

There was something in this Cherokee which Stuart saw both then and afterward, and which also attracted the attention of others, that indicated not only an acute and subtle intelligence and a natural benignity, but a wide and varied scope of emotion, truly remarkable in a savage without education, of course, and without even the opportunity of observing those of a higher culture and exercising sentiments esteemed of value and grace in a civilized appraisal. Yet he was experiencing as poignant a humiliation to be convicted of an ungenerous attitude of mind and upbraided with a protest belied as if he had been a Knight of the Round Table, bred to noble thoughts as well as to chivalrous deeds of arms, and had never taken the scalp of a child or treacherously slain a sleeping enemy.

Stuart could feel the Cherokee's heart beat fast under his hand. Atta-Kulla-Kulla grasped it suddenly in his own, gripping it hard for a moment, while with his other hand he waved a command for his men to retire, which they did, slowly, with lowering, surprised eyes and clouded brows.

"Go back!" he said to Stuart. "Hold the gate fast. You make your feast. Keep it. I believe your words. And because—" there was a slight convulsion of his features—"of the wicked ways of the wicked Earl Loudon I have forgot to-night

my words I said to-day, I say them again — and I do not always forget!"

He turned suddenly and went down toward the river, the sad, yellow moon sending his brown, elongated shadow with its quivering tuft of feathers far along the stretches of white snow. Captain Stuart paused for a moment, leaning heavily against the gate; then as he slipped within it and into the shadow of the wall, he was full glad to hear the dancing feet, all unconscious of the danger that had been so near, and the childish treble scream of the unscalped children.

"A little more, and there would have been another massacre of the innocents," he said, walking slowly across the parade; he had hardly the strength for a speedier gait. He rescinded the order concerning the hour at which "tattoo" and "lights out" should sound. "For," he thought, noticing the cheerful groups in the soldiers' quarters, "I could get them under arms much more quickly if awake than by drumming them up out of their beds in barracks."

He carried no sign of the agitation and the significance of the interview just past when he returned to the prismatic tinted swirl of the dancing figures in the flaring light of the great fire, made more brilliant by the glow of the holly boughs and the flutter of banners and the flash of steel from the

decorated walls about them. He, too, trod a gay measure with the fair Belinda Rush, and never looked more at ease and care-free and jovially imperious than in the character of gallant host. Even in the gray dawn as he stood at the sally-port of the fort and there took leave of the guests, as group by group departed, he was as debonair and smiling throughout the handshaking as though the revels were yet to begin.

CHAPTER VI

BREAKFAST, the rigorous cleaning of the quarters, guard mounting, and inspection, followed in their usual sequence, but the morning drills were omitted to give the opportunity to recruit from the vigils of the previous night, protracted, as the soldiers began to suspect, that they might be in readiness to respond to an onslaught of the savages. For Captain Stuart made no effort to restrain the story of the scene at the gate, since the sentries were already cognizant of it; he always saw fit to maintain before the troops an attitude of extreme frankness, as if the officers suppressed no intelligence, whatever its character, even with the intention of conducing to the public good.

In the great hall in the block-house of the north-western bastion, when the officers were congregated about the fire, in the rude arm-chairs, and their pipes lighted, he divulged without reserve the news which the express had brought. In an instant all the garnered sweetness of the retrospect of the little holiday they had made for themselves and their co-exiles