CHAPTER III

IN the next instant from beyond a curve in the river a boat shot into the current, — a large row-boat, manned by twelve red-coated soldiers, bending to the oars, whose steady strokes sent the craft down the stream with the speed, it seemed, of a meteor.

They were alongside and a non-commissioned officer was in diplomatic converse with Willinawaugh before Hamish had regained possession of his faculties. Very diplomatic was the conference, for the corporal had his pacific orders and Willinawaugh was burdened with the grave anxiety to make the facts conform at once to the probabilities, yet sustain the impeccability of his own conduct. A little network of wrinkles, almost like a visible mesh, gathered at the corners of his eyes and gave token of his grave cogitation.

The corporal, a dark-haired, blue-eyed, florid young Irishman, looking very stanch and direct and steady, but not without a twinkle of humor which betokened some histrionic capacity to support the situation, speaking partly in English and partly,

glibly enough, in very tolerable Cherokee, although incongruously embellished with an Irish brogue, detailed that Captain Stuart had been apprised that there was a band of Indians on the river who had some white people with them, and he wished to know if these white people were French, in which case, according to the treaty made with the Cherokees, they must be arrested and delivered up to the commandant of the fort, or if English, he wished to be assured that they were at liberty to go where they pleased, and were under no restraint.

As the officer concluded, having bowed to Odalie with much politeness, considering he was not yet informed as to whether she were of a party of French emissaries, forever sowing dissension amongst the Cherokee allies of the English, he drew himself up very erect, with a complacent mien. He was conscious of being a fine-looking fellow, and he had not seen so handsome a young woman of her evident position in life for a month of Sundays. Nevertheless he kept one eye on Willinawaugh, who was also eminently worthy of his respectful attention.

"Ingliss — all Ingliss," said the chief, unexpectedly.

The Indians in the pettiaugre, listening attentively, gave no sign of surprise upon this statement, so at variance with the warrior's previous representations. His ruse to shield the travelers now

by declaring them English shielded himself as well, for being a chief and head-man he could hardly find a plausible subterfuge to cloak his playing the *rôle* of guide, philosopher, and friend to people of a nation so obnoxious to his English allies, and establishing them in the very heart of the Cherokee nation, contrary to its many solemn obligations and treaties.

After a moment's further reflection, Willinawaugh said again with emphasis, "Ingliss, Ingliss." Perhaps he did not desire to avail himself of the added fluency of explanation which the Cherokee language would have afforded him, and which Corporal O'Flynn evidently understood. "Go Choté — Old Town. Buy fur — man — packhorse," he added, pointing across the woods in the direction in which Alexander MacLeod was presumably still wearily tramping.

The corporal for the moment forgot how good-looking he was. He concentrated his whole attention on Willinawaugh's disingenuous countenance, and then turned and cast a long, searching look upon Odalie. The eyes that met his own were swimming in tears, and with an expression of pleading insistence that fairly wrung his heart, although he hardly understood it. If she were English, why then she was free as the air. If French — well, bedad, thin, Corporal O'Flynn

wished himself at the bottom of the Tennessee River, for a French lady in grief and under arrest had no right to be so good-looking at all, at all. Here was something wrong, he could but perceive, and yet because of Willinawaugh's diplomacy he could not fix upon it.

"What's your name, my lad?" he said abruptly to Hamish.

Hamish had his eyes on the water. His fortitude, too, had given way in the sudden relaxation of the strain of suspense. He could not, would not, lift his face and let that boat's crew of stalwart soldiers resting on their oars, the two ranks gazing at him, see the tears in his eyes.

"Hamish MacLeod," he made shift to say, and could say no more.

"A good English name, bedad, for a Scotch one, and an English accent," Corporal O'Flynn mentally commented, as he looked curiously at the boy, standing with downcast face, mechanically handling the paddle.

"Now by the powers," said the young soldier to himself with sudden resolution, "Captain Stuart may undertake the unraveling o' this tangle himself."

"English!" he exclaimed aloud. Then with much courtesy of manner, "Captain Stuart desires his compliments, and begs the English party to do

him the honor to lie at Fort Loudon to-night and pursue their journey at their convanience." He glanced up at the sky. "It grows late and there are catamounts out, an' other bletherin' bastes, an' their howlin' might frighten the leddy."

Odalie, remembering the real dangers that had beset her and catching his serious, unconscious glance as he animadverted on the possibly terrifying vocalizations, burst into momentary laughter, and then into a torrent of tears.

At which the corporal, the boat's crew, and the Indian braves gazed at her in blank astonishment. Hysterics were a new importation on the frontier. She controlled with an effort her tendency to laugh, but still wept with the profusion of exhaustion and nervous tension.

Willinawaugh's eyes were fixed on her with deep displeasure. "Ugh!" he grunted from time to time. "Ugh!"

"Oh, there's bloody murder here, if one could but chance upon the carpse," said the corporal to himself, looking bewildered from her to the boy.

And now was demonstrated the fact that although the corporal had but the slightest bit of a brogue in the world, there was a twist in his tongue which showed that he had at some time in his career made a practice of kissing the "Blarney Stone" and was as Irish as County Clare.

"Of course Captain Stuart couldn't have known that his valued friend, the great chief, Willinawaugh, was to be passing with the English party, but, sure, he would take it mighty ill if the chief did not stop over, too, and lie at the fort to-night, — an' he so seldom up from Toquoe! Captain Demeré, too, will expect the great chief. My word on't, he will."

Now Willinawaugh, an epitome of craft, had no idea of adventuring with his supposed French friends, whom he had endeavored to pass off as English, into the British stronghold, for he doubted their capacity to sustain their character of compatriots; he had no means of judging of their knowledge of the English language and how soon their ignorance might betray them. Since the ruse he had adopted had evidently not sufficed to evade the enforced stoppage at Fort Loudon, he had relinquished the intention to take them on past Choté to some other of the Overhill towns, and let them establish themselves as French traders. He feared that were they once inside the walls of Fort Loudon this design against the agreement with his allies would become transparent. To be sure, it must be soon elucidated, but Willinawaugh was determined to be far away by that time, and, moreover, he could send a "talk" (letter) to Captain Stuart, whose good opinion he greatly coveted, to say that the French trader had

deceived him and made him believe that the party was English. At the same time he was too wary to venture into his valued friend's power with this fresh grievance and with stormy times for the two peoples evidently in prospect.

But he was flattered, infinitely flattered, as indeed who would not have been, by Corporal O'Flynn's tone and expression of ingenuous eyes and respectful word of mouth. Willinawaugh was glad to have these Choté Cherokees see how highly he was esteemed — he was indeed a great warrior and a "Big Injun" of exclusive privilege. The invitation in no wise was to be extended to the others to pass the night at Fort Loudon — not even to Savanukah, a chief himself, who spoke French!

Corporal O'Flynn was now going over in his mind how Willinawaugh might best be insulated, so to speak, that he might not have means to fire the barracks, should that enterprise suggest itself to his fertile brain, or find a way to open the gates, or otherwise afford ingress to confederates without; how to lock him in, and yet not seem to treat him as a prisoner; to leave him at liberty, and yet free to do nothing but that which his hosts should please. All such complicated and contradictory details did Corporal O'Flynn deem himself capable of reconciling — but one such subject was enough. Unfortunately for the triumphant elucidation of these puzzling

problems, Willinawaugh, with dignity and a certain gruffness, yet now and again a flicker of covert smile as if to himself, declined to partake of Captain Stuart's hospitality. He had a mission to the headmen of Choté which would not brook delay. Yet he had a message to leave for the English officer. He desired to tell Captain Stuart that he often thought of him! Whenever he heard tales of famous warriors, of British generals, he thought of *him!* He considered these fighting men brave and noble, when he learned of their splendid deeds in battle; and then again, they were as naught in his mind, — for he had once more thought of the great Captain Stuart!

The corporal, listening attentively to pick out the meaning of Cherokee and English, made a low bow in behalf of Captain Stuart, with a flourishing wave of his hat.

"I'll bear yer message, sir, and a proud man Captain Stuart ought to be the day! An' those jontlemen," — he glanced at the pettiaugre full of Indians, — "be so good as to ask them to lead the way."

Then he added in an undertone to his own men, "I am glad on't. I don't want the responsibility of takin' care of the baste. I might be accused of kidnapin' the craythure if anythin' was to happen to 'm, — though as to kids, he's more like the old original Billy-goat o' the whole worruld!"

Corporal O'Flynn cast the eye of a disciplinarian about him. It was one of the rules of the tyranny he practiced, thus remote from civilization, that however jocose he might be not a trace of responsive merriment must decorate the faces of the men. They were all now, as was meet, grave and wooden. At the orders in his clear, ringing voice — "Let fall!" and the oars struck the water with emphasis, "Give way!" — Odalie's tears must needs flow anew. She gazed at the dozen fresh, florid young faces, as the boat swung round and they came once more near the canoe, as if they were a vision of saints vouchsafed to some poor groping, distraught spirit, — when they were far indeed from being saints, though good enough in their way, too! They all looked with unconscious sympathy at her as she sat and wept and looked at them, and Corporal O'Flynn, moved by the tears, exclaimed below his breath, "But, be jabbers, afther all, what's the good of 'em now — better have been cryin' yesterday, or mebbe the day before. Back oars! Now — now! Give way!"

He was the last in the little fleet, and Hamish paddled briskly now to keep ahead, as he was evidently expected to do, for Corporal O'Flynn intended that his own boat should bring up the rear. As they fared thus along, Odalie noted the inflowing of that tributary, the Tellico River — how solitary,

how remote, how possible its loneliness had rendered the scheme of Willinawaugh. Some distance beyond appeared a settler's cabin in an oasis of cultivated land in the midst of the dense canebrake; then others, now dull and dusky in the blue twilight, with the afterglow of the sunset redly aflare above in the amber sky and below in the gray and glimmering water; now with a lucent yellow flicker from the wide-open door gemming the night with the scintillations of the hearthstone, set like a jewel in the center of the wilderness; now sending forth a babbling of childish voices where the roof-tree had been planted close by the river-side and the passing of the boats had drawn all the household to the brink. How many they seemed — these cabins of the adventurous pioneers! How many happy homes — alas, that there should ever be cause to cry it were better for them had they never been!

Odalie began to realize that she owed her liberty and perhaps her life to the first of these settlers who had espied the craft upon the river; as she marked the many windings and tortuous curves of the stream she understood that he must have galloped along some straight, direct route to the fort to acquaint the officers with the suspicious aspect of the Indian party and their white captives. As to the tremendous speed the commandant's boat had

made to their rescue, — she blessed anew those reckless young saints who had plied the oars with such fervent effort, which, however, could hardly have effected such speed had it not been too for the swift current running in their favor.

Suddenly the fort came into view — stanch, grim, massive, with the great red-clay exterior slopes and the sharp points of the high palisades on the rampart distinct in the blue twilight. It was very different from the stockaded stations of the early settlers with which she had been familiar. This fort had been erected by the British government, and was a work of very considerable strength and admirably calculated for defensive purposes, not only against the subtle designs of the Indians but against possible artillery attacks of the French. There were heavy bastions at the angles and within each a substantial block-house, the upper story built with projections beyond the lower, that would not only aid the advantage which the bastions gave of a flanking fire upon an assailant, but enable a watch to be maintained at all times and from all quarters upon the base of the wooden stockade on the rampart lest an enemy passing the glacis should seek to fire the palisades. But this was in itself well-nigh impracticable. Strong fraises, defending both scarp and counterscarp, prevented approach. The whole was guarded by twelve cannon, grimly pointed from

embrasures, and very reassuring their black muzzles looked to one who hoped to ply the arts of peace beneath the protection of their threat of war. Even the great gates were defended, being so thickly studded with iron spikes that not an inch of the wood was left uncovered. They were broadly aflare now, and a trifle in advance of the sentry at the entrance two officers were standing, brilliant with their red coats and cocked hats. They were gazing with a certain curiosity at the boats on the river, for Corporal O'Flynn, having pressed forward and landed first, had left his men resting on their oars and taken his way into the presence of his superior officers to make his report. He had paused for half a dozen words with Hamish MacLeod as the boat passed the canoe, and when Odalie and the boy, with a couple of soldiers at either side maintaining the aspect of a guard, came up the gentle ascent at a slower pace, Captain Stuart was already fully apprised of their long and perilous flight from Virginia. He stood awaiting their approach, — a tall man of about twenty-eight years of age, bluff and smiling, with dense light-brown hair braided in a broad, heavy queue and tied with a black ribbon. He had a fair complexion, considerably sun-burned, strong white teeth with a wide arch of the jaw, and he regarded her with keen steel-blue eyes, steady and unfathomable, yet withal pleasant. He took off his hat and

cordially held out his hand. Odalie could do naught but clasp it in both her cold hands and shed tears over it, mute and trembling.

With that ready tact which always distinguished him, Captain Stuart broke the tension of the situation.

"Do you wish to enlist, Mrs. MacLeod?" he said, his smile showing a glimpse of his white teeth. "His majesty, the king, has need of stout-hearted soldiers. And I will take my oath I never saw a braver one!"

And Odalie broke into laughter to blend with her tears, because she divined that it was with the intention of passing on a difficulty that he not ungracefully transferred her hands to the officer standing near with the words, "I have the pleasure of presenting Captain Demeré." However capable Captain Stuart might be of dealing with savages, he evidently shrank from the ordeal of being wept over and thanked by a woman.

He has been described by a contemporary historian as "an officer of great address and sagacity," and although he may have demonstrated these qualities on more conspicuous occasions, they were never more definite than in thus securing his escape from feminine tearfulness.

Captain Demeré was of a graver aspect. He heard without impatience her wild insistence that

the whole available force of the fort should turn out and scour the wilderness for her husband — he even argued the matter. It would be impossible to find Mr. MacLeod at night and the effort might cost him his life. "So marked a demonstration of a military nature would alarm the Indians and precipitate an outbreak which we have some reason to expect. If he does not appear by daylight, the hunters of the fort who always go out shall take that direction and scout the woods. Rest assured everything shall be done which is possible."

She felt that she must needs be content with this, and as it had been through the intervention of the officers that she and Hamish and Fifine were set free, it did not lie in her mouth to doubt their wisdom in such matters, or their capacity to save her husband. Looking back to the river, as upon a phase of her life already terminated, she saw the canoe in which she had spent this troublous day already beginning to push out upon the broad current. Willinawaugh, with an Indian from the other crew to paddle the craft, had eluded Captain Stuart, who had reached the water's edge too late for a word with him, and who stood upon the bank, an effective martial figure, and blandly waved his hand in farewell, with a jovial outcry, "*Canawlla! Canawlla!*" *

* Friendship! Friendship!