalo till we have passed farther inland.”

In general they travelled northward, but often they made wide circles to avoid impassable swamps. The forest seemed endless.

At dawn they came to a deep, narrow creek flowing

sluggishly through the woods. Without pause, Almayne rode his horse down the steep bank into the water. As the animal began to swim, Jolie saw the hunter turn and throw a curious glance behind him. She flushed as she realized the meaning of that glance, and her horse was halfway down the bank when Lachlan, who had dropped a little behind, rode forward and grasped her bridle.

“Wait,” he said, and she noticed that he was frowning as though angry. “There is a boat on the other bank. Almayne will bring it presently. He should have told you.”

“He thought that I would be afraid—that I would not venture,” she answered quickly, and jerked the horse’s head the other way, so that Lachlan lost his grip on the rein. Next moment her horse was in the water, swimming.

She was wet to the shoulders when they reached the other bank. There a path sloped up from the water’s edge and wound into the forest, and without a word Almayne led the way along this path. A quarter of a mile farther on he halted suddenly, swung around in his saddle and turned to her a countenance unwontedly melancholy.

“I am both a fool and a brute, Mistress,” he said very humbly. “It is my fault that you are wet and cold. I did not think that you would have courage to swim the river.”

She laughed at him, finding a strange joy in her triumph.

“You will know me better presently, Mr. Almayne,” she replied. “I shall make it my pleasure to teach you something about women.”

He glanced at her sharply, and rode on without rejoinder. An hour later she heard the voice of a man singing somewhere ahead of them, and the neighing of horses; and Lachlan, riding abreast of her, said, “It is the camp—Jock Pearson’s camp. You can rest and sleep.”

She turned toward him slowly, and he saw with surprise that her face was very white.

“I am glad,” she whispered. “I think I could not have ridden much farther.”

She swayed suddenly in her saddle. For a moment her body leaned against his, her hair brushing his cheek. With his arm about her shoulders, he steadied her, kept her from falling; but almost at once she seemed to recover her strength and drew away from him, sitting upright as her horse walked forward, a slim, straight figure, head high, shoulders back. Lachlan realized with vague astonishment that he was trembling like a reed in the wind.

## XIX

**I**N THE green savannah in the forest, where Jock Pearson's pack train was encamped, a small gentleman with a prodigious shock of white hair was absorbed in the business of defending himself against half a dozen ruffians. The small gentleman, clad in white ruffled shirt and black knee breeches, wielded a slim, straight sword; his assailants attacked him with long, stout staffs. On all sides they hemmed him in, cursing, shouting, flourishing their weapons, and it seemed that his life was not worth a pin. But the small gentleman appeared singularly happy.

He sang shrilly as he fought, and his agility was miraculous. He was here, there, everywhere. His sword was now a circle of light like a halo around his snowy head, now a glittering streak like a horizontal dart of lightning—as quick, as keen, as elusive as the flickering tongue of a snake. Too swift for the eye to follow were the parries and thrusts of that sword, as it clattered on the staffs of his assailants, turning aside their blows, menacing their lives.

Jolie gasped as the scene burst upon her vision. The path that they had been following through the forest had turned sharply around a dense myrtle thicket, and suddenly the glade had opened before her, revealing the combat that raged there. Amaze-



ment held her dumb. Just beyond the combatants was the camp of the pack train—the standing ponies, the rude shelters of blankets and skins, the smoking cook-fires; but for a moment she saw nothing of all this. She saw only the lone swordsman battling for his life and the ruffians trying to kill him.

She turned to Lachlan where he sat his horse beside her. His face, too, was blank with amazement, but beyond him Almayne was grinning. The horses had halted at the edge of the glade and neither Lachlan nor Almayne made a move, but suddenly Jolie heard a shout and saw that the small, white-haired gentleman had burst through the circle of his opponents and was racing towards them.

Three of the ruffians started in pursuit, but still Almayne and Lachlan sat their horses without movement, seemingly indifferent to the fleeing man's peril. In a few moments he was within a dozen paces of them, his pursuers meanwhile having halted as though uncertain what to do. The small gentleman rushed up to Lachlan and grasped his hand.

“Eh, lad,” he cried, “but I'm glad to see you. Lord, we were worried, Almayne and I! And this is the lady?”

He swung toward Jolie and bowed low.

“By Paul!” he cried, in a thin, bird-like voice, strangely shrill, yet not unmusical, “you will pardon an old man's boldness, Mam'selle, but of all the adorable sex I adore the most those whose hair is the brave, glorious Irish colour that mine once was.”

He glanced from one to another of them, a broad grin on his round, pink, clean-shaven face.

“Sure, now,” he chirped, “have ye no word of greeting for me?”

“Mr. O’Sullivan,” said Lachlan, “what in Heaven’s name are you doing here?”

The grin on the round, pink face widened.

“A minute ago,” the little man said, “I was enjoying a little healthful exercise. Those ignorant rogues of pack drivers had expressed some scorn of the sword as a weapon, and I laid them a wager that with this rapier I could defend myself for half an hour against the cudgels of all six of them. It was none too easy because I had to be careful not to scratch them, that being part of the bargain, but I would have won the wager.”

“But how came you here to Jock Pearson’s camp?”

“On a mule,” Mr. O’Sullivan answered, “a most abominably perverse and discontented yellow mule that I bought in Charles Town because in so short a time I could not procure a horse. Later, when I have obtained a respectable mount, I shall take delight in feeding him to the wolves.”

Almayne chuckled. “You meant it, then?” he said. “When you said you would go with us, I thought you were jesting.”

“I was,” the little man answered, “but the more I thought about the matter, the more I liked the notion. It fell in with a scheme that has been growing in my head, a scheme to study the aboriginal natives

and mayhap write a book about them. So, when the pack train left Charles Town an hour before daylight, there was I and my mangy mule, and my old friend, Ugly Meg, overruled Jock's objections to my company."

He turned to Jolie, took her hand in his and patted it.

"My sweet bird," he said very gently, "Almayne has told me something of what's afoot. You will accept me, will you not, as a volunteer in your service?"

Lachlan came to her rescue. "Mam'selle," he said joyfully, "this is Mr. Francis O'Sullivan, of Doonamaddy, in Ireland, a particular friend of mine and formerly my teacher; a man most marvellously learned in the classics and in history, and a perfect master of the sword. There is much more to commend him, as you will presently discover. I am sure you will be grateful for the aid that he will give us."

"I shall, indeed," Jolie murmured.

Again the little man bowed low to her and, turning, included Lachlan in the gesture.

"I thank you, my lady, and you, my pupil," he said, smiling. "And now I'm thinking Jock Pearson may take himself to the devil, for I am duly enrolled as a private in the ranks."

They rode on slowly across the savannah, Mr. O'Sullivan walking beside them. Despite her weariness, Jolie gazed with keen interest at the camp they were approaching—the pack ponies standing about

the water-buckets or cropping the grass; the pack drivers in their high, buckskin leggins and leather jerkins ornamented with beads after the Indian fashion; the little tents of skins, blankets and stained muddy canvas, some of which served as shelters for bundles of merchandise that had been unloaded from the ponies, while others were evidently the sleeping quarters of the party. At the farther edge of the savannah, beyond the camp, Jolie saw two Indians come out of the forest. Each carried a rifle in one hand, while a great dark bird dangled limp and lifeless from the other. Each raised one hand above his head in a stately gesture, and Lachlan replied with a similar salutation.

“My warriors,” Lachlan said to Jolie, “Striking Hawk and Little Mink, chiefs of the Muskogee. They have been out for game and they have two turkeys.”

From the lower end of the meadow sounded a faint whoop. Three horsemen, all clad in buckskins, had emerged from the woods and were galloping towards the camp.

“Jock Pearson,” said Almayne briefly, and rode to meet them.

“We shall have venison, too,” said Lachlan, sitting his horse beside Jolie, in front of the first of the tiny tents. “There’s a buck behind Ugly Meg Pearson’s saddle.”

Jolie saw the buck but looked in vain for Meg Pearson. The rider across whose horse the dead deer

was slung appeared to be a man. But when they had come up, this rider slid from the saddle and walked swiftly towards Jolie. The girl saw then a tall, big-boned woman of perhaps forty years, hook-nosed, red-faced, astonishingly ugly, clad like the others in long, fringed hunting shirt and leggins, balancing a rifle in her bony hand.

Meg Pearson wasted no time in formalities. She gave Lachlan not so much as a nod.

"You are tired, my lamb," she said to Jolie, in a voice as deep as a man's. "You are nigh ready to drop with weariness. And these fools keep you settin' here! 'Light an' come with Meg."

At noon Jolie was still asleep on a buffalo robe in Ugly Meg Pearson's little tent. That stalwart lady stood like a sentinel before the entrance, frowning grimly. She had just informed her husband that the pack train would not resume its journey for at least two hours. Six feet two in his moccasins, black-bearded, thewed like a Hercules, Jock Pearson had fumed and cursed a little and pointed to the ponies already loaded. But Ugly Meg was obdurate. The "poor lamb" would have two hours more of sleep, she asserted somewhat profanely, and any pack driver who raised his voice or cracked his whip would be most damnably sorry for it.

Jock Pearson saw a certain light in her eyes and grumbled no more until he was out of earshot. If the pack drivers grinned, they did so discreetly, for they

feared him as much as he feared his wife, but Mr. Francis O'Sullivan had seen and enjoyed the play and was at no pains to conceal his enjoyment of it.

"Eh, Jock," he cried, his pink face beaming under its white brush of hair. "They are the devil, these women that wear the breeches. What says the rustic poet?"

"Sure, Patrick's lady wears the breeches;  
Her name, it's Katie Harridan.  
She never cooks or sweeps or stitches;  
She's sprouting whiskers like a man."

The trader deigned no reply. He had not desired Mr. O'Sullivan's company and had told him so rather plainly; and just now he was in no mood to be polite. A little apart from the others Almayne, Lachlan, and the two Muskogee warriors were sitting in the grass. Almayne beckoned Pearson.

"Jock," he said, "I've been thinking there's something we ought to tell you, and Lachlan is of the same mind."

Pearson stretched his huge bulk beside the hunter, while Mr. O'Sullivan, having nothing else to do, strolled over and joined the group, standing just behind the trader. Followed then some minutes of earnest talk between Almayne and Pearson, Lachlan putting in a word occasionally, while the two Indians looked on with impassive faces. Presently Mr. O'Sullivan wandered back towards Meg Pearson's tent.

He found her just within the entrance, sitting cross-legged on a deerskin, gazing intently at the face of

the sleeping girl. He beckoned her and she came out to him.

“Ugly Meg,” he chirped in his voice like a bird’s, “I wish you joy of your white-livered, rabbit-hearted behemoth of a husband.”

She glowered down upon the little man.

“What’s he done now?” she growled.

He jerked his head towards the tent.

“The young lady yonder, Mistress Jolie Stanwicke, has run away from her father who is a vile beast that any daughter would be proud to run away from. However, as you know, old Stanwicke is a great man in the Province and has power with the Governor, and Almayne and Lachlan McDonald are of the opinion that a party may come in pursuit of her with the Governor’s authority to take her back to Charles Town. It has occurred to them at this late day that if she is found in Jock Pearson’s pack train there will be evil consequence for Jock, and to save him this danger they have proposed that our parties separate. You know and I know and Jock Pearson knows that with the Cherokees ripe for war we are too small a party to venture through the upper country with this girl in our charge.”

Mistress Pearson’s grim eyes were fixed upon her husband where he still lolled on the grass between Almayne and Lachlan.

“Let be, Mr. O’Sullivan,” she said peevishly. “That sweet lamb will be in Meg Pearson’s care until she’s safe in Fort Prince George.”

## XX

**I**T WAS early afternoon when Jolie awoke. "See, my sweet, what Meg has for you," said Mistress Pearson, smiling down at the girl, eyes twinkling in her tanned, lined face. Jolie, blinking sleepy lids, beheld a fringed buckskin shirt, new and spotless, elaborately inset with red and blue, belted with green.

"I bought it six months ago," Meg continued, "of a half-breed woman in the Chicasaw nation, and I intended it for a slim lad I know at Fort Prince George. It has never been worn and it should fit you fairly well."

Jolie donned it gleefully; the buckskin leggins, too, that Meg had magically provided; but the smallest pair of moccasins upon which Mistress Pearson had been able to lay her hands were much too large for Jolie's feet, so for the present she must stick to her own riding boots. A broad-brimmed hat of soft beaver skin, dyed green, into which Meg had thrust a jaunty feather from a wild turkey's wing, completed the girl's new costume; and when she stepped out of the tent and made her bow, Lachlan, who was waiting just without, saw not a woman but a slim, straight



youth garbed like a wilderness hunter—a boy, more beautiful than any boy, whose eyes sought his and challenged them.

“How do I look?” she asked him impudently, one hand on her hip, the other twirling an imaginary moustache.

He stood dumb with amazement. For the life of him he could find no word. It was Mr. Francis O’Sullivan who broke the silence.

“Mam’selle,” he chirped, sweeping off his hat and bending low before her, “sure, you have struck him speechless, but I bid you find your answer in the pitiful face of him. Mam’selle, I do assure you with my hand upon my heart that you are the most heavenly thing these eyes have seen at all, at all.”

“I thank you, sir, for your handsome speech,” said Jolie with a curtsy, “and no thanks to you, Mr. Tie-Tongue, at all, at all. And because he likes not my looks and is frowning at me like an ogre, I choose for my riding companion Mr. Almayne.”

So, with Jolie riding by Almayne’s side—riding astride after the manner of a man—the pack train resumed its journey. There was a purpose underneath her whim. There were questions that she wished to ask and that only Almayne could answer. He answered grudgingly at first, with an underlying hostility concealed yet plainly evident; but exerting, yet not overplaying, her charm, she got what she wanted out of him, and much more besides, so that she rode with him for an hour or longer. This done, she dared

Lachlan to a race and they galloped ahead of the party. Drawing rein, she talked with Lachlan, as they moved slowly on, about the task that lay ahead of them, asking him many questions, drawing from him in rough outline his and Almayne's plans for the rescue of Barradell.

There was another question that she planned to ask him but it was one that had to be led up to with some care; and gradually, as they rode on a hundred yards ahead of the pack train, the spell of the wilderness took hold upon her. Gradually she forgot her own concerns and a certain vague doubt which, since her conversation with Almayne, had shaped itself in her mind. Slowly her anxieties faded, and in their place came a languid dream-like content which deepened as the afternoon wore on. The feeling came to her that all sorrow and evil had been left behind—that she was riding through the Garden of God towards happiness and her lost lover and the fulfilment of her dreams.

Truly, it was like God's Garden, that springtime wilderness of Carolina where the white man's axe was yet unknown. It was a garden abloom not only with flowers but with birds more beautiful than golden jessamine or pink Indian rose; a garden not still and silent as most gardens are but astir with abundant life, aquiver with innumerable voices.

There were places where all was silent. Sometimes the trail led through lofty pine woods, carpeted with fern, where the giant trees towered eighty feet without

a limb, woods that were vast cathedrals too holy for the little singing birds. But on that day's journey the pine groves through which they passed were of comparatively small extent, so that soon they emerged from the dim, hushed cathedral places into a sunnier broad-leaved forest where the ground was sprinkled with blossoms and the foliage was alive with wings. Here the air throbbed with bird-music; troops of gray squirrels ran and leaped amid the wide-spreading branches; white-tailed deer, grazing in herds of a dozen or more, lifted their shapely heads to stand at gaze for a moment and then go bounding off along the winding, moss-tapestried forest aisles.

To Jolie it was as strange as it was beautiful. There had been birds in England, too, but never such birds as these. Now it was a crested cardinal, red as blood against a bank of lustrous laurel; now it was a gorgeous nonpareil, crimson and blue and shimmering yellow-green, glittering in the sun like a jewel of changing hues; now it was a ruby-throated hummingbird poised above a golden flower on wings that whirred so rapidly that the eye could not see them; now it was some tiny, fragile warbler from the tropical lands, in whose dazzling plumage all the tints of the sunrise seemed to have been imprisoned. All these delighted her; but stranger by far were the tall turkey cocks that she saw striding along the vistas of the woods to the right or to the left or ahead; and most strange and most lovely of all was a great flock of parrakeets that came screaming through the forest

and, alighting on the ground, covered the turf with a living carpet of rich green and vivid gold.

To Jolie it seemed that there was nothing to mar this loveliness. Out of this singing, many-coloured wilderness, this green and silver wilderness to which the long, graceful pendants of the Spanish moss imparted a misty beauty never known in England, scarcely a hint of menace came to her. Twice she saw wolves of the small low-country breed slinking along like homeless dogs under the far-spaced trees; and once, glancing down a long glade in the woods, through which trickled a small sluggish stream, she saw a big black bear stand for a moment watching with lowered head, then turn and whisk himself with surprising quickness behind a tree trunk.

The wolves she had already learned to despise, but to her eyes the bear seemed very big. She turned, glanced at Lachlan, perceived that he, too, had seen the animal. But he only smiled and made some light remark about Bruin's nimbleness in getting out of sight; and the sense of danger which had come to her momentarily vanished, and she gave herself again to silent and bemused enjoyment of the changing scene about her.

So, mile after mile, she rode in silence, Lachlan at her side or just behind her, the pack train following well in the rear, Almayne, Jock and Meg Pearson, and Mr. O'Sullivan riding at its head.

An hour before sunset, when the western sky flamed beyond the tree trunks, they came to a long savan-

nah stretching away to their left, walled in on either side by the woods. It opened before them suddenly, as they rode out from behind a dense hedge of myrtle; and as Jolie's eye lit upon it she saw its surface heave upward and her ears were full of the surge of wings. A thousand ibises and herons had taken flight, sweeping upward from the moist ground on powerful swiftly beating pinions, whirling and circling in the air, their white plumage gleaming in the late light, the long, curved, crimson bills of the ibises shining like coral. For a long moment Jolie watched them, spellbound; then, when the last of them were vanishing amid the trees, she turned to Lachlan, and he marvelled at the light in her eyes.

"And this," she said, "is the wilderness of which Almayne thought that I would be afraid. I never dreamed of anything so beautiful."

He paused for a moment before answering.

"You do not know it yet," he said. "It is beautiful and this part of it is safe. But it has claws and fangs and—other things. You will know it better soon."

"I am not afraid of it," she answered quickly; and then more slowly: "There is only one thing of which I am now afraid."

"And that?" asked Lachlan curiously.

"I am afraid of what we may find at our journey's end."

Lachlan read no obscure meaning in the words. He had been frank in pointing out to her the difficulties and dangers of their enterprise, the possibility of

failure in their attempt to rescue Gilbert Barradell; and he thought that this was what was in her mind now, and a great sympathy for her welled up in him.

He answered her cheerfully.

“Our task is no light one,” he said, “but I think we shall succeed. Almayne has no equal in Carolina, and my two warriors are the pick of the Muskogee braves. In all America I know of no better men for this work than these three.”

They were riding onward again side by side, and for a little space Jolie said no more. But her gaze no longer wandered along the forest glades; her eyes were fixed in front of her. Just under the red-gold curls beneath her broad-brimmed hat there was the ghost of a frown.

Suddenly the frown—if frown it was—vanished and her eyes were lit with laughter.

“You are a handsome man, Lachlan McDonald,” she said lightly, “though I should not tell you so and risk turning your head. And there is a panther’s grace and a lithe comeliness in your two tall warriors, Striking Hawk and Little Mink. Now I am curious about my own sex among your people. It happens that since I have been in America I have seen no young Indian girl. Tell me, Mr. McDonald, are your Indian maidens as comely as your men?”

“There are those among them,” he answered gravely, “who are far comelier. They are slim and straight, and some are tall and very beautiful.”

“And some,” she asked, “have married English husbands?”

“Aye, and French husbands and men from Scotland and from Ireland,” Lachlan replied; and he told her then of how the Frenchman, Captain Tourville, had married a Muskogee princess of the Family of Wind, the most exalted of the Muskogee clans; of their beautiful daughter, Sehoi Tourville, herself a princess; and of the Scotsman who came to Tallasee and fell in love with Sehoi and married her and became High Chief or King of the Muskogee Confederacy.

“That Scotsman,” he concluded, “is my father, and Sehoi is my mother, and she is as beautiful now as she was then.”

“Yes,” Jolie replied absently, “all this I know. Almayne told me these things and of how you are the Prince of your nation, and of how you are going back to your people now and will some day become their King.”

He nodded, smiling. Presently she turned her face to him again.

“What know you,” she asked carelessly, “of Chief Concha’s daughter? Is she one of those slim, tall ones who are so beautiful?”

She waited, her eyes searching his face eagerly; and when no answer came, she leaned towards him.

“You will recall,” she said impatiently, “that when you sat the first time in Falcon’s cabin, he

mentioned this daughter of Concha, the Appalache Chief. It is about her that I inquire. Is she comely? There is a reason why I ask."

"I do not know," Lachlan replied slowly. "I have never seen her."

He was frowning, but she met his gaze coolly. She smiled whimsically, the corners of her lips turning down.

"Well, no matter," she cried. "We shall learn about her in time, and meanwhile I shall think of her as very ugly. It will make me happier to picture her so."

"Mam'selle," said Lachlan gravely, "you will pardon me for questioning you. I told you nothing of what happened in Captain Falcon's cabin. I told you nothing of his reference to Chief Concha's daughter. I must ask you where you learned these things?"

She flushed and bit her lip.

"You must not be angry with Almayne," she said earnestly. "I wormed it out of him. I knew that you had not told me all and I made Almayne tell me. It was not his fault. I had it from him before he realized that he was telling what you had not chosen to tell."

She paused, tapping her boot with the switch that she carried. Presently her eyes dropped.

"But for Almayne," she said softly, "I should not have known how brave a thing you did when you went alone aboard Captain Falcon's ship."



Again she waited, but no answer came.

“I know now,” she continued, her rich tones low and flute-like, “that in Lachlan McDonald I have in my service as fearless a gentleman as ever served a lady in distress.”

Lachlan’s black eyes were stern and hard. He knew that under his swarthy skin the blood suffused his cheeks, and this knowledge added to his anger.

“You have done ill,” he said slowly, “and Almayne has done ill. I cannot but blame you both.”

She turned to him a pair of flashing eyes.

“Sir,” she cried, “I am not accustomed to be scolded!”

A quick answer rose to his lips, but reining in her horse, she cut him short.

“We will wait here,” she said, “until the others come.”

They sat their horses in silence, neither looking at the other. Two spots of colour blazed in her cheeks, her head was high. On a swaying twig of a willow-oak above the trail a black and russet sanguilla sang an evening song. As Lachlan watched it idly, a blue-gray shape swooped from beyond the tree-top, wings darkened over the singing bird, long claws reached down and snatched it from its perch. Jolie, aware that the song had ceased, glanced upward. She did not see the hawk dashing onward, its victim dangling from its talons.

## XXI

**T**HEY made camp that night in a murmurous pine grove close to the edge of a small cypress swamp. It was dim dusk when they halted. Only the pallid radiance of the moon and the flickering glare of the cook-fires lit the grove while the little tents were being pitched. Jolie stood apart from the others, watching the men at their work, dulling her ears as best she could to the oaths with which Jock Pearson larded his orders to the pack-horse drivers upon whom fell all the heavy labour of the camp.

The anger in her swelled higher. Lachlan, she thought, might have bade Pearson control his language out of respect for her. But Lachlan seemed to have forgotten her existence. He was busy with the horses. Almayne was sitting cross-legged on the grass, tinkering with his rifle. Mr. O'Sullivan stood talking with Meg Pearson beside a fire where a haunch of venison was already roasting. Presently, sickened by Jock's blasphemies, the like of which she had never imagined, Jolie wandered away along a moonlit glade sloping down towards the swamp.

At the end of this glade, scarcely fifty yards from the nearest of the cook-fires, the moss-bannered cypresses of the swamp soared straight and tall into

the blackness of the night; and here a long narrow cove of a lagoon lay still and deep under the shadowy trees. The moonlight, streaming down between the pine tops, illumined the water and the sloping bank where Jolie stood. Beside her a huge grapevine hung from a pine, making a loop like a child's swing, and in this loop she seated herself ten feet from the water's edge.

She was weary of body, but her mind was wide awake. Her small hands clenched as she thought of Lachlan's impertinence—for so she deemed it. It was an age in England when beauty carried with it regal prerogatives. No young man had ever used such a tone to her before, had ever frowned at her, had ever presumed to scold her. It had remained for a young barbarian of the American wilderness to flout her authority, to reprimand her like a schoolgirl.

Her thoughts passed quickly to Gilbert Barradell—to certain facts that she had learned that morning from Almayne. Lachlan, mindful of his promise to Falcon, had made known to her only part of what had happened on the *Good Fortune*. What he had omitted seemed to her more important than what he had told.

Most important of all, in her mind, was Falcon's reference to Chief Concha's daughter. Almayne had merely touched upon this incident, which he seemed to regard as of slight importance, in telling her the story of Lachlan's first visit to the brig; but she had questioned him closely regarding it, and she had

planned to get from Lachlan a report of Falcon's exact words concerning Concha's daughter, as precisely as Lachlan could recall them. The thing had to be gone about delicately—for none must guess what was in her mind—and before she could accomplish her purpose Lachlan had dared scold her and she had shown him his place.

She must wait now for another opportunity; and meanwhile her better nature cried shame upon her, and she seemed to see the proud, handsome face of Gilbert Barradell gazing at her out of sad, reproachful eyes.

If he were really gazing at her, she mused, what would he think of her beauty now—that beauty which he had worshipped?

She had suffered during these past months, and she wondered uneasily whether it had had any effect upon her face. She knew that it had not, that she was as lovely as she had ever been. She smiled disdainfully as she recalled Lachlan's description of the Indian maidens—"they are slim and straight and some are tall and very beautiful." Perhaps this daughter of Chief Concha was such an one, such an one as would appear beautiful to Lachlan McDonald! She made a little contemptuous sound with her lips; and she thought of the look in Gilbert Barradell's eyes one evening in London when she had come soundlessly into the room where he was awaiting her, and he had looked up to see her standing before him in a filmy gown of white silk and snowy lace.

She laughed aloud—a small, happy, confident laugh; and her lips framed the words, “Forgive me, Gilbert,” and she sat for many minutes contrite and repentant because of the hateful, unworthy thing that had been in her mind but was there no longer.

She must have fallen asleep sitting in her grapevine swing; but only a few moments passed before she opened her eyes and saw the orbs that watched her. They were pale yellow-green and they were set wide apart, so that she knew at once that they were the eyes of some great beast. Across the glade near the swamp edge a short, squat live-oak stood amid the pines, and under it all was dark. It was from the edge of this blackness that the yellow-green orbs stared palely at Jolie.

She could see nothing except the eyes; but imagination filled out the crouching shape behind them and made it even more terrible than it really was. She sat as though turned to stone, and she felt her body grow cold as clay. Her breath came fast and her heart pounded within her. She tried to cry out, but no sound came from her lips, and somehow she did not try again.

She knew that the camp was not fifty yards’ distant behind her. She could hear the voices of the men there, and she knew that by turning her head she could see them in the glare of the camp fires. But she could not turn her head, could not move her eyes from the terrible eyes that held her helpless, and it seemed to her that the camp was miles away.

How long she sat silent, rigid, numb with terror, she did not know. For a time her mind, as well as her body, seemed benumbed. But suddenly she realized that her lips were moving and she found herself whispering, speaking coolly to herself under her breath: "I must not be afraid. This is the wilderness. This is what I must face." So, little by little, she fought her terror down, her eyes never straying from those other eyes there in the blackness.

She wondered what the beast was. She knew that these eyes were not the eyes of a wolf and she did not think that they were the eyes of a bear. With a sudden tightening of the throat, she remembered that great beast which she had seen in the moonlight during their flight from Stanwicke Hall, that beast which was like a lioness and which Lachlan had called a panther; and she remembered how its eyes had glowed as it sat on its haunches watching them.

These eyes were paler, but she knew that it was a panther that she faced; and she recalled certain tales that she had heard, tales of panthers that followed women and children through the night. The terror mounted in her afresh; and suddenly she saw the yellow-green eyes move and was sure that they were drawing slowly nearer.

She cried out, but the sound that came from her dry throat could not have been heard a dozen yards away. For minutes more she sat rigid, staring; then the eyes vanished, to appear again almost instantly, a little farther to the left.

Somehow this seemed to renew her courage. Slowly she got hold of herself again; and again she fought down her terror, quelling it little by little, pushing it inch by inch out of her mind. Once more the eyes vanished, and once more they reappeared still farther to the left. Then, while she watched them, fascinated, they faded from view and she saw them no more.

A faintness came upon her. She held tightly to her grapevine swing to save herself from falling; and she was still sitting there, her eyes half-closed, when Lachlan's voice spoke close behind her.

"Mam'selle?"

She rose and stood on her feet, swaying a little.

"There were eyes," she told him. "Great pale eyes which watched me from the darkness yonder."

He glanced at her sharply, then strode across the glade in the direction that she had indicated, vanishing in the blackness under the live-oak where the eyes had been. In a moment he reappeared.

"It was a panther," he said quietly. "Its scent is strong on the still air. Were you afraid?"

She was herself again now—apparently as cool and contained as though her ordeal had been all a dream.

"Not I," she lied glibly, knowing that she lied, yet feeling that it was not all a lie. "Did I not tell you that I did not fear your wilderness? And did I not tell Almayne that I would teach him much that he does not know about women?"

Lachlan stood silent a moment.

"Mam'selle," he said, "I have come to ask your pardon for my rudeness to you this afternoon."

"I do not lightly forgive, Mr. McDonald," Jolie answered after a pause. "You have done me a great service, but that, as I conceive it, does not give you the privilege of scolding me when you choose."

"Nor do I so conceive it," he answered.

"And yet you hectored me shamefully."

"I was angry. I am sorry."

"And Almayne?" she asked quickly. "You have scolded him also because of what he told me?"

"I have said nothing to him yet," he replied.

"I forbid you to mention the matter to him." Her tone was a command.

"Mam'selle," he exclaimed, "you are arrogant!"

Her eyes flashed dangerously.

"And what if I am, Mr. Lachlan McDonald?" she said proudly.

He was silent, gazing at her in wonder.

"I know not how it is here in America," she continued, a biting sarcasm in her tone, "but in England the young men about me do not complain of what you are pleased to term my arrogance. They take me as I am, and they are proud to serve me."

She paused, expecting a reply, but none came. Deliberately she played her bold game to a finish.

"They said in London, Mr. Lachlan McDonald, that Jolie Stanwicke was the most lovely lady in all that great city, more lovely even than the great ladies of the Court. Because of her beauty many



gentlemen of London were her servitors. It is your good fortune to be in her service here. I think you do not sufficiently value your privilege."

"You are mistaken, Mam'selle," Lachlan muttered. "You—I am aware——" He hesitated, his mind awhirl in the face of a new experience.

"Come," she said quietly, "I am hungry. The venison should be ready by now."

She chattered lightly of small matters as they walked the short distance to the camp. Lachlan answered briefly, his thoughts still in a maze. As for Jolie's thoughts, they were clear enough, yet led to no conclusion. The sense of them was this:

"Either he hates me as a monument of vanity, in which case all is well, or else I have stretched him at my feet."

At supper she found her answer. The pack-horse men supped apart. The others sat on the grass around an elk hide laid upon the ground, serving them as a table; and Jolie was aware that from beginning to end of the meal Lachlan scarcely glanced in her direction.

Later she led Almayne aside.

"I have done it," she told him.

"Done what, Mistress?" the hunter inquired curtly.

"This afternoon," she said, "you made it very clear to me that you regarded me as a peril to your young Muskogee Prince. To speak plainly, you have been afraid that he would fall in love with me."

The hunter stared down at her, open-mouthed.

“By the Lord!” he exclaimed, “I said nothing of this to you!”

“You said it as plainly,” she smiled, “as a man may say anything without putting it into words. You can now dismiss your fears. I have done that to your Indian Prince which puts me forever beyond the pale of his desires.”

“In God’s name, what have you done to him?” asked Almayne in some alarm.

“I have shown him Jolie Stanwicke as she really is,” she answered solemnly. “And henceforward he will flee from her as from a plague.”

## XXII

**S**UNRISE found them again on the road—the Path, as Almayne called it—the great Trading Path from Charles Town to the inner country. All that day and through the early hours of the next they pushed on steadily. The Path had long been an Indian trail; now the traders' caravans travelled it also, the long lines of pack ponies bearing cloths, rum, guns, hatchets, paint and innumerable trinkets to the Catawbas of the middle country, the Cherokees of the Blue Mountains, the Chicasaws who dwelt beyond the mountain barrier; and returning, after months in the far wilderness, laden with bales of pelts. It was becoming a well-travelled road, for year by year the peltry traffic grew and the caravans increased in number; yet it was still, throughout most of its length, but a narrow trail through a vast and unspoiled wilderness.

Jolie's heart sang within her, answering the singing birds, of which the number seemed illimitable. Her eyes, thought Lachlan, as she turned to glance behind her, were brighter than the wild flowers strewn along the way; her slender form, as she swayed with the motion of her horse, was more graceful than the slim,

leaping deer. Yes, she was beautiful, and doubtless it was true that in England many gentlemen were her servitors because of that beauty. But—he smiled a wry smile and, leaning forward, whispered to his mare:

“Tuti, my little Snowbird,” he spoke softly into the silken ear, “she is a very lovely lady, this Mistress Jolie, this Lady Sanguilla. But saw you ever such pride, Tuti, such vanity of woman?”

The mare flicked her ear and tossed her small shapely head. Lachlan laughed quietly.

“Be at ease, Tuti, little Snowbird,” he murmured. “For a while longer thy master’s heart belongs to thee alone.”

Nevertheless, he kept his eyes upon the girl. She rode a little in front of him, Meg Pearson by her side. Ugly Meg’s horse, like that of Jock Pearson, who rode with Almayne a few paces behind Lachlan, was a blue roan of the big-boned English type; but Jolie’s claybank gelding, Selu by name, was of the Indian breed, small, slim, long-maned, long-tailed, small-headed like a barb. Men said that the wild horse herds, which roamed the forest savannahs on both sides of the Blue Mountains and from which the Indian warriors obtained their mounts, were sprung from the horses that the Prince Soto had abandoned in the wilderness long years before on his ill-fated march to the Great River. There was truth in the tale, for in those days, before in-breeding had produced the mustang type of later years, one could see in many of the Indian horses—Chicasaw horses, as the

folk of Charles Town called them—the signs of Andalusian blood.

Selu, so named because he was the colour of corn, was of this Chicasaw breed, and Tuti the Snowbird, though her colour was dark chestnut, might have been Selu's sister. Lachlan had bought them both of a smooth-tongued trader who had brought them down from the nation of the Cherokees into Charles Town; and though Selu was the swifter and the better trained, Lachlan loved Tuti the Snowbird better, because of her playful, impudent tricks and the warm, loving heart within her.

He was content, for the present, with Tuti's company. Mr. O'Sullivan, digging his heels into the ribs of his mule, pushed past and joined Jolie and Meg at the front of the caravan. Behind Lachlan, Almayne, who rode a piebald Chicasaw pony which he called Nunda the Moon-Face, spun yarns with Jock Pearson about great hunts beyond the Blue Mountains and marches and ambushes of the Indian wars. After these again trailed the pack ponies, the pack-horse drivers riding beside them, occasionally cracking their long whips.

Lachlan turned in his saddle from time to time to watch the trail behind. The great nation of the Cherokees, who held the mountains and the upper foothills, was known to be restive. The Governor's ill-advised policy had incensed the younger braves; and Lachlan knew more than the authorities at Charles Town knew—knew that a Cherokee war was inevitable.

But he did not expect it immediately, and the Catawbas, who held the middle country, were friendly to the Charles Town English.

It was from behind that danger might come at any time, although Lachlan did not look for it so soon. Doubtless Stanwicke had already gone to the Governor with news of Jolie's flight. Doubtless Falcon also had the news by now, and probably the forces of the Province were already engaged in the search. But Lachlan and Almayne had planned carefully.

Before leaving Charles Town for Stanwicke Hall they had laid a false scent, which, Lachlan felt fairly sure, would send the searchers off on a blind track. None in Charles Town knew that they were to join Pearson's pack train, and with the deceptive clues that they had prepared in advance, considerable time should elapse before the searchers found the right trail.

One possibility bothered Lachlan. It might be known in the town that Mr. O'Sullivan had left with Pearson's train, and in this Lance Falcon might see some significance. Yet this, too, seemed unlikely. Mr. O'Sullivan had told no one of his hastily formed decision to go journeying into the wilderness, and since the pack train had started before daylight, there was a good chance that his presence in it had been unobserved by anyone who knew him.

In the mid-forenoon they met and passed a group of half a dozen Congaree Indians, members of one of the smaller tribes that the warrior nations despised.

All were armed with rifles, two carried steel hatchets, while the others bore tomahawks of stone. They were unmounted, for the Congarees were too poor to own horses, and they carried on their backs the bundles of skins that they would barter in Charles Town for taffai rum.

Recognizing Pearson, they stopped and made as if to show the pelts that they carried, hoping to get their rum at once instead of trudging the weary miles to Charles Town; but Jock, knowing the Congarees of old and aware that few skins of value would be found in their bundles, bade them roughly get on and clear the road. It was just after they had passed that Jolie beckoned Lachlan and he rode forward and joined her.

“Your warriors,” she said, “Striking Hawk and Little Mink. I have not seen them this day. Where are they?”

“Little Mink is ahead of us, Mam’selle,” Lachlan told her, “and Striking Hawk follows in our rear.”

“But why?” she asked.

“You are not travelling the safe roads of England,” he replied. “Here it is well to know who comes on the Path in front of you and who follows on the Path behind.”

Her eyebrows lifted. “Did you know that those Congaree Indians were coming?” she inquired.

Lachlan nodded.

“A logcock called from the woods in front of us some minutes ago,” he said. “It was the voice of

Little Mink, and it gave me notice that travellers were approaching and that they were not to be feared."

She exclaimed in wonder, while Meg Pearson looked on with a smile and Mr. O'Sullivan swore softly in the ancient language of Ireland which he used when he was much pleased or surprised.

"And, lad," he asked, "if those poor Congarees had been enemies whom we should have had cause to fear, what then would have been Little Mink's signal to you?"

"He would have called to me, then," Lachlan answered, "in the voice of one of the preying birds or one of the hunting beasts. If the danger were slight he would have used a sparrow hawk's cry. If it were great, but not very great, he would have uttered the scream of the partridge hawk. If the danger were very serious, we should have heard the howl of a lone wolf or the scream of a hunting panther."

Mr. O'Sullivan slapped his thigh with his right hand. "By damn and by Paul!" he cried, his round face glowing like a beet under his white mop of hair. "'Tis the strategy of the wilderness and 'tis superb material for the book I plan to write about the warfare of the aborigines. Now tell me, lad . . ."

The words died on his lips; he stood open-mouthed, eyes suddenly wide. From Jolie's cheeks the colour drained.

From far behind the pack train the sound came—a long, quavering, wailing scream. It might have come



from a woman smitten suddenly with terror; yet it was an utterly inhuman cry, savage and wild and menacing, fiercer even than the chorus of the wolves.

Ugly Meg found her tongue first.

“Speak of the devil——” she said grimly, her eyes on Lachlan’s face.

Mr. O’Sullivan glanced at Jolie, marked the pallor of her cheeks.

“Perhaps,” he suggested hopefully, “that was the real thing we heard—a real panther. What say you, lad?”

Lachlan made no reply. Already Almayne was at his side, speaking rapidly in a low voice, his gray-blue eyes alight. Lachlan nodded, turned swiftly to Jolie.

“Mam’selle,” he said, “we will go now—you and Almayne and I. It was the signal agreed upon with Striking Hawk. It means that pursuers from Charles Town are coming. Mr. O’Sullivan, you cannot come with us—your mule could not keep up. Ready, Mam’selle? Then—ride.”

Meg Pearson’s long arm encircled Jolie’s slim shoulders. Leaning forward, she kissed the girl upon the forehead.

“God’s blessing on you, my lamb,” she whispered. “We’ll do what we can for you here.”

Nunda the Moon-Face leaped forward as Almayne’s heels dug into the piebald’s flanks. “Now, lamb!” cried Meg, and struck Selu’s haunch with her open palm. They were off, racing straight up the

Path, Almayne in the lead, the fringes of his buckskin shirt streaming in the breeze, his long rifle balanced in his right hand.

Teeth clenched, muscles taut, Jolie bent forward over Selu's neck. She saw Almayne glance behind him, saw the frown on his brow, read the thought that was in his mind.

The spurs of her riding boots tickled Selu's sides. The claybank was racing now, and Jolie, head down, boring into the wind, spoke to him coolly, gently:

"Faster, Selu! Faster, my sweet boy! We'll teach Almayne something, you and I."

The gale shrilled in her ears. Above the rush of the wind she could no longer hear the thunder of Tuti's hoofs behind her. The Path was hard here, the grass that grew in it was short, its curves as it wound through the forest were long and sweeping; yet Jolie knew that it would have been madness to race an English horse at such break-neck speed along that trail. But she knew also that the Chicasaw horses were marvellously sure-footed, and ahead of her Nunda was racing, too. Almayne had let the piebald out; he was doing his best, and his best was good. For some minutes he held his lead; then, little by little, the space between them lessened, and Jolie smiled.

As inch by inch she drew abreast of Almayne, as inch by inch she passed him, she turned her face to him so that he could see that smile.

## XXIII

**M**R. FRANCIS O'SULLIVAN lounged upon his mule and chirped a foolish song. When his mind was serene, he loved the stately stanzas of the austere Greeks. In moments of anxiety, his tongue, without direction from his brain, warbled of lighter themes. Care bestrode him now, for he sang of love:

Oh, a Princess walked in the hawthorne lane;  
Bright was her hair as the Mogul's gold.  
And he saw it shine like the sun through rain,  
And he could not know that her eyes were cold.

So he said to his sword: "There is none so fair  
From the Uttermost Snows to the Happy Isles";  
And he swore: "By God, I will kiss her hair!"  
And he prayed: "Lord, blind me not when she smiles."

Jock Pearson, riding on the little man's right, scowled as though he found the tune distasteful; and Meg Pearson riding just behind him, a long-stemmed black pipe clenched in her teeth, suddenly ripped out a most unladylike oath. Mr. O'Sullivan turned in his saddle and beamed upon the lady.

"What ails you, Meg?" he inquired mildly. "Do you swear at my singing? For my part, I swear by it."

"Your singin' be damned," Meg answered harshly. "They're comin'. I hear their hoof-beats."

Mr. O'Sullivan's smile lost something of its good-humour.

"I'm disappointed," he said. "I had begun to hope that it was a real panther, after all. Well, our friends have a good start. Hast any plans, Jock?"

The big trader shook his head. "Only to help Almayne all we can without runnin' ourselves in hot water," he answered gruffly.

"Hum," said Mr. O'Sullivan thoughtfully. "And suppose you let me do the talking, Jock of the bear's voice. I've a good lying tongue in my head, and the less you say the less likely you'll get in trouble."

Jock grumbled something in the depths of his beard, but Meg said quickly, "Talk and be damned to you. Nem' mind my cursin', Mr. O'Sullivan. When somethin's goin' to happen I gets a little narvous and forgets my breedin'."

"I'm a little nervous myself, Mistress Pearson," O'Sullivan said coolly, and went back to humming his tune. Ugly Meg glanced at him sharply, threw back her head and laughed.

"Well, what now, my lovely Bird of Paradise?" asked O'Sullivan testily.

"I was only thinkin'," she said, her corrugated sun-tanned face a little redder than usual, "what a comical sight you are, a-settin' on that-ar mule with that-ar sword a-danglin' by your side."

Mr. O'Sullivan seemed not to hear her. He appeared to be deep in thought, but in reality he was listening—listening to the hoof-beats, which he, too,

now heard. Yet he would not turn his head. He sat very erect upon his jogging mule, his uncovered white hair gleaming in the sun, his small, bright-blue eyes very blue in his round, smooth, pink countenance. As always, he wore a white shirt, open at the neck, and black knee trousers with silver buckles. One hand, in which he carried a light hickory switch, lay upon the pommel of his saddle; the other rested on the hilt of the slender rapier that he had worn constantly since leaving Charles Town.

Suddenly he seemed to wake from his absorption.

"My sword, eh," he muttered absently. "What's comical about my sword? Why, damme, woman . . ."

A shout interrupted him. A pack-horse driver was pointing with his whip. Around a bend of the Path behind the pack train a group of riders were approaching at a gallop. There were five men in all, a tall man on a big black horse leading them.

O'Sullivan sat on his mule watching them keenly.

"The tall, wide one's Lance Falcon," he said quietly. "Jock, d'ye know the others?"

Pearson shook his head. "Can't tell yit," he answered. "Except the tall one, they ride like sailors."

Mr. O'Sullivan grinned.

"That's what they are," he muttered. "Falcon's brought his own men with him. Probably the Governor was too slow in moving, and he's taken matters into his own hands. Well, well, luck's with us. Come."

He clucked to his mule and, followed by Jock and

Mistress Pearson, rode to the rear of the pack train.

"We'll meet 'em here," he said. "Mind, now, I do the parleying."

Lance Falcon, booted and spurred, the long red feather in his hat matching his broad red sash, reined in before the group, his men close behind him.

"Give you good day, gentlemen," he said pleasantly. "It grieves me to see that those who were with you are no longer of your company."

Mr. O'Sullivan blinked for a moment uncomprehendingly. Then he turned to Jock Pearson.

"This man," he said distinctly in his bird-like treble, jerking his thumb towards Falcon, "is of a certainty very drunk."

Falcon started violently, stared at O'Sullivan, then smiled.

"Your pardon, sir," he said, "I am very sober, and I am in haste."

O'Sullivan calmly returned the stare, then spoke again to Jock.

"If he is not drunk," the little man chirped, "then he is a boor. He has not the courtesy to uncover before a lady."

Falcon's hand, resting on his sword-hilt, tightened, but his smile was broader than before. His eyes darted quickly from one to another of the three, and with a flourish he swept off his wide hat with its red feather.

"A thousand apologies," he cried, bowing low to Meg. "In my haste I took the lady to be a man. I pray you overlook the error."

His smile vanished suddenly.

“You are Jock Pearson?” he asked, addressing the trader.

Jock nodded.

“It will be well for you, then, to answer my questions truthfully. I come with the Governor’s authority. A young lady, Mistress Jolie Stanwicke, together with Mr. Lachlan McDonald and a hunter named Almayne, joined your party one day’s march from Charles Town. Where are they now?”

“May I ask,” said Mr. O’Sullivan meekly, “to see the Governor’s warrant?”

Falcon whirled on him fiercely.

“And may I ask you, sir,” he thundered, “to hold your tongue?”

The small blue eyes in Mr. O’Sullivan’s pink face blinked rapidly. He stroked the point of his chin with a chubby white hand.

“I think, sir,” he said cheerfully, “that by using my tongue I may save Your Honour considerable fruitless effort. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that Mistress Jolie Stanwicke and her two companions were riding in our company. Let us suppose that they learned of your approach and decided to give you the slip. Let us suppose, finally, that they left us forthwith, not even pausing to say good-bye. A few miles distant, I am informed, are the great swamps and canebrakes of the Santee. By now, if all I have supposed is true, Mistress Jolie Stanwicke and her friends are in the Santee canebrakes. And by

now I think it has dawned upon you, my black-browed, evil-eyed fellow, that you have played the part of a most lamentable ass."

Falcon's full-blooded, sun-tanned face had turned a purple-red; under his moustache his white teeth gleamed; there was murder in his eyes. But Mr. O'Sullivan continued, unabashed:

"Gentle and courteous sir," he said, in tones of utmost humility, "by your gracious leave, I will put the case before you. I'm thinking you found the Governor a little slow to move, so you, being a man of action, took matters into your own hands. With your own men you galloped out of Charles Town to run Mistress Jolie Stanwicke down. There was a thing or two that you forgot, I'm thinking. You and your men are seamen, and seamen are grand upon the sea. But what I don't understand, Your Honour, and what you don't understand, Your Honour, is this: How in hell are your seamen going to track Mistress Jolie Stanwicke in the canebrakes of the Santee, and she in the charge of James Almayne, the best woodsman in Carolina?"

Mr. O'Sullivan smiled a beatific smile, the smile of a pink-cheeked, snowy-haired cherub.

"Faith, most superfluous sir," he said, "we were worried a while ago, thinking that surely you had with you some man of the woods who could follow a wilderness trail and maybe match wits with Almayne. Yes, my thick-skulled Captain, you gave me a scare, for I had understood that you had a brain. But my



mind's easy now and there's a singing in my heart. Good day, sir, and may the snakes of the Santee canebrakes sharpen their fangs on your hide."

For some moments Captain Falcon sat his horse in silence. He sat frowning, his arms folded, his head sunk forward a little, his eyes fixed upon Mr. O'Sullivan. The veins bulged in his forehead, yet his voice was calm.

"I take it," he said, "that you are Mr. Francis O'Sullivan, the pedagogue."

Mr. O'Sullivan bowed. "The same, sir," he replied sweetly. "And you are Captain Lance Falcon, the pirate, who will some day be hanged."

A slow smile replaced Falcon's frown. "Mr. O'Sullivan," said he, "you have given me much pleasure."

Again the little man on the mule inclined his head. "Sure and 'twould be discourteous," he replied, "not to return the compliment. It has been a real joy to me to learn that mine enemy is an ass."

Falcon's smile broadened. "Most of what you have said," he remarked quietly, "is true. Most true of all is it that I proved myself foolish when I lost patience with the Governor and set out on this quest without a woodsman to guide me. I had hoped to overtake my quarry on the road and bag the bird before it could escape into the woods. Yet I am not quite the simpleton that you have supposed me, Mr. O'Sullivan. The Governor's men are but an hour or two behind me, and when they come up we shall try to match wits with your friend Almayne."

Mr. O'Sullivan leaned forward on his mule. His right hand moved with amazing swiftness, and the hickory switch that he held in it thrashed across Falcon's cheek.

"You lie, Lance Falcon!" he said distinctly in his high thin voice of a bird.

It was a stinging blow. It left a white welt on the dark tan of Falcon's face. Yet the man did not move an inch, did not even lift his hand.

"Eh, well!" he cried. He turned to his men behind him, and to the pack drivers standing near by.

"You are all witnesses?" he asked. "You saw the blow?"

A dozen heads nodded. Falcon turned again to the little man on the mule.

"Of course, Mr. O'Sullivan," he said, "your design has been entirely plain from the beginning. You wished to make a quarrel. I have understood that you have some reputation with the sword—in fact, that you make a pittance by teaching not only Greek and Latin but rapier-play also. Well, I am not unwilling to have a lesson from so eminent a teacher, and perhaps in my clumsy way I may be able to instruct the pedagogue. 'Twill help pass the time until the Governor's men arrive."

With a tiger's liveness which belied his bulk, he leaped from his horse. In an instant O'Sullivan, too, was on his feet.

"The ground is firm here," Falcon continued coolly, "and the trees do not hedge us in too closely.

There is room for some pretty play, do you not think?"

"And the road is open behind you," chirped O'Sullivan in answer, "so that when the fear of God comes upon you, your long legs may beat a rub-a-dub-dub back to town."

Again Falcon's white teeth gleamed under his moustache.

"Tut, tut, my little pepper pot," he replied, "you are overdoing it now. I see that I can instruct the pedagogue in gentlemanly courtesy."

Deliberately he removed his coat, handed it to one of his men, rolled back the sleeve of his white shirt, exposing his powerful fore-arm, dark brown with the suns of many seas.

He drew his sword with a flourish and, lowering the point, turned to Meg Pearson.

"Permit me, Madame," he said, bowing, "to reassure the timorous heart that must needs dwell with so fair a face. I shall not kill our little pedagogue. To do so might put me to some bother in Charles Town. I shall make a hole in his right arm above the elbow and I think that within the next quarter hour he will lose a part of his left ear."

"Ugly Meg," said Mr. O'Sullivan testily, "if you don't want to see this long-winded, most damned pirate sent to hell, you can just ride up the road a little piece and smoke your pipe."

## XXIV

**O**N THE white sleeve of Mr. O'Sullivan's shirt above the elbow there was a spot of red no bigger than the end of a man's thumb. Meg Pearson, sitting bolt upright on her horse, her pipe clenched between her teeth, watched that spot with wide, staring eyes. It grew no larger; and presently Meg knew that O'Sullivan's right arm had been pricked but that Falcon's sword point had not yet made the hole that he had promised to make in that arm.

Her gaze shifted to another spot of red. This spot, too, was small; the tip of her finger would have covered it. It was on the front of Falcon's shirt above the right lung. Another pin-prick, Meg knew; but O'Sullivan's promise, also, had come close to fulfilment.

There were times when Meg could not see the swords, so swiftly did they move. They were like the tongues of snakes, and sometimes, as they slid along each other, they gave forth a sound like the hissing of serpents.

There was no sound except the sound of the swords, which was sometimes a hissing as of angry snakes, and sometimes a deadly rasping that was like no

other sound in the world. Around the two swordsmen, Jock Pearson's pack-horse drivers and Lance Falcon's followers formed a wide circle under the far-spaced trees. Some still sat their horses; others had dismounted; one pock-marked, earringed seaman, his head swathed in a silken yellow scarf, sprawled at full length on the ground, his villainous face supported in cupped hands. It would be a long fight, he perceived, and he would enjoy it in comfort.

It had already lasted longer than most of Lance Falcon's fights. Its first fierce phase was over, the phase of impetuous attack and savage reprisal, the phase of experiment. Falcon knew now that his task was hard, that some strange chance had brought to the New World a fencing master who was equal, perhaps, to the best in Europe.

He had known some of these teachers of the sword; clever men, but inclined to be academic, to insist too much upon form and style. It had pleased his fancy sometimes in the cities of the Continent to match himself against these professional pedants of rapier-play, and there had been only one, a certain De Bon of Paris, whom he had failed to touch with his covered point. Five years had passed since he had fenced with that tall, lanky Frenchman, but there was something in the sword-work of this little Irish pedagogue that recalled the methods of De Bon.

Falcon had drawn first blood. Within the first few minutes of the fight, his point had touched O'Sullivan's arm. But it was a mere touch, not the clean,

penetrating thrust that he had promised himself and Meg Pearson; and sixty seconds later he had felt O'Sullivan's point prick his chest and had saved himself barely in time. Thus at the outset each had tested the other's mettle, each had learned caution, had perceived the hollowness of the boast that each had uttered.

None knew it, but Mr. Francis O'Sullivan was praying as he fought. With all his adoration of the pagan Greeks, he was a pious man and he was aware that he needed now that help from Heaven which, in time of stress, he had never been loath to ask. If Falcon, like most soldiers of fortune, had felt scorn for the fencing teachers, the schoolmen of the sword, here was one rapier schoolman who had scorned the sword-work of most soldiers. O'Sullivan had tried scores of them, and, while many were good artisans with the rapier, there were not many whom he would rank as artists. But in all the world there were very few men known to him whom he would admit to that exalted rank—Leuthen of Vienna, the Duke of Beaujeu, Vanzetti of Milan, Gotteschalke of Strasbourg, De Bon of Paris, his old fencing partner, Murtzulph the Mohammedan, and perhaps a half-dozen others. And now in raw America, where the rifle was honoured above the sword and where good swordsmen were rare, he had found another artist of the rapier, this Captain Lance Falcon.

So Mr. O'Sullivan prayed, though he was careful that none should be aware of his praying. His smooth

pink cheeks had lost none of their pink, and, as always, he smiled while he fought; but his heart was solemn within him, for he knew that in a dozen years he had faced no such swordsman as this.

He knew that his was the greater skill the more consummate artistry; but he knew also that the difference was very slight, so slight that Falcon's longer reach and superior strength atoned for it. And while Mr. O'Sullivan prayed, he schemed and studied and calculated, his thoughts reaching into the future even while his hand and eye dealt with the deadly, imminent present. Barring some accident, some unlikely mischance, the victory would come, he believed, to him whose endurance met the test. On this theory he based his battle.

For those who looked on, the world round about them had ceased to exist. To Jock Pearson, to Ugly Meg, to the pack-horse drivers, it had seemed at first an unequal battle. They knew nothing of the art of the sword. They saw a tall, powerful man, a seasoned soldier, bronzed and arrogant and thewed like Jock Pearson himself, great of shoulder, yet slim of waist and clean of limb, matched against a small, plump, white-haired, woman-voiced gentleman who might have been a lawyer's clerk or a minister of the Gospel. To them it appeared that only one ending was possible. And the first stage of the fight had served to confirm their judgment, for at the outset Falcon took the offensive, driving his antagonist before him.

But there were more practiced eyes than these in

that circle of spectators. Falcon's men knew a swordsman when they saw one, and the blades had scarcely crossed before those veterans gave O'Sullivan his due. It was then that he of the yellow scarf and the earrings stretched himself upon the ground to rest his limbs while he watched. He counted himself a connoisseur, this pock-marked cutthroat, and he saw this fight as no three-minute affair. He had no doubt of the outcome, for he had followed Falcon for years and had seen him in action many times; but he figured the little white-haired man a hard nut to crack.

A horror came upon Meg Pearson. It drove the colour from her furrowed cheeks and set her limbs shaking. It was a horror of the swords. Like serpents' tongues they were, the darting, flickering tongues of deadly serpents. She could not get the thought out of her head; it possessed her utterly and turned her blood to icy water.

She had seen men fight and die. She had seen knives flash and strike home in the frequent brawls of the hard-bitten pack-horse men. She had heard the whine of arrows and the hum of rifle bullets in Indian ambuscades along the Great Wilderness Path. She had seen the bodies of women, their heads still bloody where the scalps had been lifted. Yet now there was an unknown horror upon her, and the courage was gone from her, and her eyes were wide with terror of those darting, flickering serpent-tongues of steel.

To Meg there was something in the spectacle that



was like black magic. The deadly flickering serpent-tongues struck and struck and struck, yet could not find their mark. Death rode on those flashing points, but some incomprehensible wizardry defied the death that rode there. It was necromancy; it smacked of the supernatural, and her horror grew. But to the pock-faced pirate, stretched upon the ground, his puckered eyes appraising every thrust and parry, it was not necromancy, it was not horrible. On the contrary, it was divinely beautiful. His connoisseur's soul was in rapture; he revelled in the most perfect display of swordsmanship that he had ever seen.

In truth, there was much that was beautiful about that fight. There was its almost flawless artistry, the art of the rapier in its perfect consummation. There was Falcon's strength and grace, which was like the terrible, beautiful, smooth strength and grace of the royal tiger. There was O'Sullivan's deftness and quickness and lightness, which somehow brought to mind a swallow on the wing. And there was another beautiful thing about it—it was a gentleman's fight. Once Falcon backed against a pine trunk and his opponent could have killed him. Once O'Sullivan stumbled on a tussock of grass and was for an instant at Falcon's mercy. But neither blade struck home.

A time came when Meg Pearson knew somehow—though how she knew it she could not tell—that the crisis was near. It was, perhaps, that mysterious prevision which is granted to some when tragedy impends. She knew it, and that was all; but while she

knew mysteriously that the end was at hand, she did not know what that end would be.

There was no perceptible change. Both were tired, but one seemed no wearier than the other. They fought as they had been fighting for an eternity—warily, carefully, circling each other like panthers, advancing, retreating, retreating, advancing, feinting, thrusting, parrying, eye to eye and blade to blade.

Yet, while in this sense there was no change, there was something new that now made its presence felt, a subtle, invisible thing, but very real—an intenser deadliness.

Meg felt it first, perhaps because she was a woman, but soon there were others who felt it also. The pock-marked earringed pirate felt it, and his avid eyes glittered with a more savage light; and somehow that mysterious knowledge, which none could question, although there was no palpable thing upon which to base it, spread from man to man until all that eager circle of spectators possessed it, and eyes widened and lips tightened as they awaited the end that was coming soon.

It came; and there was forewarning of it; but none in the circle caught the warning. They lived for nothing in that moment except the spectacle before them. Their whole being was concentrated in their eyes; all their other senses were dulled. In the woods to the west an owl hooted; in the woods to the east another answered it. Jock Pearson and Ugly Meg, his wife, were old in the ways of the woods, and there were

good woodsmen among the pack drivers. All must have heard the two owls hoot, but none was aware of the sound. In that moment of tense, taut expectation, with the climax of the drama at hand, none wondered why it was that owls were hooting in the broad light of day.

A minute passed. They no longer circled each other like panthers. They fought now as though they were rooted to the ground. The darting swords were like living light. O'Sullivan's smile had become a ghastly grin and his pink cheeks had turned gray. Falcon's face was haggard and drawn; his eyes were like those of a madman; in his forehead a great vein bulged and pumped.

Close at hand an owl hooted again. And instantly at that signal the empty forest sprang to life.

Meg Pearson heard the whine of an arrow passing close above her shoulder. Before she could turn her head, a rifle shot shattered the silence, another and another, and all at once the air was thick with arrows raining in from every side. Then bedlam broke—a hell of yells and savage, ear-splitting whoops. It was as though the forest itself had gone suddenly mad, for though jets of flame and puffs of smoke were visible amid the trees, no foeman showed himself.

Meg knew in an instant that all was lost. She felt a stinging pain in her shoulder. She saw men pitch from their plunging horses. She saw Jock Pearson rise in his stirrups and wrench a long shaft out of his side: She heard him shout "Ride for it, Meg! They've

done me." She saw him sway in his saddle, then fall. In an instant she was on the ground beside him, her hand on his heart; and in another instant she was in the saddle again.

O'Sullivan heard her voice above the tumult, pitiful and shrill and frenzied, crying out, "Damn them, they've killed my Jock!" He saw her wheel her plunging horse and dash straight into the forest to the right where the war whoops were loudest and where now he could see naked brown forms flitting here and there amid the tree trunks. He saw her hurl her rifle from her as she galloped on and snatch her tomahawk from her belt. Then a strong hand grasped him from behind and pulled him down upon the ground.

Half-lying, half-kneeling, he twisted his body sideways and saw Falcon lying beside him close to a fallen horse. He heard Falcon's voice whisper hoarsely, "Lie still, old swordsman"; felt Falcon's heavy hand upon his back pressing and holding him down. Four dead men lay near him; five riderless horses milled about or stood staring, their nostrils wide. Down the Path he heard a thunder of hoofbeats and, raising his head a little, he saw horsemen galloping away in the direction of Charles Town, while behind them the Path was filled with plumed and painted warriors, yelling like mad, and in the woods on either side other warriors fired at the fugitives.

A mental numbness came over him as he lay watch-

ing the pursuit. He was aware of a strange indifference, as though he were a mere spectator at a show. In the midst of this he heard Falcon's voice speaking very calmly.

"Eh, pedagogue," the voice said. "The long-winded, most damned pirate can teach you a trick or two, after all. D'ye hear me, man?"

O'Sullivan nodded.

"They think we're dead," Falcon continued quickly, "but in a minute they'll be back for our scalps. My horse bolted, but the big roan yonder will carry my weight. You try for the gray. If you get him, ride *up* the Path and ride hard. Ready? Now, go!"

In the same instant they leaped to their feet and dashed for the horses; and behind them immediately a wild whoop rang out, followed by a fierce chorus of yells and a scattered volley of shots.

The big roan was Jock Pearson's horse, a veteran of the wilderness, trained to stand where his rider left him. Falcon reached him, grasped the bridle, swung to his back, raced away up the Path. The gray horse jerked his head aside as O'Sullivan sprang for the bridle rein, reared, and trotted out of reach.

Beyond the gray stood quietly a sorrel Chicasaw pony that had belonged to one of Pearson's pack drivers, while beyond him again the laden ponies of the pack train snorted and tossed their heads. O'Sullivan knew that the sorrel was his only hope. The

yells behind him were louder, nearer, but there were no more shots, and in an instant he understood why.

In front of him and to his right a naked warrior came leaping straight toward him, a long-shafted steel tomahawk in his lifted right hand, a rifle in his left. His high headdress of eagle feathers, the elaborate pattern of his black and vermilion paint proclaimed his exalted rank. At twenty paces he hurled the tomahawk. It whirled through the air, a streak of bluish light, so swiftly that the eye could not see the revolving handle.

Yet it was no swifter than Falcon's rapier thrusts had been; and O'Sullivan was ready for it. He felt the wind of it as the steel hatchet blade cleft the air where his head had been a fraction of a second before. He was down on his hands and knees when the tomahawk passed over him. He had scarcely regained his feet when the tall Indian, leaping onward at full speed, spitted himself upon O'Sullivan's sword.

The Chicasaw pony still stood where he had been standing, ears back, tail switching, fidgeting a little on his feet, but too well trained to bolt. O'Sullivan was an indifferent horseman but agile as a cat. With yells and whoops ringing in his ears, with bullets and arrows singing past him, his foot fumbled at the stirrup; yet somehow he got himself on the horse's back, and by some miracle no missile touched him as the pony raced away up the Path.

It had been quick work. Since their dash for the

horses scarcely two minutes had elapsed. The sorrel was faster than the roan and bore a lighter load. Not long after the whoops behind him had died away, O'Sullivan saw Falcon in the Path ahead, riding hard, his chin over his shoulder. At sight of O'Sullivan, he checked the roan's stride slightly until the other was close behind him; then for three miles or so they pushed on at a swinging gallop. At last Falcon reined in. As O'Sullivan ranged abreast of him, the Irishman spoke:

"Captain Falcon," he said, "if you had not pulled me down upon the ground, Francis O'Sullivan would be a dead man now. Some day, God willing, I'll repay the debt."

Falcon's strong teeth gleamed under his moustache.

"You owe me nothing," he replied gruffly. "If I had not pulled you down, Lance Falcon would be a dead man, too. I saved you to save my own scalp, which was already wriggling on my head, and which still feels none too secure because I know not the ways of this damned heathen-infested wilderness."

"Nor I," said O'Sullivan, "but, by Paul, I can learn."

"It means, I take it," Falcon continued, "that the Cherokee rising has come. They are between us and the town. We cannot win back to the coast. We must . . ."

With an oath, he jerked his horse back upon its haunches.

God's blood!" he cried. "We are cut off!

In the Path ahead stood a tall Indian, a rifle in one hand, the other held high, palm outward.

“The Lord hath His eyes upon us,” said O’Sullivan quietly. “To us poor babes in the wilderness a guide has been granted. It is Lachlan’s man, Striking Hawk.”



## XXV

**A**LMAYNE on Nunda the Moon-Face rode in the lead. Behind him strode the Muskogee warrior, Little Mink, who, soon after the flight began, had stepped suddenly from behind a tree trunk and joined the party. Jolie Stanwicke on Selu rode next, and Lachlan on Tuti the Snowbird brought up the rear. They followed no trail. For some miles, after leaving the pack train, they had raced along the Great Path, then they had turned to the right into the forest.

Of necessity their pace was now much slower. Sometimes the horses trotted, but more often their gait was a walk. They were heading, Lachlan had told Jolie, for the great swamp of the Santee, a vast fastness of cypress forest and interminable cane-brakes where, Almayne felt confident, they could throw their pursuers off the track.

Riding in single file, they spoke seldom, but Jolie, her bridle rein loose on Selu's neck, hummed a song. She had no sense of peril, no consciousness of anxiety. In the charge of these three men she felt as safe in this trackless wilderness as she had ever felt amid the groves of Hampshire.

She studied them as she rode. In front of her the eagle feather, fastened in Little Mink's narrow crest

of straight black hair, swayed rhythmically; the long muscles of his naked back and broad, copper-coloured shoulders bulged and writhed with every stride. Save for the loin-cloth about his waist and the high moccasins on his feet and calves, his body was bare. Its symmetry, its feline slimness and liveness, its evident power fascinated her. Here in another form was that beauty of the wilderness which from the beginning had so delighted her.

He was as beautiful, she decided, this young warrior of the wilderness, as the wilderness itself of which he was a part. The thought engendered another, and a shadow came into her eyes. Yes, they must be beautiful, those tall, slim Indian maidens of whom Lachlan had spoken, since the Indian youths were so good to look upon. And that mysterious daughter of Chief Concha, the Appalache, who held Gilbert Barradell prisoner, was a princess among her own people, and the high-born Indian girls would be the fairest.

For a little while her happiness was clouded; but these thoughts passed. Almayne turned in his saddle to speak briefly with Little Mink in the latter's tongue. She studied the tall hunter's thin, tanned, hawklike face, his deep-set gray-blue eyes gleaming above his white moustache. He felt her eyes on him, looked at her and smiled, and she gave him a radiant smile in return. Suddenly it came to her that her first distaste for him had passed—that now she liked him profoundly, counted him her most trusted friend in this, her time of trial.

She turned to glance momentarily at Lachlan, riding ten paces behind her. He was gazing to the right, watching a small herd of wild black cattle grazing in a savannah, and she saw his face in profile. She saw the Indian in it, and she saw the Frenchman; the Scotch blood, she had already decided, was not apparent. Beneath its buckskins, she knew, that body was as lithe and strong as Little Mink's; and the face was far handsomer. It had not the stony impassiveness of an Indian's countenance. Even in moments of repose the vivid spirit behind it shone through it like a flame; always, in spite of the sharply chiselled Indian features, it was a face luminous and alive.

He was like a fairy-tale, she reflected, this young Indian Prince. Somehow she could not quite believe in him. And all that Almayne had told her about him was like a fairy-tale. Who in England would credit her if she told the story there: that in the wilderness of America there was a nation, or group of nations—an empire in miniature, the Confederacy of the Muskogee—over which an old Scotsman reigned as King, dwelling in barbaric affluence in his great house at Tallasee, waited upon by his scores of negro slaves, teaching his copper-skinned subjects the arts of peace and of war?

Who in England would believe her if she told what Almayne had told her about that wilderness empire of which this slim, dark youth behind her was Prince and heir, if she told of the Red Towns and the White

Towns, the towns of war and the towns of peace, of the strange dances and the stately ceremonials, the Green Corn Dance and the sacred Dance of the Serpent, of the "beloved bear grounds," where, instead of beef cattle, droves of bears were kept to furnish meat, of the great herds of horses and the smiling fields of grain?

Who would believe her if she told what Almayne had told her of the origin of this empire of the Muskogee; how, when the Spanish conquerors sacked Mexico and wrecked the magnificence of Montezuma, there were some among the great Emperor's subject-peoples who would not submit to the foreign yoke; how they left their home in that distant country and marched northward and eastward, a whole nation of them, men, women, and children, seeking a new abode; how they met and fought many savage and warlike tribes in the land of the buffalo and the antelope; how at last, after long years of wandering in the western wilderness, they settled on the River Albamas, subdued all the nations that held the vast and smiling country, southward and westward of the Cherokee mountains and, teaching these nations something of the civilization of the Aztecs, bound them together into a powerful Indian empire known as the Confederacy of the Muskogee?

Who in England would believe her if she told of the ruling families of this barbaric empire, as proud of their blood as any English earl—of the Family of the Wind, whose maidens were princesses; of the

Families of the Wolf and the Panther; of the Family of the Beaver, whose old men took precedence among the counsellors? And who in England would believe her if she told of the young man who was Prince of this empire, this young Lachlan McDonald, who had in his veins the Indian blood of the Family of the Wind (the blood of Montezuma himself), the staunch blood of Scotland and the fiery blood of France? This young Indian Prince whose speech and manners were those of a polished English gentleman, whose woodcraft was that of a red hunter and warrior, and whose swordcraft would do credit to any young gallant of the English court?

Yes, they would laugh at her if she told them about Lachlan McDonald, Prince of the Muskogee Confederacy, Chief of the Family of the Wind. They would set it all down as mad romance. Yet he was there, riding behind her, in the flesh.

She felt his eyes upon her. She knew how he watched her, how he studied her when he thought himself unobserved. Well, she must not be too hard with him. He had ventured his life for her and had all but lost it. He had done her good service and he was serving her still. He had named her the Lady Sanguilla, so Almayne had told her, after some sweet-voiced beautiful bird, and she liked the name and was somehow glad that he had so named her.

She half-regretted now the tone that she had adopted when he had come to ask her pardon. She had done it with a purpose. She must guard against

the danger that Almayne had seen from the beginning. She must not let that happen. But she must not be too hard with Lachlan McDonald; and she did not wish to be too hard with him. Yet, for some reason that she could not fix clearly, she could not trust him as she trusted Almayne.

It was not that she mistrusted him. It was not that she doubted the sincerity of his intention to do all that he could to rescue Gilbert Barradell. She knew not what it was that warned her. She knew only that there was something in Lachlan McDonald's eyes—something of which, perhaps, he himself was unaware.

But she could not now think long or deeply of these matters. Around her, as she rode, the panorama of the wilderness unfolded—an ever-changing picture, more beautiful, more marvellous than ever. Its sights and sounds held her, drove all else from her mind. She wondered vaguely where their pursuers were now, whether Lance Falcon was with them, whether Meg Pearson and Mr. O'Sullivan had been able to detain them for any appreciable length of time. But the problem of the pursuit held her thoughts only briefly. Almayne and Lachlan McDonald betrayed no anxiety, and she felt none.

The rich wilderness soothed and lulled her. Again her mind was full of languid, dreamlike content, a sense of fulfilment ahead and of sorrow and evil left forever behind. There had been beauty and wonder along the Great Path; here there were greater beauty, greater wonder.

The deer were everywhere. There was scarcely a moment when she could not look to right or left and see a grazing herd. Crossing the head of a long, narrow savannah walled in by dense growths of cane, she tried to count the wild animals feeding there. In the foreground were nineteen white-tails, beyond them a drove of fifteen wild black cattle, and beyond these again five elk, while farther away there were still other herds of deer, too closely bunched to be counted with certainty. But the number of these was as nothing compared with the birds; tall cranes, some white with black-tipped wings, some gray with crimson patches on their heads; egrets pure white from head to drooping tail, walking in hundreds along the edges of the shallow pools; a great army of white ibis whose curved orange-red bills glowed in the sun.

She was watching the tall, stately cranes when a sudden movement among the grazing deer nearer at hand fixed her attention. She saw their small heads suddenly lift, saw some of them go bounding away, their tails held high, while others still stood at gaze; and suddenly from the tall grass a long, tawny shape launched upward and forward, and a great panther fell upon one of the deer, bearing it to the ground.

Almayne turned in his saddle and spoke a word to Lachlan, then wheeled his horse and galloped down the savannah, the others close behind him.

The big tawny cat, like a lioness in shape and scarcely less in bulk, crouching on the body of the

deer, rose as they drew near and stood watching them, head hanging low, long tail waving slowly. Jolie's heart beat faster. She noticed that Almayne held his rifle ready. She noticed, too, that Nunda the Moon-Face went forward laggingly, and she felt Selu trembling under her.

The panther's body stiffened, his long tail ceased its waving, in his bloody jaws Jolie could see the long teeth gleam. Almayne's rifle went to his shoulder; but still he rode on slowly, Lachlan and Little Mink beside him, Jolie close behind. When they were no more than twenty paces' distant, the panther whirled like a flash and bounded away to the right, vanishing in the tall grass.

Almayne turned to Jolie with a smile.

"Sometimes, Mistress," he said, "Klandaghi the panther fights for his game, but this one figured the odds too heavy. I hate to rob him, for Klandaghi is a great hunter and a clean one. But we must have meat, and it is best not to fire our rifles; in this still air the sound would carry far."

Before he had finished speaking, Little Mink's knife was at work upon the deer's carcass. Within a few minutes the task was completed and they were again on their way.

It was an hour after this when Almayne reined in suddenly and held up his hand to halt the others. They were coming up out of a dense bed of low fern to slightly higher ground where the great pines were supplanted by oaks of even mightier girth; and under



these oaks the ground was almost bare of vegetation and the soil was light and sandy. Almayne, bending forward in his saddle, was gazing intently at the sand in front of his horse's fore-feet, while Little Mink, stooping low, was also examining the ground. Lachlan rode forward past Jolie, dismounted, and stooped beside Little Mink, and a moment later Almayne dismounted and walked a few paces to the right, his eyes studying the sand at his left hand.

Jolie waited curiously. The three men talked briefly together, and presently they came toward her. Lachlan was frowning; Almayne's thin face was grave.

"We think it well that you should know," Lachlan said to her. "In the sand yonder are the tracks of a great war party of Cherokees, perhaps three hundred braves. It can mean only one thing—that the Cherokees have begun their threatened war against the Province."

She nodded calmly, inviting him to go on.

"This war party," he continued, "was moving eastward. They left the Great Path to the northward and came through the forest to shorten the way. Probably they struck the Path again near the point where we left the pack train."

"Our friends—Meg Pearson, Mr. O'Sullivan—they are in danger, then?" asked Jolie quickly.

"We can't tell, Mistress," Almayne answered her. "The war party may have missed them. I pray God so."

“Little Mink will go back to warn them, if they are still alive,” said Lachlan. “We must think of ourselves. Almayne believes that we had best lie for some days in the canebrakes of the Santee and decide later what to do.”

“Let us do what you and Almayne think best,” Jolie answered. Turning in her saddle, she saw Little Mink striding through the ferns behind her, following the back trail. As she watched, his tall, copper-brown form faded amid the straight trunks of the pines.

## XXVI

**F**ROM the forest of oak where they had found the tracks of the war party, the land sloped gradually until the oaks thinned and Jolie saw in front of her a solid rampart of tall, dense canes. That rampart seemed impenetrable. So closely set were the straight, smooth stems that no creature larger than a fox could have made its way through them. But Almayne turned to the right, and, before they had ridden fifty yards along the edge of the brake, a path opened before them leading straight into the canes.

Into this narrow opening the hunter led the way. Soon Jolie discovered that the whole canebrake was a labyrinth of winding game-trails, so narrow that there was barely room for a horseman to ride. Underfoot the damp black soil was carpeted with fallen cane leaves; on either side the slender green cane stems walled them in. The sun was still high when they entered the brake, yet here it was already dusk; for the foliage of the canes, meeting over their heads, made a roof many feet thick through which only an occasional shaft of light could penetrate.

The air was still and very hot. The cane leaves above her were motionless, yet on all sides she heard

mysterious rustlings, heard or seemed to hear mysterious, furtive footfalls. For a time she saw no creature of any kind, but somehow she knew that all around her was life. Suddenly, to the right and seemingly near at hand, sounded a loud snort, deep-throated, raucous, menacing. Startled, she turned to Lachlan, riding just behind her.

“Buffalo,” he whispered. “There are some in these brakes, though the big herds are farther inland.”

He listened a moment, his black eyes sparkling. The snorting became a mighty bellow, and Jolie heard hoof-beats and the noise of a heavy body galloping over dead cane leaves.

Lachlan smiled. “There must be another path in there,” he said, “running close to this one. A buffalo bull met something in the path—a bear, perhaps, or a wolf—and ordered it out of his way.”

The dimness, those eerie rustlings of unseen feet, worked on Jolie’s nerves. She had not ridden fifty yards when a piercing scream, again on her right and close at hand, drove the blood from her cheeks. This time it was Almayne who enlightened her. Turning in his saddle, he smiled at her.

“Don’t be frightened, Mistress,” he said in a low voice, “though I don’t wonder if you are. A fox can yell worse than a panther. I think something caught that fellow.”

As they advanced, the canes grew larger. They were as tall as small trees now, Jolie thought, although she could not see their tops. At frequent intervals the

path that they were following was crossed by other paths or gave off branches to right or left. Before the light grew too dim to see, she had abundant evidence of the cause of those mysterious rustlings. Glancing down the side paths that they crossed, she caught many glimpses of the wild things that walked the shadowy tunnels of the canebrake. Once it was a troop of deer in a path opening to her right; once it was a wild black cow; twice she saw foxes; and once Almayne himself uttered a low exclamation of surprise as Nunda the Moon-Face stopped suddenly with a snort, and a huge dim shape reared itself suddenly upward in the trail ahead.

“Zooks, what a bear!” Almayne muttered, and held his rifle on the beast while Nunda capered under him.

For a moment Jolie was sick with fear. Reared on its hind legs, looming doubly gigantic in the dusk, the creature seemed to fill the opening ahead of them. For perhaps a quarter of a minute it stood thus, and Lachlan, urging his horse forward, crowded past Jolie, his rifle ready. Then the bear dropped on all fours, turned deliberately and ambled off, disappearing at once around a bend of the winding path.

Almayne laughed quietly. “By my soul,” he said to Lachlan, “that one was as big as any I ever saw in the Blue Mountains.”

As suddenly as they had entered it they emerged from the labyrinth of the canes. Above them now towered a mixed growth of cypress, pine, and gum,

gigantic trees, bearded and bannered with Spanish moss. Where the cypress and the gums grew the ground was wet or under water, and here and there they came upon small ponds or lagoons, sometimes open, sometimes densely grown up with trees.

It was late afternoon now, and the light was dimming, though brighter than in the canes. In the still water of the lagoons Jolie saw the huge shapeless heads of alligators, while on the banks and on fallen logs sprawled many saurians, some of them twelve or fifteen feet in length. There were snakes, too, some mottled brown, some coppery red, and terrapins innumerable, and large, wide-winged, ghostly birds that flew without a sound. If that flower-strewn, sun-lit forest through which they had ridden for so many miles had seemed to Jolie the Garden of God, this spectral, reptile-haunted swamp was the borderland of Hell.

Later, when they had made camp on a dry grassy knoll in the heart of this fastness, and the night had shut down, the place seemed more than ever the abode of fiends and of lost souls. Lachlan had told her of the wild music of the beasts in the great low-country swamps, but she had not imagined so fearful a chorus of howls and screams. Almayne and Lachlan made a lean-to of bark and pine boughs for her, and, being very tired, she lay down at once, while the men roasted venison over a small fire; and afterward, with Lachlan standing the first watch, she tried in vain to sleep.

She remembered now what Lachlan had told her: that this wilderness which she had found so beautiful had claws and fangs and worse things than these. She thought of Meg Pearson and Jock, and of Mr. O'Sullivan, and of the others with the pack train, unconscious of danger, unaware that suddenly the peaceful woods had swarmed with painted savage foes. She thought of the dangers through which she and her companions must pass before she could reach the place where Gilbert Barradell was held captive. Yes, it was a mad quest; yet even now she was not wholly sorry that she had come because in Charles Town her father awaited her, and the man Falcon, whom she dreaded as she had never dreaded any other man.

Outside near the fire she could see Lachlan sitting motionless, his rifle close beside him, his face lit by the flames. It was a handsome face, she reflected, in spite of its thinness—very handsome, very keen, very strong; but there was something in it of which she was vaguely afraid.

With the voices of the wilderness in her ears and the image of Lachlan's face in her mind, she fell asleep at last.

Jolie awoke to a different world. Already the sun was high above the tree-tops. Instead of the fierce voices of the hunting beasts, the songs of innumerable birds filled the air. In front of her little lean-to the grassy ground sloped gently to the edge of a small

lagoon ringed round on both sides and at the back by young cypresses, bright green with the fresh foliage of spring. The placid waters were of a most vivid and beautiful blue; and presently down to the young cypresses bordering them floated a host of milk-white birds, slender, plumed, and graceful. By scores and hundreds they came eddying down from the higher air, crowding the cypresses at the water's edge, covering them so densely that in places they seemed to be mantled with snow.

She lay motionless, listening to the music of the singing birds, watching the scene before her.

Still the wide-winged, immaculate egrets floated down, like giant snowflakes almost as light as air, until all the cypresses were white with them and hundreds stood in the shallow waters around the margins of the blue lagoon. Twice, as she watched, flocks of wild turkeys flew out of the woods on one side of the lagoon into the woods on the other side; and once she heard the shrill screeching of parakeets and saw a regiment of brilliant green and yellow forms shoot at incredible speed across the open space before her. Above the water a company of fork-tailed kites, as swift and buoyant as swallows, swooped and swerved with marvellous grace in an intricate aerial maze; while along a grassy tongue of land thrusting out from the farther shore a troop of five deer walked slowly down to the water's edge and for some minutes stood there drinking, lifting their heads now and then to gaze curiously across the



lagoon at the little lean-to of boughs and bark where Jolie lay watching them.

She had no sense of fear now. The weariness and weakness of the night before had gone. Her long sleep had renewed her strength. That terror of the wilderness which had come upon her had vanished.

She rose presently and emerged from the lean-to. The three horses grazed near by, but of Lachlan and Almayne she saw nothing. She went and talked to the horses.

"Selu," she said, patting the claybank's forehead. "Good boy, Selu! We taught Almayne something yesterday." From him she passed to Nunda, the moon-faced piebald. "You're a good boy, too, old Nunda," she told him, "but you're getting on in years and I'm glad we outran you yesterday because it taught Almayne not to despise me for being a woman."

Tuti the Snowbird, jealous of her attentions, thrust a chestnut nose over the girl's shoulder, and she smiled.

"Poor little Tuti," she whispered, stroking the mare's neck, "you're a pretty lass, but nobody ever notices you because your master is so handsome."

Struck by a sudden thought, she walked down to the water's edge, startling the white birds in clouds. In a battered mirror of Meg Pearson's she had viewed herself in her buckskin costume and had found the image not unsatisfactory. Now she wished to see herself again as Lachlan McDonald saw her, and for

some minutes she studied her reflection in the water, finding it, however, but an indifferent looking-glass. She turned away with a smile at her foolish whim, and saw Lachlan and Almayne walking towards her from the woods beyond the lean-to.

She went to meet them. Almayne carried a wild turkey dangling from his left hand, and she noticed with surprise that Lachlan carried not only his rifle but a bow also. She clapped her hands over the gobbler, though declaring it a shame to kill so handsome a bird, and appropriated one of its long tail feathers for her hat; then she exclaimed over Lachlan's bow—a rude weapon made out of a hickory sapling, with a length of thin buckskin as a string.

The swamp turkeys were so tame, Lachlan told her, that it was easy to approach them. Almayne and he had made this bow, with sharpened canes for arrows, because even here in the heart of the swamp the sound of a rifle might betray them to some enemy.

They breakfasted on cold venison, on certain roots which Almayne had prepared in the Indian fashion, and on corn-cakes made from meal, of which both Lachlan and Almayne carried a supply. In high spirits she pronounced it as good a breakfast as any she had ever had in London, and Almayne, obviously pleased, promised her a greater variety when dinner was served. He was telling her of the wild vegetables of the woods and of the fine bass that they could kill in the lagoon with Lachlan's cane arrows when suddenly, in the midst of a sentence, he stopped.

He was listening, she knew. She saw the sudden light in his eyes, caught his quick glance at Lachlan, who also was listening, his black eyes bright, his thin lips compressed. She waited, tense, expectant; and in a moment she saw Lachlan nod, and saw Almayne answer with a nod. Lachlan turned towards her.

“That was a logcock calling yonder,” he said with a smile, “a logcock that was not really a logcock. It was Little Mink’s signal. He is coming.”

He made no move, and Almayne, too, sat quiet, munching a corn-cake. They were very sure of this signal, thought Jolie, perhaps too sure. What if they were mistaken? What if some enemy were using Little Mink’s call to deceive them?

She saw an Indian emerge from the woods. At that distance she could not be sure of his identity. Close behind him appeared a horseman, and a half-smothered cry burst from her. The man on horseback was Lance Falcon.

Lachlan and Almayne were on their feet. She heard the hunter’s oath of amazement, saw Lachlan leap for his rifle and halt midway. The Indian walking in front of Falcon had raised his hand above his head, palm outward. She saw now that the Indian was Little Mink; and now behind Falcon she saw another horseman whose great shock of white hair told her at once that he was Mr. O’Sullivan. Behind O’Sullivan walked the other Muskogee, Striking Hawk.

They came on slowly. Almayne’s face was still

blank with amazement; Lachlan was frowning. Jolie stepped swiftly to his side.

“Mr. McDonald,” she said quickly, “there is one thing that I wish you to remember. I fear Captain Falcon even more than I loathe him and I loathe him as I have never loathed any living man.”

She was standing beside Lachlan when the four who had come out of the forest halted in front of them. It was O’Sullivan who spoke the first word.

“Thank God, you are safe,” he said soberly. “They attacked the pack train. Meg and Jock and four more are dead; the others are fled towards Charles Town.”

He paused and glanced at Falcon, sitting erect and self-contained on his big roan, his brown head bare, his white shirt open at the throat, his bold eyes fixed on Jolie Stanwicke’s face.

Mr. O’Sullivan frowned.

“I owe my life to this man,” he said shortly, nodding towards Falcon. “I ask you all to bear that fact in mind.”

## XXVII

**M**R. O'SULLIVAN told them the story: how Falcon and himself had fought; how the Indians had attacked; how Jock Pearson had been killed by an arrow; how Meg had ridden madly into the midst of their foes; how Falcon had pulled him down upon the ground and thus had saved him; how Falcon and he had dashed for the horses and escaped. He told of their meeting with Striking Hawk, who, after sounding his panther signal to give warning of Falcon's approach, had circled through the woods and thus had avoided the Cherokee war party; and finally he told of how Little Mink had found them. Throughout the narrative, Falcon sat silent on his horse, his arrogant eyes seldom straying from Jolie's face; and when the tale was finished, there were tears on Jolie's cheeks, Almayne was cursing softly, and Lachlan's black eyes were smouldering above lips that were tight and stern.

Almayne was the first to speak.

"Jock was my good friend," he said, "and Ugly Meg was worth a dozen ordinary women. But that's past. We can't help them now."

His gray-blue eyes rested a moment on Falcon's face.

"Mr. O'Sullivan," said he briskly, "you tell us

that this man, Falcon, saved your life. Maybe that's true, but he did it to save his own skin. If the Cherokees had seen you standing there, they'd have rushed you, and they'd have got his scalp as well as yours."

Falcon's cool, insolent smile broadened.

"I have already pointed that out to Mr. O'Sullivan," he said quietly. "Mr. O'Sullivan owes me nothing."

"That's settled, then," continued Almayne, with evident satisfaction. "In that case, I shall ask Captain Falcon to let me have his sword, after which he can go for a little walk in the woods with Striking Hawk and Little Mink."

Jolie failed for an instant to catch the meaning of the hunter's words. Suddenly their grim significance came to her, and her breath quickened. Sick with horror, she glanced at Almayne and saw the deadly purpose in his eyes. Hitherto she had not once looked at Falcon. Now her eyes, as though some irresistible fascination compelled them, sought his face.

His smile had faded. Perhaps from his tanned, florid cheeks a little of the blood had drained. The half-contemptuous, half-whimsical insolence was gone from his eyes. Yet while she watched, the smile came back and the dark eyes under their over-hanging brows gleamed with sudden fire.

"I thank you, friend Almayne," he said dryly in his deep voice, "but I am not in the humour for a woodland ramble from which I should never return.

You are five to one here. If you want my sword, come and take it."

Mr. O'Sullivan opened his lips to speak, but a gesture from Lachlan checked him. Lachlan drew Almayne aside, spoke earnestly in his ear. Jolie studied the hunter's frowning face, heard his grumbled remonstrance: "We've got the damned rattlesnake. Why not mash his head? If we don't we'll be sorry." She saw him spread his hands at last in reluctant acquiescence. Lachlan stepped back into the circle, and stood facing Falcon.

"Captain Falcon," he said, "we are six men and one woman in a country alive with enemies. I believe that I can rely on you to do your part in defending that woman from the dangers that surround her. I shall expect you to obey my orders and those of Almayne, and at the first sign of disobedience or treachery we shall shoot you instantly."

The old insolence flared in Falcon's eyes again. He bowed low to Lachlan.

"Mr. Lachlan McDonald," his deep voice boomed, "there was a time not long since when you served me faithfully and well aboard my brig. I engage, upon the honour of a soldier, and for the sake of this sweet lady, to obey you as faithfully now as you obeyed me then."

He swung down from his horse, turned his back towards Lachlan, as though the matter were ended, walked to where Jolie Stanwicke stood and bent low before her.

“Have you no greeting for me, lady?” he asked. “Is it not fitting that the latest recruit in your service should win some slight word of acknowledgment from your lips?”

Jolie stood silent, her eyes averted, her lips twitching. He waited, his head still bent, his mouth still curved in a smile. The silence lengthened. Slowly the blood mounted to his face; his hand resting on his sword-hilt tightened till the long fingers pressed deep into the flesh of his palm. A quiver ran through his frame as though uncontrollable passion shook it. But all at once he straightened and looked her in the eyes, his smile as arrogant as ever, no trace of embarrassment in his manner or his countenance.

“I shall not hold it against you, lady,” he cried with a laugh. “I shall pray for a chance to prove that your newest recruit is worthy of reward.”

They remained for three days in their green meadow in the heart of Great Santee. In front of Jolie’s lean-to, on the evening of the third day, they held a council of war. Almayne was for staying where they were, and then, when the way was safe, returning to Charles Town. Falcon seconded this policy. Lachlan and Mr. Francis O’Sullivan were silent because both had been watching Jolie’s face while Almayne had been speaking. When the hunter had outlined their position as he saw it, and Falcon had supported his proposal, Jolie spoke to Almayne:

“If there were no woman with you,” she asked



quietly, "would you fear to push on through the inner country of the Cherokees to the place where Gilbert Barradell is a prisoner?"

"It would be dangerous, Mistress," the hunter answered. "But I think we could get through."

"Have you complaint to make," she continued, "of the woman you have with you—of her strength, of her courage? Has she been faint in the face of danger? Has she lagged and delayed your flight when it was necessary to flee?"

"By Zooks!" Almayne exclaimed, "she has proved herself brave and strong and I will bear witness that she can ride."

"And if she prefers to face the dangers that lie ahead rather than those that await her in Charles Town, will you go on with her upon this quest—and you, Mr. McDonald, and you, Mr. O'Sullivan?"

The hunter pursed his lips. "You may not understand, Mistress," he said gently, "the fate that would befall you if we were taken by the Indians."

"I do understand it," her eyes looked straight into his, "and I am not afraid."

She rose and stood before them, her cheeks pale, her eyes wide and shining, her silken, golden-red hair a halo of glory in the slanting sunlight—a slim, boyish figure in her embroidered buckskin jacket belted in at the waist and her fringed leggins—a boyish figure, yet the loveliest woman that any of the four men before her had ever seen.

"Oh, I know I am selfish," she cried, "I should

not ask you to go on, to venture your lives for me. But I do ask it. I ask you to help me go to Gilbert Barradell. I ask it of you, James Almayne; of you, Lachlan McDonald; and of you, Mr. O'Sullivan."

There was nothing of tragedy in her tone, nothing that was theatrical; only a quiet dignity, a profound and solemn earnestness. It was this that moved them more than her words. She read their answers in their faces; but it was Falcon who spoke first.

"You do not ask it of me, lady," he said in his deep voice, his glowing eyes fixed upon her, "yet I will go."

Almayne eyed him, frowning.

"You will go," growled the hunter, "because the rest of us are going, and if we turned you loose in these woods, your life would not be worth tuppence."

"Lady," said Falcon calmly, "I have observed that our friend Almayne is somewhat lacking in the polish that marks the intercourse of gentlemen. Later, perhaps, I shall give him a lesson in manners."

## XXVIII

**A**T GRAY dawn they started. Almayne on Nunda the Moon-Face held the lead, with Little Mink striding just behind him. Jolie rode next, then O'Sullivan, then Falcon, with Lachlan and Striking Hawk in the rear. By the same tortuous way which had brought them to the grassy knoll in the heart of the swamp, Almayne led them back to the inner edge of the great canebrake. Into the brake they plunged and for miles rode onward through the canes, following the dim, winding paths, seeing no sign of man but only the wild creatures that made and used those sinuous byways.

Night found them still in the canes; that night and the next night and the next. It was Almayne's plan to follow the canebrake inland as far as possible, because in its shelter they would be safer than in the open park-like forest. This lengthened their journey greatly, for the canebrake game-paths were never straight but wound in and out like serpents, crossing and recrossing one another, dividing, rejoining, and dividing again. The brake extended inland for perhaps two hundred miles, following the winding of the river. In an unbroken evergreen belt, from half a mile to a mile or more in width, it bordered the river swamp from

the tidewater country near the sea to the Santee's sources high among the hills.

Day after day they threaded their shadowy labyrinth. Almayne, moody and preoccupied at first, grew more and more cheerful as mile after mile of their journey passed and still they saw no sign of an enemy. To Jolie this vast cane thicket with its teeming life was scarcely less wonderful than the forest had been; but she grew weary of its dimness, of its hushed, furtive noises, of its endless leagues of smooth straight stems hedging her in on either side, and of the green roof of cane foliage meeting overhead and shutting out the sun. She knew that the most dangerous stage of their journey would come when they left the canebrake amid the foothills; yet she was eager for that time to come.

It came at last. The brake was much narrower, the canes were of smaller girth, and the river had dwindled to a crystal-clear, swift-flowing creek. They turned aside from it at a point where a splendid beech wood came down to the edge of the stream; and for miles they rode through a noble forest where nothing save beeches grew, clothing every hill and valley—for they were now in the rolling lands of the upper country—casting so deep a shade that no undergrowth subsisted under them.

The stately beech forest merged into an even statelier one of oak, hickory, ash, walnut, and many other broad-leafed trees beneath which they saw herds of grazing deer and many flocks of turkeys, while in

the sunnier places the ground was spangled with wild flowers and everywhere the air was vocal with bird songs. Now and again the woods fell away and they skirted small forest-encircled prairies, green with grass and wild pea-vine; and in these prairies they saw not only deer in great numbers but bands of elk, small herds of shaggy buffalo, scattered troops of wild horses and lesser animals of many kinds.

Always, as they rode onward, the hills around them grew higher. From those hilltops, but for the forest that mantled them, the high rampart of the Blue Mountains, the easternmost ridge of the Appalachians, might have been seen looming against the northern sky. They were in the heart of the Cherokee country now—the country of the Erati or Lower Cherokees, who held the foothills, even as their kindred, the Otari or Upper Cherokees, held the mountains themselves.

There was danger everywhere, every moment. Erati and Otari, blood brothers of an ancient and powerful nation, were allies in this war against the Province. Almayne knew the country as well as he knew the palm of his hand, knew every Indian village in it, every hunting trail, every buffalo path. Thanks to this knowledge and to his woodcraft he kept them safe. But again and again the hunter saw signs of their enemies, signs that were plain enough to Lachlan also and to the two Muskogee warriors; and again and again he turned aside from routes that he had planned to follow, abandoning them because he saw

that the danger was too great. Slowly the conviction grew upon him that he was attempting the impossible and that they were likely to pay for their boldness with their lives.

Jolie knew nothing of this. There was no need to tell her. Not until mid-afternoon of their second day among the foothills did she know. Almayne raised his hand then as a signal to halt, beckoned Lachlan to come to him, and for some minutes the two talked earnestly together. Lachlan returned to Jolie presently, nodding to the others at the same time so that they might hear what was to be said.

"Almayne believes," he told them, "that we cannot reach Fort Prince George now. There are enemies on every side, and it would be equally dangerous to return. We must do what we did in Great Santee—find a safe place and wait there for a time."

"And where, lad, shall we find a safe refuge?" Mr. O'Sullivan asked him.

"Almayne knows of one," Lachlan answered, "the peak of Sani'gilagi. He thinks we may gain it, and he thinks it is our best hope."

He turned to Jolie. "Can you ride all night?" he asked.

She smiled at him bravely.

"I think that I was never so strong or so well," she replied. "I think that this wilderness of yours is transmuting me into a man."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Mr. O'Sullivan fervently; and "God forbid!" Lachlan echoed him, then flushed

to the roots of his hair upon realizing that he had spoken the words aloud.

She flashed him a smile that was like a miracle. In his mind all else was blotted out—the invisible enemies around them, the peril in which they stood. To the last of his days he was to remember her as she was at that moment—sitting at ease on Selu's back, her buckskin jacket open at the throat, her broad hat with its jaunty feather pushed back above her red-gold hair. Lachlan turned from her with a pounding in his ears and a mist swimming before his eyes.

## XXIX

**T**HEY will say, down yonder," Almayne remarked thoughtfully, "that the Thunder God is sleeping on his sacred mountain and that he has drawn his white buffalo robe over him so that the sun may not shine upon his face."

He sat, with Jolie Stanwicke and Lachlan McDonald, upon the brow of a great precipice of rock. How high that precipice was Jolie could only guess, for below them a white blanket of mist shut the world from her view. She knew only that they were on the summit of a lofty mountain which Almayne called Sani'gilagi, and that the dangers that had encompassed them were past.

They had ridden, without pause or rest, all of the previous day and all of that night. Before the darkness came upon them the hills had changed to mountains. At sunset, to Almayne's and Lachlan's great joy, a rain had set in, and for hours they had ridden on through a drenching downpour, while thunder rolled and crashed around them and vivid flashes of lightning lit the forest. A cape of some thin leather-like material, which Lachlan had carried under his saddle, kept Jolie dry. Save when the lightning flashed, the blackness was impenetrable; yet Almayne had



led them on and on without a halt, along a winding ascending way through interminable woods.

She was too weary to ask questions, too weary even to wonder why they would be safe on that mountain with the fantastic name which they were seeking as a refuge. She did not know when, after hours of riding, they began the ascent of the mountain itself. By that time she was asleep on her horse's back; and she did not know that Little Mink and Striking Hawk, walking on either side of her, had held her in her saddle as Selu struggled up the steep slope. Nor was she aware of it when, late in the night, after the rain had ceased, they reached the summit.

It was noon of the next day when she awoke, to find herself lying under a shelter of bark and hemlock boughs built against a rock.

All this now seemed strangely remote. She had eaten and had swallowed some strong rum, of which Almayne had a little left, but she was still desperately tired; and for an hour or more she had lain in the sun above the precipice's brow while the men busied themselves in various ways some few yards behind her.

Slowly her strength returned and her mind, drugged with fatigue, awoke from its lethargy. She moved as close to the edge of the precipice as she dared and looked down and out; but she could see below her only clouds and mist. She caught Lachlan's eye and beckoned him, and when he came to her, Almayne came with him, and the two sat beside her near the

edge of the cliff. She learned from them where they were and what had happened since she fell asleep; then, because by now she knew Almayne's moods, she waited for him to tell her more.

He sat silent for a while, puffing at his pipe. Then, as though talking to himself, he muttered:

"Old mountain, I know every inch of you. Lord, Lord, the times I've had in the valley down yonder—the hunts with Corane the Raven and Sinnawa the Hawk's-Head warrior, and old moon-faced Nunda who looks so much like my horse that I named the pony after him."

He turned to Jolie with a short laugh.

"You will wonder, Mistress, why we are here. I will tell you now about Sani'gilagi, the mountain of the Thunder God, and about Aganuntsi, the Great Conjuror of the Overhills."

For some moments he smoked silently. Presently he took the pipe from his mouth and with it made a sweeping gesture, taking in the whole horizon.

"When the mist clears," he said, "you will see below you and all around you the kingdom of the Cherokees. You will see a wilderness of mountains, the fairest wilderness this side of Paradise—range after range and peak after peak, and valleys sweeter than any in England, and all covered over with noble forest, the end of which no Englishman has ever seen. Oh, it is a grand kingdom, none grander upon earth, and it is alive with game. Lachlan, here, loves his sunny land of Tallasee, far to the southward and

westward of these mountains, and that is a sweet land, too, and there is good hunting in it and warriors equal to the Cherokees' best. But if, like Lachlan's father, I should become an Indian king some day, I should ask nothing better than to be king of these Overhills.

"That is what the Cherokees call these mountains, Mistress—the Overhills—though I think the name rightfully belongs only to the great range that the traders sometimes call the Smokies. I know the Cherokees well. I have lived with them and hunted with them and I have fought them, and they are good hunters and good warriors. From end to end of the Overhills James Almayne is known, and he has friends in many villages and enemies, too. I have sat at the right hand of their old chief, Moytoy of Tellico, and of their new chief, Atta-Kulla-Kulla. I have followed the war trail with Oconostota, their greatest war captain, and I have hunted with Corane the Raven and Yonah the Bear and Wayah the Wolf and many others. All these are my friends; yet, because there is now war with the English, any of these would kill me to-day if the chance came. But my closest friend among them is Aganuntsi, the Groundhog's Mother (though he is a man), the Great Conjuror of the Overhills.

"I will tell you about this Aganuntsi, Mistress, the sharpest rascal in the Overhills and my very good friend.

"Once, on a long hunt far over on Ocona Lufta, I saved the life of Aganuntsi's son when a big bear had

the boy down. That was the beginning. Aganuntsi made me his blood-brother then, and since then the bond has tightened. He was a hunter as well as a wizard until he grew too old to hunt, and I hunted with him often and a strong friendship grew between us."

Almayne rose, walked to the edge of the precipice and pointed downward with his pipe.

"Down there," he said, "right under us in a deep valley is a Cherokee town that they call Sequilla. You will see it when the clouds lift. That is where Aganuntsi lives. He is now the Chief Conjurer of all the mountain tribes, and we owe our lives to his rascality."

The hunter laughed and came and sat beside them again.

"I will tell you why," he said, as he refilled his pipe.

"Long ago Aganuntsi made up his mind that he needed a mountain of his own where he could concoct his deviltries in secret. In the Cherokee myths, the stories that the old men had handed down, Sani'gilagi was the home of the Thunder God, the Red Man of the Lightning. Aganuntsi said that Sani'gilagi was the home also of Tsulkalu, the Master of Game, a slant-eyed invisible giant who strides about over the mountains and of whom all the Cherokees are afraid. And he said that Tsulkalu had told him to warn all the Indian hunters not to kill game on Sani'gilagi because the game there was his. Two Cherokee hunters who did not believe him were

killed mysteriously not far from the summit, and after that all the others believed him, so that now no Cherokee dares hunt up here and very few ever come here except Aganuntsi himself. He comes sometimes, with a great panther that he has tamed, to gather roots for his magic medicines and to talk to Tsulkalu, so he says, but it is a rare thing for any of the others to come, because they are afraid to hunt on this mountain and they seldom go where they cannot hunt."

Almayne turned to Jolie with a grin.

"So you see now, Mistress, why we came to Sani'-gilagi when it got too hot for us down yonder. So long as they do not see us from the valley, we are fairly safe on this mountain top."

She nodded, her eyes bright, for his tale had fascinated her strangely.

"And if Aganuntsi himself comes," she asked, "will he betray us?"

"Once, years ago," Almayne answered, "when there was war, I was coming with two pack ponies loaded with fine beaver skins from the country of the Chicasaws. I did not know that there was war with the Cherokees, and they surprised me and took my pelts and killed my horse. I got away with an arrow through my arm, and I managed to throw them off the track and got up here, but the wound mortified and I was very sick. By luck, Aganuntsi found me. He healed my wound, and brought me food, and my scalp is still where I like to wear it."

He stretched his long arms lazily and yawned.

"Come," he said, "the mists are lifting. We can see something now."

A few paces from the brink of the precipice he halted them.

"They have sharp eyes," he explained. "If we stand on the edge against the sky line, they might see us from down yonder."

They stood where they could see everything, yet could not be seen. Almayne waved his hand in a wide gesture.

"The Kingdom of the Cherokees," he said.

Jolie stood silent, her eyes wide with wonder, her bosom heaving. Nothing in her past experience had prepared her for such a spectacle, for the little hills of Hampshire were pygmies beside this mountain. The grandeur of what she saw took her breath; the beauty of it benumbed her mind and paralyzed her tongue; the vastness of it filled her with something that was like terror.

The cloud blanket beneath them had disappeared except a few drifting fragments which melted as she gazed. Spread beneath her now she saw a blue hazy world of hills and valleys and mountains billowing to the horizon, while, directly in front, her gaze dropped down, down, down—down through space that seemed unfathomable to a deep wide valley which the long humped ridge of Sani'gilagi partly encircled like a wall. There was a clearing in this valley, she noticed; but except this one clearing, which resembled a tiny

lake of vivid green, all the valley floor was clothed in forest, while the great mountains looming beyond—mountains that seemed as huge as Sani'gilagi itself—were mantled with forest to their rounded summits, where wisps of white cloud still clung. Beyond these again rose other mountains, range upon range, as far as her eye could see, their dim outlines merging at last with the blue of the sky; and over all these also the forest lay, blue as the sea except where it darkened to purple beneath the shadow of some drifting cloud, unending, illimitable, continuous as the sea itself.

“The Kingdom of the Cherokees,” Almayne repeated. “The Empire of the Overhills. What do you think of it, Mistress?”

She did not answer. A faint sound had come to her, a sound so faint that at first she was not sure it was a sound—a strange, low throbbing. Faint as it was, it caught and held her attention instantly; for there was something in it that was compelling and insistent, something cruel and menacing. She listened keenly, and so low was it that for a moment she believed it to be only the beating of her own heart or the pulsing of blood in her ears; but, glancing at Lachlan, she knew that he also heard it and that Almayne, too, was listening.

“The war drums,” said the hunter slowly. “They are beating the war drums down in Aganuntsi's town.”

He pointed to the green clearing in the valley far

below. Watching it closely, Jolie saw that there were many dark spots in it, which were huts or houses, because from some of them thin columns of smoke curled upward.

“The war drums,” Almayne muttered again, as though talking to himself. “I’ve heard them a hundred times, but I hate the sound of them still.”

Jolie shivered. She stepped quickly back, moving farther from the precipice’s edge. She had a strange feeling that eyes had been watching her from that distant clearing in the valley under them and that the war drums were beating because those eyes had seen her.



### XXX

**O**FTEN, during the days that followed, Jolie sat above the brow of the great precipice at the summit of Sani'gilagi and gazed down at the Cherokee town in the vale of Sequilla far below; and often she heard faintly the throbbing of the war drums there. A feeling of wonder would come to her then, a vague sense of unreality. Around her as far as her eye could see spread the blue and purple panorama of the mountains. Day after day the serene loveliness of it sank into her soul. It was beauty inconceivable; it was peace beyond understanding. Surely it was past belief that this blue and purple paradise swarmed with savage and relentless foes.

Yet she knew that it was so. Morning and midday and evening she heard the war drums throb. On the second day Almayne was gone for hours, not on Nunda the Moon-Face this time, but on foot; and when he returned, he brought word that the forest all around Sani'gilagi was alive with enemies.

From the towns of the Smokies and beyond; from Tellico, from Choti, from Nikwasi and the towns of the Tlanuwa Rock and of War Woman Valley; from Cullowhee and Tanasi and Waginsi and Kanuga and Notteley; from the towns of Ocona Lufta and the

place of the Wounded Bears; from the towns of the high Nantahalas and of Ukwuni and Estatoee; from the towns of the Racing River and of Wolf Creek and of Vengeance Creek; from the ancient town of Toxawa, the Town of the Shedding of Tears; from the towns beyond Butting Buffalo Ridge and the Ridge of the Earless Warrior and the Defile of the Wolves; from the towns of the Chopped Oak and the Pretty Fawn and the Daring Horseman; from Nacoochee and Toccoa and Tallulah and Gusti and Tikwalitsi war parties had come and the forest was dotted with their camps, while their hunters roamed the woods in every direction in search of game. Almayne had never before seen so great a concentration of warriors, so ceaseless a movement of war parties along the mountain trails.

It was the same story day after day. Sometimes Almayne went scouting, sometimes Lachlan, but as a rule they relied for this service upon the two Musko-gee braves, Striking Hawk and Little Mink. There was one day when Lachlan was gone from dawn to sunset. Toward mid-afternoon Mr. O'Sullivan sat himself down beside Jolie and found her strangely preoccupied, her eyes intent upon an opening between two rocks through which passed the trail leading down the mountain side. She grew more restless as the shadows lengthened, and twice she went to Almayne and questioned him concerning Lachlan's absence. Again and again that afternoon she was aware that Falcon was watching her; and when, just

at dusk, she saw Lachlan's buckskin-clad figure framed in the opening between the two rocks, the blood mounted to her face because she knew that Falcon's eyes were fixed upon her.

They had made for Jolie a palace on their mountain top—a hut of boughs and bark built against a rock; and they had floored this palace with mosses and with hemlock branches over which were spread saddle blankets and the clean-scraped skins of deer, skins made sweet and soft by a process known to the two Muskogee braves. On either side of the hut were the rough shelters in which the others slept; and in front of these they cooked their food over a fire so made that almost no smoke rose from it. Fifty yards away was the brink of the precipice; and it was the rule of the camp that no one should show himself by daylight at the edge of the cliff.

There was another rule strictly observed—that no gun should be fired. Yet they never lacked meat. Within a day of their arrival on Sani'gilagi, the two Muskogees had made for themselves and for Lachlan and Almayne locust bows and hickory arrows that were not of the best but that served their purpose; and thanks to Aganuntsi the Conjuror, who had forbidden his tribesmen to hunt on Sani'gilagi, the mountain swarmed with game.

With their arrows and with traps of deer-sinew which Lachlan constructed, they could kill within a few hundred yards of their camp squirrels, rabbits, turkeys, ruffed grouse and an occasional deer. On

these, and on certain roots and vegetables of the woods, in the preparation of which Almayne was marvellously expert, they lived well; while a clear, cold spring bubbling from the mountain side a few hundred yards down the wooded northern slope provided an abundance of water. Near this spring, in a small natural meadow in the woods, the horses grazed.

The days lengthened, and still Almayne and Lachlan were agreed that it would be madness to leave their refuge. Around them buzzed a hornets' nest. In the region about Sani'gilagi the principal strength of the Cherokee nation was assembled. From this part of the mountain country Fort Prince George in the foothills was within easy reach. The Fort had undoubtedly been under siege since the outbreak of the war, Almayne asserted, and the Overhill Cherokees had concentrated here in the southeastern corner of the Blue Mountains to support the warriors of the Lower Towns who were investing the Fort.

There were times when Jolie gew impatient, but she was dimly aware that the edge of her impatience had been dulled. Somehow she did not find this fact a thing to ponder over. Her mood, her environment, the life they led on the mountain did not encourage introspection. It was not only when the war drums throbbed faintly in the valley below that life seemed tinged with unreality. Over her whole existence that tinge of unreality seemed to have spread. Often it deepened until all this that she was living through seemed a dream.

And it was not wholly, or even mainly, an evil dream. There were moments when she was afraid, moments when anxiety gnawed at her, moments when she was obsessed with sudden yearning to resume instantly in the face of all dangers the quest for Gilbert Barradell. But she was aware with a languid surprise that in general she was happy. Her faculty of self-analysis seemed to have vanished and she had neither the will nor the power to examine her mood and seek out causes. She knew only that in after years—if for her there were to be any after years—she would not look back upon those days on Sani'gilagi with horror.

Her contentment was not the contentment of ignorance; she knew all that there was to know. The men kept nothing from her. She knew that perhaps weeks would pass before they could resume their journey towards the place where they believed Barradell to be. She knew that while they might remain for weeks on Sani'gilagi without being discovered by the enemies swarming in the forest below, there was, on the other hand, always the danger of discovery.

Yet, though she was aware of all this, though day after day the distant throbbing of the war drums served as a grim reminder of the peril which surrounded her, her mind refused to dwell upon these things. There was something in her, something profound and elemental, that responded quickly to the spell of the wilderness. She had loved it from the beginning. Though she had learned its deadly ruth-

lessness, she loved it more than ever now; its beauty, its vastness, its wildness, its teeming, marvellous life. Its magic had conquered many men who, once having known it, could not be content anywhere else. Now that magic was at work upon Jolie Stanwicke; and more and more often, when her thoughts went back to the little fields and the quiet hedgerows of England, she wondered how she could find contentment there again.

And there was something even deeper than this magic of the wilderness. These men with whom her lot was cast in this strange adventure—three of them had become a part of herself, her mind, her soul. O'Sullivan, with his quick humour, his infectious smile, his bird's voice and his stout heart, his sprightly tales of the days when he was a fencing master in Paris, his light love songs, and his beautiful and noble stories of the ancients, of Great Olympus and the golden age of Greece and Rome; Almayne, in appearance a rude wilderness hunter, blunt, hard as flint, irritable at times, pitiless towards his enemies, scornful of all softness, yet a man of fine texture under his rough exterior and—now that she had conquered his antagonism—as tender to her as a kinsman; Lachlan McDonald . . .

So it was no pale, drooping flower that bloomed on the rocky summit of Sani'gilagi above the miasma of war which was spread over all the wilderness below. The girl who had come so strangely to live for a time

on that grim mountain with danger all around her was no sick-hearted, trembling, pitiful creature wringing the hearts of her companions with the spectacle of her distress. Jolie was, or seemed to be, the lightest-hearted of them all. Once, in Marshall's tavern in Charles Town, Almayne had told Lachlan that she was proud and perverse and ill tempered. Perhaps he had found her so in those days when his own dislike of her had been very plain. Now, he was her slave.

Over them all she reigned as a queen. They served her because they loved her—each in his own way, they loved her. Between Falcon's dark burning passion for her and Almayne's deep joy in her lay a vast gulf. Perhaps as great a gulf separated the love that Mr. O'Sullivan bore her and the love that had been born in Lachlan McDonald for this Lady Sanguilla, as he still called her in his thoughts.

She was brave, so brave that her courage was a continuing marvel to them all. She was gay; and they wondered what this gayety must cost her who was like a caged bird unable to fly to the mate she loved. Even to Lance Falcon she was courteous, almost kind, and three of them knew that this cost her much, and they praised her in their thoughts for the spirit that enabled her thus to conquer her loathing.

And she was beautiful. She was more beautiful, they thought, during those days on Sani'gilagi, than she had ever been before. Her buckskin suit was stained and faded now, its bright embroideries

obliterated by dust. Her wide hat was spotted and shapeless. Her olive skin had burned almost as brown as the skin of an Indian girl. But these things took nothing from her beauty—indeed the darkening of her skin enhanced her loveliness, enriching the colour of her cheeks, causing her eyes to appear even more brilliant than they had been; and her red-gold hair seemed to them more brilliant, too, as though the bright sunshine of the wilderness had burnished and refined it.

Lachlan McDonald, watching Lance Falcon keenly, saw that the man was drunk with the beauty of this girl; knew that he himself was intoxicated with the same heady wine; knew that he loved Jolie Stanwicke and hated Gilbert Barradell.



## XXXI

**T**HERE was a spot on the ridge of Sani'gilagi, a little beyond the camp, where Jolie loved to sit in the late afternoons. It was shaded by trees of no great size but densely foliaged; and on one side, down the wooded slope to the west, opened a long glade hedged in by the woods, while to the east she could view the deep valley of Sequilla and the great mountains that rose beyond.

There was an hour when there was magic in this spot. It was the hour when the wild creatures of the mountain awakened from their midday rest and moved about again; the hour when the wood thrushes began the prelude to that celestial evening chorus with which each day they heralded the going-down of the sun; the hour when the slanting sun-rays, streaming down into the valley far below and bathing the wooded heights beyond it, seemed to magnify all objects within range of her vision so that she could see them more distinctly than at any other time.

Almayne had found this spot for her. It was so near the camp that he considered it safe for her to sit there alone; and he remembered it well because he had spent long hours there when, in the earlier

Cherokee war, he had remained for weeks wounded and sick on Sani'gilagi. He had pointed out to her a small opening in the forest clothing the valley under them and had told her that if she watched it, she would see sometimes a thin, dark line drawn across it. A buffalo road, the main highway of the herds travelling back and forth across the barrier of the Blue Mountains, crossed that opening, he said, and when she saw that thin, dark line, she would know that buffalo were passing.

She saw the dark line twice. She saw, too, great flocks of wild turkeys come flying in above the valley to their roost on the mountain side some distance farther down the ridge. In the shadowy glade sloping down to her left, aglow with flame azalea and pink kalmia, she often saw deer come silently out of the woods and graze quietly, unaware of her presence, while all around her and on the slopes below her the wood thrushes sang. And from this spot she saw also many other things: the changing light upon the valley and the heights beyond as the sun sank lower; the smaller creatures of the woods, foxes and rabbits and squirrels and striped brown chipmunks, which, as evening approached, came out of the surrounding forest into the open glade on her left hand.

She loved to sit here in this secret place and watch the life around her; yet often her eyes saw nothing of what was before her because her thoughts were elsewhere—in England, perhaps, or in Charles Town, or in the distant Indian town where Gilbert Barradell

was a captive. Strangely, it seemed, her mind would then revert to what Lachlan had told her about the Indian girls—that many of them were beautiful; and always, when her thoughts had taken this channel, they led her quickly to one Indian girl, an Indian girl whom she had never seen—that mysterious daughter of Chief Concha, the Appalache, who held Gilbert Barradell prisoner.

A dozen times she had been on the point of questioning Lachlan further—to get him to tell her exactly what Falcon had said about Concha's daughter during their interview in the *Good Fortune's* cabin. Yet she had never done so; and she knew now that she never would. When she had first questioned Lachlan about the matter, it had led to a quarrel. She was strangely unwilling to mention the subject to him again.

One afternoon, when Jolie sat alone in this retreat on the crest of the ridge just beyond and below the camp, she saw a sight that brought her instantly back to the living present. Out from the trees in front of her, not twenty feet away, walked a great panther, the largest that she had ever seen.

The beast did not pause. Slowly, noiselessly it came on, its pale eyes fixed upon her face, its long tail held high above its back. She could not move, she could not cry out. Utter terror held her rigid, dumb.

Ten paces from her the panther stopped and stood motionless; and suddenly she was aware that behind

the panther in the shadow of the trees stood a man.

For an eternity she waited. Then he stepped into full view and advanced towards her, placing his hand upon the panther's head as he passed the beast.

He was an Indian, very old, very tall, perfectly erect. Over his shoulders he wore a cape of feathers dyed yellow and blue. There were silver bracelets on his bony arms and white shell-like pendants hung from his long, deeply slit ears. His creased and wrinkled face was spotted with tattoo marks and ringed with vermilion paint; while from the middle of his head, where a narrow ridge of short stiff hair rose like a comb or crest, a long slender green snake dangled and writhed, its forked tongue flickering ceaselessly.

She knew that he was Aganuntsi the Conjuror. Her lips framed the word, though the sound was all but inaudible, and she rose to her feet as he advanced towards her. For a moment, when he was almost directly in front of her and within arm's length, he looked directly at her, and she shuddered and drew back before the glare of his eyes. But he did not speak or pause. As soundlessly as the great panther gliding at his heels, he strode past her up the slope towards the camp.

Jolie sat down again upon the rock where she had been sitting. She was shaken; her breath was coming fast. After a little, she rose and walked back to the camp on the summit just above. Near the brow of the precipice Almayne and Aganuntsi the Conjuror were

seated, while near them the tame panther sprawled lazily in the sun.

Lachlan, Falcon and Mr. O'Sullivan stood apart. The two Muskogee warriors were away, scouting or hunting. Seeing her, Lachlan came towards her. He smiled and greeted her lightly, but she saw anxiety in his face. They walked to where O'Sullivan and Falcon stood, and she noted O'Sullivan's gravity.

For some minutes they stood talking, not venturing to ask one another what Aganuntsi's coming meant. Then Jolie laughed softly.

"This is a great man, this Conjurer," she said. "We must ask him to sup with us and we must feed him well if we value our lives. Let us prepare the feast."

She was afraid, oppressed with a sense of impending calamity, but she would not show her fear. While she supervised the roasting of two ruffed grouse and the broiling of slices of venison, she chattered lightly or hummed a tune. Before the food was ready, Almayne and Aganuntsi were done talking. The Conjurer rose and Almayne, too, got to his feet. The Indian raised his right hand, and Almayne returned the salutation. Then Aganuntsi strode off along the way he had come, the panther following close behind him.

Almayne strolled slowly toward the group around the fire. Their anxious eyes, searching his face, found reassurance in his smile.

"By Zooks!" he said as he joined them, "I am as

hungry as a mountain bear. I thought the old man would never finish talking of the times we've had together."

He would tell them nothing more. There was nothing more to tell, he insisted; Aganuntsi had talked only of the old days. But to Jolie there came again a sense of crisis, of disaster close at hand.

At last the meal was over; the pipes were smoked in the gathering dusk. Little Mink and Striking Hawk returned from their hunting and scouting, bringing with them a turkey and two grouse. With the round moon bathing the mountain top in ghostly light, Jolie bade them all good-night and lay down on the couch of boughs in her little hut.

She had scarcely gone when Almayne, remarking that he wished to have a look at the horses, knocked out his pipe and arose. Lachlan caught an almost imperceptible movement of the hunter's head, and when Almayne walked towards the trail leading to the spring, Lachlan followed him. Out of sight and ear-shot of the camp, the hunter halted and turned.

Lachlan saw his face in the moonlight, stared at it wide-eyed, and gripped his arm.

"In God's name, Almayne!" he exclaimed. "What's amiss?"

"The worst," Almayne answered in a harsh whisper. "Barradell is false to her."

## XXXII

**S**ITTING on a rock in the moonlight, his head between his hands, Lachlan listened while Almayne talked.

“I learned it by accident,” the hunter said. “At first Aganuntsi talked of our hunts in the old days. Then, after a while, he told me that he had returned not long ago from a mission to the Appalaches. He went there to arrange with them to join in this war against the Carolina English, and a hundred Appalaches came back with him, commanded by a Spanish officer.

“Aganuntsi said that he had spent many days in Chief Concha’s town. He said that Concha has a new War Captain, an Englishman whom he took prisoner. The Spaniards at St. Augustine learned of this somehow and they ordered Concha to watch the Englishman closely but not to harm him. Aganuntsi said that Concha has a daughter, the most beautiful girl he has ever seen. You know how handsome these Appalache and Siminole women sometimes are, tall and slender and light-skinned and quick-minded and talkative.

“Well, this girl fell in love with the Englishman. At first Aganuntsi could not remember the English-

man's name, but he remembered it later—Gilbert Barradell.”

Almayne paused. Lachlan, his head still supported in his hands, said nothing.

“He married the girl some six weeks ago,” the hunter continued, his voice harsher than ever. “It was a real marriage performed by a Spanish priest. He is mad about her, Aganuntsi says, and she is devoted to him. Concha has made him War Chief, and he and his wife spend part of their time in St. Augustine, where they are made much of by the Spaniards.”

Almayne tugged at his moustache and glared at the top of Lachlan's bowed head.

“For God's sake, don't sit there like a stone!” he exclaimed. “What are we to do now? What are we to tell Jolie?”

Lachlan got to his feet slowly, a little unsteadily. He was dazed, his thoughts were a whirling chaos. Almayne seized his arm in a grip of iron and shook it.

“Pull yourself together, man,” he said fiercely. “We must think this thing out here—now!”

They talked until late into the night. For a time they were like men struggling to set their thoughts in order again after the impact of some stunning physical shock. An inconceivable thing had happened. It had burst upon them without the slightest warning. At first they could not grapple with it.

Like drowning men clutching at straws, they clutched at the possibility of error, at the possibility that Aganuntsi had manufactured the story for some



obscure purpose of his own, But these straws sank under them.

This thing that had happened, Lachlan knew, was a thing that had happened often before. The spell of the wilderness was strong. It made many a man forget the world that he had known, renounce that world forever. The Southern Indians had advanced much farther along the road towards civilization than the ruder savages of the North and West. Their women, especially those of the ruling families or clans, were often beautiful, often highly intelligent, quick of wit and of speech. Many a white man of good birth, already captivated by the lure of the wilderness, had found in some dark-eyed Indian beauty the final and decisive reason for making the New World his home. Often these marriages failed, but sometimes—and Lachlan found double proof of it in his own ancestry—they endured.

No, this incredible thing that had burst upon him like a thunderclap was not incredible. On the contrary, it had happened before and would happen again. But that it should have happened to Jolie Stanwicke, that she should be numbered among those unhappy ones who had been cast aside by wandering lovers to whom the wilderness had called in tones that would not be denied—this was the fact which at first appeared too monstrous to be real.

He knew that he loved Jolie Stanwicke. The love that had been kindled in him had mounted and flamed during those long days on the wilderness trails

and on Sani'gilagi's summit. Yet now that love was submerged in pity; for he saw her stricken, blighted, her gallant spirit crushed, the light gone from her eyes.

Within tight lips that did not move he cursed the man who had done this thing—this Gilbert Barradell, whom he had never seen but had always hated because Jolie Stanwicke loved him.

Suddenly a light broke upon Lachlan and brought confirmation, if confirmation were needed, of the thing that Aganuntsi had told. His mind leaped back to that first night in Lance Falcon's cabin, when he had played the part of Don Ruy Ortiz of St. Augustine. Every incident of that night was etched upon his memory. He could recall the very words of that puzzling, unexpected question which Falcon had asked so eagerly: "And what of the affair of Chief Concha's daughter?"

So Falcon had known even then! He had known of the existence of this Indian girl, had known that there was something between her and Gilbert Barradell.

In a flash a new fact dawned upon Lachlan.

Jolie Stanwicke had distrusted Gilbert Barradell! She had been afraid of this thing that had now happened!

It was as plain now as the noonday sun. Lachlan knew now why Jolie had attached so much importance to Falcon's question about the affair of Concha's daughter. He knew now why Jolie had questioned

him so eagerly about this Indian girl, why she had sought to learn from him whether the girl was beautiful. Yes, she had been afraid of this girl, this daughter of Chief Concha's, from the moment when she had learned of the girl's existence. Loving Barradell, yet she had doubted him, had lacked faith in his constancy.

Lachlan could not tell Almayne where these thoughts carried him. Indeed, he himself did not know. He was aware only of a sudden new sense of freedom, as though a weight had been struck from around his neck.

He could not explain this feeling, did not try to explain it. Instead, he turned to the question of what their course should be. Should they tell Jolie at once or should they wait? It was instinct, perhaps, that determined him upon the latter course; and Almayne, pointing out that weeks might pass before they could leave their refuge on the mountain, could see no reason for haste in imparting to Jolie what they had learned.

This settled, they walked slowly back toward the camp and saw Mr. O'Sullivan sitting on watch, his white head gleaming in the bright moonlight. The same thought came to them both. Almayne uttered a low whistle and beckoned O'Sullivan. He came to them quickly and Lachlan told him of the news that Aganuntsi had brought.

For some moments the little man stood silent before them, his head bowed. Then he lifted his face to

Lachlan, and they saw that tears were in his eyes, and yet he was smiling and there was a great content in his face. It was not his habit to talk in riddles, but this time his words left them puzzled.

“I am glad,” he said slowly in his bird-like voice. “I have been afraid that she would not discover herself in time. That danger is past now.”

When Lachlan stared at him blankly and Almayne swore under his breath, O’Sullivan laughed happily.

“You think I am daft,” he told them. “You will see that I am wiser than you two simpletons put together.”

For Lachlan there could be no sleep that night. Presently, while O’Sullivan and Almayne still stood talking, he wandered alone down the steep, narrow trail which led to the spring and the little meadow where the horses grazed. His thoughts were still awlirl. He did not realize that as he passed the spot where O’Sullivan had been sitting on watch, he picked up the Irishman’s rapier which had been leaning against a rock. Yet, as always when he walked through the woods, he moved with the noiselessness of an Indian hunter, and as always his senses were alert.

Suddenly a faint sound halted him. It might have been one of the horses in the meadow below, but he did not believe that this sound had been made by a horse. More cautiously than ever he moved forward

down the steep trail until the meadow opened before him.

There in the bright moonlight he saw Lance Falcon standing beside the big roan that he had ridden on the flight to the mountain—the roan that had once been Jock Pearson's.

There was no saddle on the roan, but he was bridled, and Falcon was about to vault upon his back. Lachlan stepped out into the open and strode towards the spot.

Falcon saw him instantly, and the hand which had held the bridle-rein leaped to the hilt of his sword. Momentarily a black frown convulsed his face; yet he was smiling as he greeted the younger man.

“Ah, Mr. McDonald,” he said coolly, “you have come to bid me farewell?”

Lachlan had halted ten paces away.

“Where are you going, Captain Falcon?” he asked sternly.

For a moment Falcon seemed to hesitate. Then he nodded, as though he had reached a decision.

“A blunt question,” he said briskly, “and I shall give it a blunt answer. I am grown weary of your mountain, Mr. McDonald, and more than a little weary of the rôle of prisoner. I have been, as you are aware, a confidant of the Governor of St. Augustine and I happen to know something of the Spanish plans to help the Cherokees take Fort Prince George. If those plans were carried out, there are Spanish

Indians and a Spanish officer among the Cherokees of this wilderness, and it is in my mind to go to them now and tell them certain things."

"Traitor!" Lachlan flung at him fiercely. "You would betray us! Your pledged word——"

Falcon spat out a contemptuous oath. He moved a step nearer, and Lachlan, watching him keenly, saw the gleam of his white teeth in the moonlight.

"I have played the honourable fool long enough, Mr. McDonald," he exclaimed harshly. "You may consider my pledged word broken if you choose. Spain and the Cherokees are allies in this war—though the Charles Town English know it not—and I have only to ride down this mountain to find myself among friends. Why I have waited so long I hardly know."

He paused and stroked his chin.

"It was a losing game that I was playing on the mountain," he continued calmly. "I think that already Gilbert Barradell is a shadow and Lachlan McDonald has taken his place. But the game is not yet over. I shall come back to Sani'gilagi within a few hours at most, and I shall bring with me my friends from down yonder, and it may be that the lady, having changed her mind once, will change it a second time, seeing that she will have no choice when she rides into St. Augustine as Lance Falcon's prize."

He spoke quietly, casually, as a man might speak to his neighbour about the weather.

"We have a score to settle, Mr. McDonald, and

the time to settle it has come. Fortunately you have a sword in your hand and the moonlight is well nigh as bright as day. They cannot hear us on the mountain top. On guard, sir! I am going to give myself the pleasure of killing you before I go."

In an instant his rapier was out. In another instant the moonlight glittered on the crossed blades.

### XXXIII

**I**T SEEMED to Lachlan that he had been fighting for an eternity—that for unnumbered hours he had been circling the moonlit meadow under Sani'gilagi's summit, parrying, thrusting, battling for his life, while in front of him Lance Falcon danced and shimmered behind a shifting, glimmering veil of steel—a crouching, hideously smiling figure, yet darkly handsome, unreal, elusive as the moonlight, baleful as some nameless phantom of a dream.

To Lachlan all that had happened and was happening was unreal. It seemed to him that his mind and body dwelt apart; that his hand and eye were fighting this fight without direction from his brain; that the moves that he made were not made consciously but were wholly mechanical, as though his body had become an automaton animated by some force within itself over which he had no control.

Yet he knew that never before had he fought so well. His eyes—and apparently Falcon's also—seemed as much at home in the brilliant moonlight as in the full light of day. He knew that he was fighting with all the art of which he was capable, that he was utilizing with almost perfect skill all that O'Sullivan had taught him; and he was not alarmed



at the discovery, which he had made early in the combat, that Falcon was at least his peer in sword-craft, while enjoying also the advantage of height and reach.

He had no sense of apprehension or of nervousness. His mind was not here in the moonlit meadow where he was battling with Lance Falcon but in the little lean-to on the mountain top where Jolie Stanwicke was sleeping.

He saw her lying on her couch of boughs, smiling a little, her red-gold hair pushed back from her cool forehead. How beautiful her face was, and how lithe and strong her slim body, and how brave she had been amid all the perils of the wilderness! With a quick thrill of pleasure he recalled how she had learned to love the wilderness, despite its hardships and its terrors; and he wondered dully whether she had learned to love it well enough to go with him to his own land of Tallasee and to dwell with him there.

But that, he told himself calmly, could not be. There was Gilbert Barradell who had her heart and had crushed it, though as yet she did not know that Barradell was false. And there was Lance Falcon, this devil with whom he was fighting—Lance Falcon who loved her as a fiend might love an angel and who would come back to Sani'gilagi with his Spaniards and Spanish Indians and carry her with him to St. Augustine.

The thought stung him to fury. Yet it was like the

unreal fury of a dream, and almost at once it passed, leaving him cold. Eternity wore on. Falcon was attacking more vigorously, more boldly. Lachlan knew that they had circled the moonlit meadow many times, Falcon always advancing, himself always retreating. He knew, too, though he was scarcely conscious of the knowledge, that at last eternity was drawing to a close, that the battle neared its end. His mind still dwelt apart; but he was hazily and quite calmly aware of Falcon's more aggressive offence; and he knew mechanically—as though his senses knew it but not his brain—that Falcon planned to finish soon.

The slow, interminable minutes passed. He was retreating more rapidly now. He was moving backward around the meadow, and the rasping, hissing swords were as swift as lightning, as nimble as the flickering tongues of snakes.

Swift as was Lachlan's sword in defence, Falcon's was swifter in attack. Lachlan realized grimly the truth of what O'Sullivan had told him—that this man was an almost perfect master of the rapier and that his enormous strength and his length of arm rendered him doubly formidable. Lachlan could not hold his ground for an instant. Falcon was rushing him, attacking him like a raging tiger, and Lachlan gave way before him—faster, faster, faster.

A slow cunning grew in Lachlan's brain. Now, with the final crisis upon him, his mental lethargy fell from him, his mind sprang awake to the fight, to his peril, to his opportunity.

There was one chance in a thousand; one faint, infinitesimal hope; one tenuous, almost incredible possibility.

He had been retreating so long and so swiftly that Falcon must think him beaten. If, now, he should suddenly attack——

Falcon's point touched Lachlan's shoulder, a moment later pricked his bare forearm. This, then, was the end: he had waited too long.

Lachlan laughed, braced himself for the shock, flung himself in the teeth of that whirlwind assault, lunged, and lunged again.

A moment they stood like battling stallions, thrusting, stabbing, clashing steel against steel. Then Falcon staggered backward, stood swaying, fell face downward in the grass.

Presently Lachlan was aware of a voice behind him speaking his name—the voice of Jolie Stanwicke. He turned his head slowly.

She was standing, clad in her stained and faded buckskins, near where the trail came down into the open. Her eyes were wide and staring and her face in the white moonlight was like that of a ghost. Behind her, where the trail entered the meadow, stood Mr. O'Sullivan.

She came forward slowly, and Lachlan walked toward her, while O'Sullivan ran quickly to the spot where Falcon lay motionless. She spoke no word, but she lifted her face as they met and Lachlan took her

in his arms. He looked down at her and in her eyes he beheld a miracle.

He bent and kissed her lips. He told her then that he loved her, and she answered quietly:

“And I love you, Lachlan McDonald, though I did not know it till now.”

O’Sullivan had come forward as she spoke, and she held out her hand to him and he pressed it between his hands.

“I have known it for a long while, Jolie,” he said softly, “ever since our first days on the mountain. I was only afraid that you would not discover it in time.”

He paused and looked at her gravely.

“Captain Falcon is dead,” he told her very gently. “Will you go back to the camp and tell Almayne what has happened here?”

When she had gone O’Sullivan turned to Lachlan.

“It was God’s will, God’s goodness,” he said reverently. “She came out of her hut and ran to me where I sat on watch beside the ashes of the fire—Almayne had left me not five minutes before. She had dreamed, she said, that you were in peril here in the meadow, and I remembered that you had come this way and had taken my sword. We ran down the path together, but she was swifter and left me a little behind.”

The little man stood silent a moment.

“God’s ways are strange,” he continued. “From the path above I saw what happened. She came out into the meadow a moment before you attacked. I

think that Falcon saw her standing there, in the moonlight, and that for a fatal instant he was confused."

O'Sullivan paused once more.

"You owe your life to her, lad," he said, his hand on Lachlan's shoulder, "but perhaps it will be best if she never knows."

The two Muskogee warriors kept watch over Falcon's body that night lest some wandering wolf-pack should find the place; and next morning, before Jolie had awakened, they laid him in a shallow trench dug with tomahawks and piled stones upon the spot. Almayne leaned on his long rifle, frowning and scornful, while Mr. O'Sullivan spoke a few words of prayer over the grave; but Lachlan, remembering a day when he had stood by Falcon's side on the *Good Fortune's* deck in the midst of blood and death, seemed to hear once more a great voice booming above the gale.

O'Sullivan ended his prayer and stood, a small, plump, white-headed figure in torn black knee-breeches and mud-stained white shirt, gazing down at the mound of stones at his feet.

"He was an evil man," the little Irishman said slowly, "but, by Paul, he was a swordsman!"

With this brief epitaph they left Lance Falcon.

## XXXIV

**T**HAT day passed much as their other days on Sani'gilagi had passed. Yet for two of them it was such a day as had never been seen before. For Jolie Stanwicke and Lachlan McDonald the world that they had known had been blotted out and a new world had begun. From the valley below, as they sat together near the edge of the cliff, the faint insistent throbbing of the war drums floated upward on the evening air; but if they heard the sound and remembered for a brief moment the peril that surrounded them, that peril mattered little.

Only once Jolie spoke of Gilbert Barradell; and it was then that Lachlan made known to her what Almayne had learned from Aganuntsi the Conjurer.

She listened calmly while Lachlan told her of Barradell's marriage to Concha's daughter. Then she kissed him and held his face between her hands and smiled into his eyes.

"I am glad that Gilbert is happy," she said, and sat for some minutes in silence, her head against Lachlan's shoulder.

Presently she laughed aloud. "Do you remember," she asked, "how I quizzed you about this Indian girl, this daughter of Chief Concha, and how I hoped

that she was ugly? You did not guess what was in my mind?"

"I guessed it later," he answered.

"I think," she continued, smiling, "that even then I knew that Gilbert was as false as I have been—that even then I doubted him."

Her eyes softened suddenly.

"Listen!" she whispered. "A sanguilla, but it sings a different song."

"It is a mountain sanguilla," Lachlan told her, "a brighter, more beautiful bird, and one not often seen."

She listened to the bird, her eyes soft and thoughtful.

"Have you forgotten," she asked him, "the name you gave me—the Lady Sanguilla? Almayne told me. I have never heard you call me that, and I should like to hear it now."

He whispered the name in her ear. She nodded and said no more. A few minutes later she was asleep, her head pillowed on his shoulder. He laid her gently on the moss, looked for a long while at her face with the long silken lashes veiling the closed eyes, brushed the red-gold hair back from the smooth forehead. Then he joined Almayne and O'Sullivan.

It was at deep dusk of the second day after this that Aganuntsi the Conjuror came again.

They had finished the evening meal and were sitting around the little fire in front of Jolie's lean-to.

The moon had not yet risen and only a few stars sparkled in the sky

Suddenly, straight in front of her, Jolie saw two points of light. For an instant she believed that they were twin stars low against the horizon; but, as she watched them, they moved, and they were not white or yellow but pale yellow-green. She knew then that they were the eyes of a wild beast moving along the edge of the cliff, directly in front and not fifty yards away; and in the same instant she discerned dimly the outlines of a huge cat-like shape behind the eyes.

She whispered a warning to the others. They needed no warning. Lachlan and O'Sullivan had already seen the beast; Almayne and the two Musko-gee warriors, sitting at the other side of the fire, had turned their heads cautiously and were searching the gloom. Little Mink was reaching for the bow that lay on the rock near him, when Almayne spoke.

"It is the tame panther," he whispered. "Aganuntsi is coming."

The words were scarcely spoken when the darkness took shape and the Conjuror stood before them.

Almayne rose and stood facing him. Neither uttered a sound. Aganuntsi turned and strode away into the night, and without a word Almayne followed him.

The twin stars that were the panther's eyes were motionless now. The beast had lain down near the edge of the precipice and there it waited, its yellow-green orbs glowing in the fitful light. Jolie could hear the low murmur of Aganuntsi's voice, could distin-



guish his form and that of Almayne standing motionless near the entrance of the trail leading down the mountain side.

In the circle about the fire no one spoke; none dared ask aloud what this second visit of the Conjuror could mean.

Jolie shivered. That sense of crisis, of peril, which had been so strong in her upon the occasion of Aganuntsi's first visit, was stronger than ever now. With a strange fascination her eyes remained fixed upon the yellow-green orbs in front of her; and suddenly, as she watched them, they vanished.

Moving her head slightly, she saw Almayne returning. A steely light glittered in his deep-set eyes; his thin, tanned face was like that of a hunting hawk. His eyes rested on Jolie and his lips tightened.

"Aganuntsi came to warn us," he said slowly. "An Appalache scout wandered up the mountain this morning and saw us. They are coming to-night to take us. We must try for Fort Prince George."

There was a silence. Then Lachlan asked quietly:

"What think you, Almayne, of our chance of reaching the Fort?"

"A slim chance," the hunter growled, "one chance in five."

Mr. O'Sullivan leaped to his feet and there was a smile upon his lips.

"We are going to win through for your sakes, Jolie and Lachlan," he told them. "And I think there will be a minister at Fort Prince George."

**E**VERY moment was precious. Yet Jolie found time for one last look at the little camp on the mountain top before they stole down the path to the woods-encircled meadow below the summit where the horses grazed. Within a few minutes they were mounted and away.

They followed no trail. They descended the upper slopes of Sani'gilagi by a steep and rocky way where even the sure-footed Chicasaw ponies were sometimes in danger of falling. The moon shone fitfully. Sometimes the forest around them was bathed in ghostly light, and twice Almayne halted them until drifting clouds obscured the moon once more.

There were many alarms. Again and again Jolie saw dim forms moving amid the trees, but always these proved to be small bands of deer. Once they were close to disaster and were saved only because Little Mink, the taller of the two Muskogee warriors, was swifter of foot than a Cherokee sentinel who saw them and sped away through the moonlit woods.

Jolie saw the beginning of that race but not the end. She knew only that after a time Little Mink reappeared at Almayne's side and nodded in reply to a short, guttural question of the hunter.

It was due to Aganuntsi the Conjuror that they were able to pierce the circle of enemies around Sani'gilagi. Knowing the precise location of every Indian camp, he had advised Almayne as to the best route to take, and the hunter's consummate woodcraft and his intimate knowledge of the ground enabled him to follow these directions in every detail. Yet it was not only a miracle of skill which brought them safely through that first dangerous stage of their journey; it was also a miracle of good fortune.

When the dawn came they had left far behind them the valleys around Sani'gilagi where the camps of their enemies dotted the woods. There was less danger now, for a while, of a chance encounter with some wandering Indian band, but with every moment there was greater need of haste. Long ago their flight from the mountain-top had been discovered. That they were being pursued was certain, and there was no telling how close behind them their pursuers were.

In the gray light of morning Almayne wheeled Nunda, his piebald pony, to the right and headed straight up the slope of a steep oak ridge. A few minutes later they found themselves in a narrow, deep-worn path or road winding along the ridge's wooded summit.

In short, quick-spoken sentences Almayne explained his change of plan, pointed out the necessity of greater speed. This was a buffalo path, he told them, one of the highways trodden out by the herds

in passing back and forth across the mountain barrier. For some miles it would lead them in the general direction of Fort Prince George, and they would follow it for a while because they could ride faster than in the unbroken forest. Without further word he set out at a brisk trot, the two Muskogees running just behind him.

To Jolie the swifter pace brought a sense of exhilaration. Her mind was oddly content. Throughout this journey she had been aware of a strange indifference to danger. Always, as she rode, she saw in her mind's eye the image of Lachlan. His place in the column was behind her; she could not see him without turning her head, and she turned it seldom. But with the eye of her mind she saw him as clearly as though she were gazing into his face, and during that ride she was aware of little else.

She knew now that she had loved him since those first days on Sani'gilagi; that by then Gilbert Baradell had become a phantom which still seemed real but which had no reality. She wondered vaguely that she had not recognized sooner the change that had been taking place in her; and she thought with wonder—wonder that was not vague but sharp and almost awe-inspiring—of the tremendous revelation which had come to her suddenly in that dreadful moment in the moonlit meadow when she saw Lachlan battling with Falcon and believed that he was lost to her forever.

Yes, these things were cause for wonder, and,

dreaming thus, she wondered at them. But in the fact that she who had loved Gilbert Barradell now loved Lachlan McDonald she found nothing strange. All that had gone before seemed unreal, childish, utterly unimportant. Her life had begun when Lachlan McDonald came into it.

Mile after mile the buffalo path wound through the splendid virgin forest of the mountains and the upper foothills; and mile after mile Jolie rode on, seeing little, hearing little of what passed around her—the abounding wild life of the wilderness, the grouse and the turkeys which they startled from time to time, the deer standing at gaze in the forest glades. Suddenly Almayne flung up his hand and jerked his horse to a halt. The others halted also and Jolie, her reverie broken at last, bent forward on Selu's back, watching the hunter curiously.

She knew that he was listening, but she could hear nothing. He sat erect and rigid on his horse, his head cocked a little to the side, his long rifle gripped in his right hand. Then, with a quick motion of his arm urging haste, he wheeled to the right out of the buffalo path, riding diagonally up the steep wooded slope, the others following. Behind a kalmia thicket well above the path he halted them.

“Watch the path,” he whispered. “You'll see something.”

For perhaps a minute they waited. Then from below came a muffled snort and, later, a dull thudding, as of hoofs. Gazing through a gap in the kalmia

foliage, Jolie saw the huge bulk of a buffalo bull in the path below, another and another and another—bulls, cows, and calves plodding onward in single file until two hundred or more had passed.

Almayne watched them eagerly, anxiously. Finally, when the last of them had vanished, he uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

“I feared that when they smelled our traces they would break into the woods,” he said to Lachlan. “Luck’s with us. That herd will wipe out our tracks in the buffalo path.”

For a moment he sat his horse, thinking deeply, tugging at his white moustache, his lean brown hand fingering his rifle. Then, with a gruff word to his piebald pony, he led the way along the mountain side, turning at last not down towards the path, but up the slope through the woods towards the ridge’s summit. Presently he beckoned Lachlan and the latter rode forward and joined him.

“A mile beyond the divide,” he said, “we can strike the old trading road, leading to the Keowee river ford and thence to the Fort. The road is hard and broad and we can make speed. What think you, lad? Shall we keep to the woods or risk a dash in the open?”

Lachlan, pondering the question, saw the hunter’s face grow suddenly tense, saw his lips frame a smothered exclamation, saw the long black rifle leap to his shoulder. Almost instantly came the rifle’s hollow crash, and next moment from the forest ahead of them rang out a long, quavering yell.

Almayne, his eyes like blue embers, flung up his hand in a gesture commanding silence. For a few moments they waited, breathless and rigid; then from far behind and below came a long whoop, tremulous, musical, indescribably ominous.

Almayne swore huskily.

"I winged him," he growled, "but he gave the signal and they heard it. They were closer behind us than I thought. We must ride for it now."

Jolie touched Lachlan's arm.

"What has happened?" she asked.

"Almayne saw a Cherokee scout and wounded him," Lachlan told her quickly. "He must have come through the woods, while the others followed the buffalo path. They heard his signal and they are coming. We must strike for the old trading road and make a dash for the river ford above Fort Prince George."

Already Almayne's pony was crashing through the underbrush as his rider urged him up the slope. Lachlan leaned over and pressed his lips against Jolie's forehead. For an instant she clung to him. Then she bent forward over Selu's neck as he plunged through the thicket in the path that Almayne had broken. As her slim form straightened, Lachlan saw her sweep her hand across her eyes; but when she turned and looked back, she was smiling, and her eyes were bright, and his heart leaped at the spectacle of her beauty and her courage.

## XXXVI

**T**HEY gained the top of the divide and began the descent of the farther slope. They heard no more whoops behind them, but Lachlan knew that their pursuers would have no difficulty in following the trail. Luck had not been with them, after all. The pursuers had been so close behind them on the buffalo path that the passage of the herd, obliterating their tracks, had gained them no respite. Evidently the Indians had pushed on after the herd had passed, throwing out scouts into the woods on either hand; and by an ill chance one of these scouts had seen them.

Their lives depended now upon their speed. One fact was in their favour: Lachlan knew from the whoops that they had heard that these Indians following their trail were Cherokees, not Appalaches, and the Cherokee war parties were generally unmounted. If they could reach the old trading road in time, they could outdistance these pursuers, provided no other enemies barred the way. Lachlan knew also how grave this danger was, knew that they could hardly hope to ride that road unseen and unchallenged. But the risk had to be faced. There was no choice now.



Halfway down the ridge Lachlan spoke briefly to Striking Hawk and Little Mink as they ran for a little space beside his horse. In the woods the two Muskogees easily kept pace with the horses, but in the open road this would be impossible. Yet Lachlan felt little anxiety for his two henchmen. Knowing their woodcraft, he was fairly confident that they could make their way through the forest to the Fort.

The woods thinned, the giant trees standing far apart. Just below lay the bottom of the valley, level almost as the palm of a man's hand—a long, narrow natural meadow of short green grass, starred with innumerable wild flowers; and straight down this valley, with the wooded heights rising on either side, ran the old trading road.

Lachlan's heart gave a leap. He had feared that here they might come upon another war party, for the road was a thoroughfare for the Cherokee bands; but save for two bunches of grazing deer, the valley was empty as far as his eye could see.

They were well out in the open heading for the road when a hoarse shout from Almayne startled them. The hunter was pointing with his rifle. Far away up the valley, where the road swung round a jutting promontory of woods, Lachlan saw a large party of Indians, some mounted, some on foot—evidently a mixed band of Appalaches and Cherokees, two hundred or more in number.

In an instant Lachlan knew that Almayne had not shouted rashly. They had already been seen. As he

gazed, the mounted Appalachians drew apart from the others, racing their ponies along the path, while behind them a cloud of dust whirled upward.

Almayne's voice shrilled like a trumpet: "Ride! Ride!" At full speed they dashed for the road and, reaching it, swung to the left down the valley. Jolie, glancing backward, saw O'Sullivan just behind her on his sorrel Chicasaw pony, and behind him Lachlan on Tuti the Snowbird, while some distance to the rear the two Muskogee warriors were bounding onward on foot.

The road passed through a belt of trees extending outward from the mountain side at a point where the valley narrowed; and Jolie, stealing another glance behind, saw that Little Mink and Striking Hawk were with them no longer. They had turned aside, she supposed, into the belt of timber; but there was no time to think of them now.

Her horse was abreast of Almayne's and she realized that he was shouting to her.

"To the left . . . when you reach the ford!" She could barely distinguish the words above the thunder of hoofs. In a moment she had drawn in front of Almayne and, head over shoulder, she saw O'Sullivan also pass the hunter.

Her hand tightened on the bridle rein. For an instant she believed that Almayne and Lachlan were holding back to fight the pursuers so that she could escape; but soon she saw that they were racing onward at utmost speed, and she knew that the time

to fight had not yet come—that not yet must she turn and die beside her lover.

Suddenly she heard, or thought that she heard, the faint sound of a shot, followed instantly by another. Again she looked back; and behind her she saw the pursuers dashing outward from the belt of trees—a swift-flowing stream of plunging horses and plumed and painted Indians half-hidden in swirls of dust.

Lachlan, too, had heard the shots and was looking back. Even as he watched, he saw an Indian pitch from his pony and plunge headlong to the ground, while another drew slowly to a halt, sat swaying a moment on his horse's back, then fell sideways heavily.

Lachlan laughed exultantly. Little Mink and Striking Hawk, in ambush in that belt of trees, had struck a hard blow at their enemies before beginning their flight through the woods.

But that blow checked the pursuit not an instant. Three riders turned back to help the unmounted Indians in the rear search the belt of timber whence the shots had come. The others, at least fifty in number, dashed on without pause, bending low on their ponies' backs, whooping, yelling, flourishing their rifles, their bows, and their long lances of hickory or cane pointed with bone or flint.

Through the dust swirls behind her Jolie caught glimpses of them now and then. A warrior on a white horse led them. Even at that distance she could see his headdress of pink flamingo feathers streaming in

the wind, could catch flashes of white and brilliant red in the tossing plumes of his followers.

The spectacle fascinated her, its wild and terrible beauty delighted her as no spectacle had ever delighted her before. There was no fear in her. Instead, a frenzy of exultation possessed her, and she gloried in the strength of her lissome body, in the skill of her horsemanship which neither Almayne nor Lachlan could excel. Of the four horses, hers was the swiftest; and she knew that she was getting his best out of him—that no other rider could have handled Selu better in that mad race.

And ever and always during that race she was thinking of Lachlan. Before her eyes his face shone; the pounding hoofs of the horses thundered his name. Womanly fear had gone from her; yet she was a woman still, for as she rode she exulted in the thought that he saw her now superbly, splendidly beautiful, with a kind of beauty that no woman had ever shown him before. Long ago she had lost her hat and her long hair streamed behind her like a flame. Again and again she looked back and saw that his eyes were upon her; and twice, swinging her slim body erect, she flung her hand high above her head and waved him a greeting through the dust.

The road crossed a brook, swung to the left around the steep wooded shoulder of a hill, turned sharply to the right again in a long loop. The surface was rocky and uneven here; of necessity she checked Selu's speed. Presently behind her she heard a burst

of shouts and yells. Out of the woods to the right of the road the pursuers were streaming, so near at hand now that a little cry burst from her.

With a sudden tightening of the throat, Jolie realized what had happened—they had taken a shortcut around the other side of the hill and had reduced the distance by half.

It was a desperate race now—and soon it became not only a race but a battle. Some of the Appalaches were firing as they rode; three times the crack of rifles broke through the thunder of hoofs. It came over Jolie all at once that the end was near. She had loved horses, had talked with Lachlan often about them; and she remembered his telling her that the Spanish ponies of the Appalaches and their kindred, the Siminoles, were the swiftest in America.

Her hand tightened on Selu's rein, checking the claybank's stride. They would be overtaken soon, and she must be at Lachlan's side when that grim moment came.

Behind her she heard O'Sullivan shouting and, glancing back, she saw Lachlan close behind him and, close behind Lachlan, Almayne. Lachlan was waving to her furiously, urging her on. He drew his body erect and pointed ahead with his rifle; and swinging her gaze to the front again, she saw at the foot of a long, gentle, grassy slope the waters of a river glittering in the sun.

Her heels dug into Selu's flanks. Down the green slope she raced, the others crowding her close. Yet

hope was dead in her, for she saw their fate clearly now.

They had reached the ford too late. They would be shot from the bank as their horses struggled in the waters of the river.

She was almost at the water's edge and she bore to the left, remembering the words that Almayne had shouted to her. A strong arm gripped her waist, dragged her from Selu's back, swung her to the right, and flung her down. . . .

She lay bruised and half-dazed behind a great rock close to the water, and beside her Almayne and Lachlan were crouching, their rifles levelled, while beyond them O'Sullivan stood, lips tight, eyes blazing, his naked sword clenched in his hand. Down the long slope the Appalaches were charging, a torrent of yelling braves and plunging horses, rifles, tomahawks and lances waving, feathers streaming in the wind.

Almayne's rifle cracked; a moment later, Lachlan's. An Indian doubled over backward, sprawled for an instant on his horse's crupper, fell and rolled over and over in the grass. Simultaneously a piebald pony crumpled in full stride, sending his rider flying, and another pony, smashing into the fallen horse, fell also, as his rider leaped clear.

Still the others came on—an avalanche of plumed and painted warriors, riding high on their horses' backs, swinging their weapons madly, yelling like fiends from hell.

Nothing could stop them, Jolie knew. This was the end.

A coldness came upon her like the coldness of death, and with it an utter indifference to fate. It was as though she were a mere looker-on at some tremendous pageant; and the pageant thrilled her, filled her with a fierce, frenzied joy in its barbaric beauty.

For an instant this mad joy possessed her; then followed fear—fear that seemed to grip her throat with physical hands and stop her breath. They were so near now that for a frightful moment she saw their faces—the faces of demons, of devils, streaked and daubed with black, red, and yellow, the eyes ringed with glaring circles of white paint.

She tried to struggle to her feet, but her hand slipped on a loose fragment of shale, and she fell sideways so that her eyes were turned toward the river. Beyond the stream she saw a man leap upon a rock—a white man in the buff and blue of a Provincial Ranger. He waved his hat, and from the dense bushes fringing the river bank on either side of him burst little puffs and jets of flame and smoke. The bushes parted and men leaped out, ran along the bank, dashed into the water and began wading across—white men all of them, most of them in buff and blue, some in buckskins, all armed with rifles.

The trees beyond the river swayed and danced before her, swirled madly, then vanished in an all-engulfing blackness. When she opened her eyes,

Lachlan had her in his arms, strange men with rifles in their hands were moving and talking all around her, and beside her Almayne was standing, his rifle levelled, its long black barrel resting on the rock in front of him.

She could not take her eyes from his face pressed against the rifle stock. It was the face of some fierce, fearless bird of prey—the face of a hunting hawk striking his victim. Moment after moment she waited. Would he never fire? At last she tore her eyes away.

Beyond the rock she saw men lying—brown, half-naked men, their limbs and their upturned faces fantastically streaked and ringed with paint, feathers of many colours in their heads—Indians, Appalaches, some eight or ten of them, sprawled in grotesque attitudes on the ground. Far up the slope, apparently well beyond rifle range, the main body of Appalaches were sitting their ponies, gesticulating, milling excitedly to and fro. A little apart from them, erect on his white horse, she saw the tall chief with the pink flamingo headdress. He sat facing the others, his back turned to the river. Evidently he was haranguing his followers, urging them to the attack, and as he spoke he flourished his long lance, waving it above his head.

Suddenly he wheeled his horse, flung his lance high in triumph and caught it as it fell. A moment he waited motionless, pointing down the slope, his bright plumes shining in the sunlight—horse and rider poised for the charge.

Beside Jolie, Almayne's rifle cracked. The chief



with the pink headdress sagged slowly forward on his horse's neck. The others, crowding round him, gripped his arms and held him on his horse as the whole body of them rode hurriedly up the slope and disappeared over the brow of the hill.

A short, bearded man in buff and blue, standing near Jolie, cursed delightedly, while others leaped upon the rock and cheered. Almayne turned to Lachlan with a grin.

"A far shot," he said coolly, "and a damned lucky shot. I got him just in time. Another half-second . . ."

Lachlan was scarcely conscious of the words. He was holding Jolie in his arms, smoothing the glistening hair above her temples.

In the book that Mr. Francis O'Sullivan wrote in his later years about the warfare of the Indians, he gives us a final glimpse of these two lovers.

It was God's Providence [he says] that as we reached the River a scouting Party from Fort Prince George were resting just across the Stream. They saw us coming and their sudden Volley from Ambush saved us, for nine Enemies fell and the rest broke and ran, believing they were in a Trap. While they were preparing a second Charge, which might well have overwhelmed us, Almayne with a marvellous long Shot killed their Leader, and they drew off out of Sight, so that we all got safely across and rode, with our Rescuers walking beside us, towards the Fort, which was some little distance down the River.

Now as I rode beside Almayne, with Lachlan and Jolie riding just ahead, there was a Shadow on my Heart; for I said to myself: Lachlan McDonald is of the Wilderness and must dwell there: he must return to his People in the Land of Tallasee or be false to his Trust. But Jolie is of England. She has known the Lights of London. Will they not beckon her to come back?

So I mused, like a pessimistickal old Fool, because by now I should have known this Woman.

When we were come out upon a wooded Eminence whence we could look down upon Fort Prince George, we reined in to enjoy the noble Prospect; and Lachlan and Jolie sat their Horses close beside me, so that I heard what passed between them.

“Where lies Tallasee?” she asked.

He pointed to the Southwest.

“A far Journey,” she said thoughtfully. “Far from here and very far from London and the Hills of Hampshire.”

She saw that his Eyes were troubled and she smiled at him.

“We shall live there,” she said, “and I shall be the Wife of Lachlan McDonald, Prince of the Muskogee Nation and Chief of the Family of the Wind. I shall be very happy in Tallasee and I shall not pine for England.”

He gazed at her strangely, and his black Eyes were marvellously bright.

“Sometimes,” he told her, “we shall visit Charles

**Town, for my People and the English live at Peace. And perhaps some Day we shall see London and the Hampshire Hills."**

**She seemed not to hear him.**

**"I wonder," she said softly, as though she were communing with her own Thoughts, "whether there will be a Minister in Fort Prince George."**

**THE END**

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