If he had mended his holt a little he could have took my whole head, and where would I have been now!"

"By the grace of God you would be a saint in Paradise," said Odalie, presenting the orthodox view.

"Yes," he admitted, "I've always feared there might be more in that notion of the Injuns about the scalpless being shut out of heaven than we know about — revelation, mebbe."

"No, no!" and horrified at this interpretation she made her meaning clear.

After that she undertook the *rôle* of missionary in some sort, and in quiet unobtrusive ways suggested bits of orthodox doctrine of much solace to his ruminating spirit, and sometimes on dreary, ice-bound days he and she and Fifine sat on the crudely fashioned benches before the fire and sang psalms and hymns together till the station rang with the solemn choiring.

"Dill" came in now, bringing his own knife for breakfast, and a very cheery face under his coonskin cap and red handkerchief, and when the "short eating" was disposed of all three men took their axes to chop up a tree for fuel, close outside the stockade, for the great chimney-places had capacious maws, and the weather was fast hardening to a freeze.

Presently Odalie heard the quick strokes of their

axes, alternating with sharp clangs, the blows ringing out briskly on the icy air. The house was very still. Fifine had fallen asleep on the rug before the fire, having peevishly declined the folly of being disrobed and put to bed in the daytime, to recuperate from the exhaustion attendant upon her first ball. As she could not stay awake without whimpering, Odalie saw with satisfaction her little distorted countenance, round head, and chubby body collapse on the opposite side of the fireplace. Odalie herself sat down to rest for one moment on the befrilled block of wood which she complimented by calling a *tabouret*. Once she roused herself, smoothed out the expanse of her white apron over her blue homespun dress, then careful to permit the attitude to foster no crumple in her stiff, sheer, white mob-cap on the lustrous folds of dark hair, she leaned her head against the rude chimney.

How long she sat there she did not know. While sleeping she saw the faces of Indians, and when she gradually woke she thought she still slept. For there beside the fire were the Indian faces of her dream! She was stifled and dumbly sought to cry out, for this was surely some terror of the nightmare. But no! without was the light of the wan wintry day, showing in a vague blear at the half-open door, and within, the dull glow of the fire, sunken now to a vermilion mass of embers.

On the opposite side of the hearth lay Fifine on the rug, sleeping still, with the sleeping cat in her arms — and between were Indian faces, the Indian faces of her dream!

Odalie breathed more freely, for they were women's faces — two women, muffled to the ears in red blankets, were calmly seated on the rug before the fire as if they had long been there gazing at her with blank, expressionless faces. She still heard the regular strokes of the axes of the men of the station, as just outside the stockade they resolutely pursued the chopping of the tree. She could not understand how the two women, unobserved by them, had slipped in at the open gate; Odalie was able to smile faintly at a prevision of Sandy's amazement at his own negligence.

One of the Indian women smiled in return, a bright-eyed demonstration, and suddenly Odalie remembered the young Cherokee beauty she had noted at the sally-port, watching the parade, the day after her arrival at Fort Loudon. The other, encouraged, began to speak, and to speak in French — a curious, dislocated patter. Asking how she had acquired the language, Odalie was informed that this was the squaw of Savanukah, and that he had journeyed as guide and hunted much with a French trader who had formerly dwelt at Choté, and hearing them talk the squaw, too, had learned.

"And how did you know that I speak French?" asked Odalie.

The elder woman pointed at the girl, who laughed and tucked down her head like a child. She was obviously solicitous that Odalie should observe the many strings of red beads about her neck; these she now and again caught in her fingers and drew forward, and then looked down at them with her head askew like a bird's. Odalie, with ready tact, let her eyes rest attentively on them, and smiled again. Her instinct of hospitality was so strong that it was no effort to simulate the gracious hostess. It was one of Hamish's stock complaints, often preferred in their former home when visitors were an intrusion and their long lingering a bore, that if the Enemy of Mankind himself should call, Odalie would be able to muster a smile, and request him to be seated, and offer him a fan of her best turkey feathers, and civilly hope that the climate of his residence was not oppressive to *him!*

"And how do *you* know that I am French?" she asked, with a delightful expression of her fascinating eyes.

The soldier had told her, — the handsome young brave who talked to her one day at Choté, — the girl said in fairly good English. Odalie asked her name, and, as it was given, exclaimed that it was a whole sentence. Both the Cherokee women

laughed at this in the pleasure of *camaraderie*, and the elder translated the name as the "Wing of the flying Whip-poor-will." The young Indian girl came to be known afterward at MacLeod's Station as Choo-qualee-qualoo, the Cherokee word which imitates the note of the bird. Recurring to the subject, she attempted to describe the soldier, by way of identification, as having hair the color of the lace on the Captain's red coat. Odalie was able to recollect a certain smart young soldier, who as orderly had one day accompanied Captain Stuart on a visit of ceremony to Oconostota, at his seat of government at Choté — old town. While the young orderly had led the horse of the English Captain up and down before the door of the chief's great council-house, Choo-qualee-qualoo had been set to ask him some questions, and as she told this the little minx laughed with her sharp white teeth shining, and looked like some sly little animal, malevolent, yet merry, and of much grace. Willinawaugh, she continued, believed that he had been duped by MacLeod into affording him and his family safe conduct on his journey hither, under the pretext that he was French, and therefore an enemy to the English, whom Willinawaugh hated; for the newcomer, MacLeod, and his brother, had been suffered to build a house and settle here among the English, while if Frenchmen they would have been hung as

spies at the great gate of the fort or sent direct to Charlestown as prisoners. So Willinawaugh had set her to weave her toils about the young soldier and discover the truth from him, as he walked the officer's fine horse up and down, and the tall English Captain and the great warrior, Oconostota, smoked their pipes in the council chamber. Thus it had chanced that the unsuspicious orderly, free with his tongue, as a young man is apt to be in the presence of a pretty girl, told all that Choo-qualee-qualoo asked to know, as far as he knew it himself, and sooth to say, a trifle further. He gave forth the fact that MacLeod was English — that is Scotch, which he made as one of the same tribe, and so was the brother. But the wife was French — he himself had overheard her talking the frog-eaters' lingo — and, by George, she was a stunner! The baby was hers, and thus a mixture of English and French; as for the cat, he could not undertake to pronounce upon the animal's nationality, for he had not the pleasure of the acquaintance of its parents.

Choo-qualee-qualoo laid down this last proposition with a doubting gravity, for the young man had promulgated it as if with a sense of its importance and a weighty soberness, although he laughed at most that he said himself and at everything that any one else said.

He saw fit to remark that he did not under-

stand how that sober-minded Sawney — meaning the Scotchman — had ever contrived to capture such a fine woman, but that was always the way with these dull prigs. Now as for such rattling blades as himself and his Captain — who would have been disposed to lay the flat of his sword smartly across the shoulders of the orderly, could he have dreamed of mention in such irreverent fellowship — they had no chance with the women, and for his own part this made him very sad. And he contrived to look so for about a minute, as he led the Captain's horse up and down before the door of the council-house, while Choo-qualee-qualoo, at one end of his beat, stood among a clump of laurel and talked to him as he came and went, and Willinawaugh, in the shadowy recesses of a neighboring hut, watched through the open door how his scheme took effect.

It made him very sad, the soldier said, mournfully, for the girls to like other fellows better than him — as they generally did!

And Choo-qualee-qualoo broke off to say here that she did not discern why such preference should be, for this soldier's hair was the color of the Captain's gold lace on his red coat (the orderly was called "Carrots" by his comrades), and he had a face with — and at a loss she dabbled the tips of her fingers delicately about the bridge of her nose

and her eyes to intimate the freckles on his fair skin, which beauty-spots she evidently admired.

The Scotchman's French wife was a stunner, the orderly was good enough to declare again, and everybody else thought so too. But he had overheard Captain Demeré say to Captain Stuart that her husband had no right to bring her to this western wilderness, and that that terrible journey of so many hundred miles, keeping up on foot with men, was enough to have killed her; and Captain Stuart had replied that she would make a fine pace-setter for infantry in heavy marching order. The orderly protested that for his part, if he were a condemned fine woman like that, he wouldn't live in a wilderness — he would run away from the Scotchman and go back to wherever she came from. Handsomest eyes he ever saw — *except two eyes!*

Here Choo-qualee-qualoo gave Odalie a broadside glance which left no doubt as to whose eyes this exception was supposed to refer, and put two or three strands of the red beads into her mouth, showing her narrow sharp teeth as she laughed with pleasure and pride.

Thus it was that Odalie was apprised of the fact that she was regarded by the Indians as a French prisoner in the hands of the English, and that the young soldier's use of the idea of capture by her husband, figuratively, as in the toils of matrimony,

was literally construed. Her first impulse was to repudiate this suggestion of captivity, of detention against her will. Then her strong instinct of wisdom, — for she had no foresight in the matter, — that made Hamish sometimes charge her with being as politic as Captain Stuart himself, moved her to reserve this detail for the consideration of the commandant of the fort, as every matter, however trivial, that bore upon the growing enmity of the Cherokees toward the English amongst them, and their disposition to fraternize with the French, was important.

The two captains listened with serious attention when she detailed this conversation to them, having repaired to the fort for the purpose, and being received as a guest of much distinction in the great hall, summarily cleared of the junior officers, and, not so summarily, of the clouds of tobacco smoke. They both instantly commended her course in leaving the impression on the minds of the Indian women as it had chanced to be made, and in dismissing them in unimpaired good humor with some little presents — a tiny mirror set locket-wise and an ivory bobbin wound around with red thread. The women had evidently derived special pleasure from the slyness and presumable secrecy of their interview, skulking out with a craft of concealment that completely eluded the notice of Sandy and

"Dill," and this had given Odalie a sense of disapprobation and repulsion.

"Why should you care?" demanded Demeré, always sympathetic with a woman's whim-whams, even when he could not feel with them. "No amount of explanation could enable the Indian women to comprehend the situation from your standpoint."

And Captain Stuart could not restrain his laughter at her discomfiture.

"Do you consider yourself so free, then? Do you call it freedom — in the holy *bonds* of matrimony? I had no idea how much you object to hear the clanking of your chains!"

As he noted her long-lashed glance of disdain, — "Doesn't the holy Scripture call it a 'yoke,'" he persisted, bursting out laughing afresh.

She would not reply but sat listening to Captain Demeré, who began to reason, — "This impression on the part of the Cherokee women might afford us — I don't know how — some means of learning and frustrating the treacherous plans of the savages. It gives us a source of information through you that we can trust."

"I don't relish the deceitful part assigned to me," she protested.

"What would we do with any information, Mrs. MacLeod, supposing we gain aught of value," re-

turned Demeré with some haughtiness, "except to use it for the defense of the fort, and your own outlying station? Are we here to wage war or to maintain peace?"

She was silent, a trifle mortified because of her own mortification to be supposed a mere captive.

"Everybody else knows that you are the commanding officer at MacLeod's Station," said Stuart in pretended consolation, only half smothering a laugh.

"Besides," Demeré argued, gravely, "you will never be able to convince them of the facts. Of course you know I intend no disparagement to you when I say they will believe that young soldier's rodomontade in preference to your word — being women of such extreme ignorance."

"Why, the man ought to be gagged!" exclaimed Stuart, in delight at her seriousness.

The color mounted to Odalie's cheek. She had but entered her twenties, and despite her matronly arrogations she felt very young, now and then. Notwithstanding her humble pioneer status, she retained much of the aristocratic traditions inherited from her "Grand'maman"; she was beginning to feel it a great liberty that the young orderly should have expressed his admiration of her, although of course he was not aware that it would be repeated. She objected that he should know that she knew of it.

"I hope you will not acquaint him with the circumstances," she said, stiffly.

"By no means," said Demeré, appreciating her scruples. "That sort of thing is beyond discipline. The men in a garrison will tell everything they know or think they know."

Odalie sat for a moment longer. "I think," she said, recovering her equanimity after a fashion, "that since I immediately placed the information of this ludicrous *contretemps* at your disposal, for whatever you may make it worth, I should be promised exemption from the kind of raillery — and jokes — which Captain Stuart — frequent mention of chains, and bond-slave, and matrimonial noose and — such things," she paused, rising and looking at Stuart, wistfully remonstrant, for she could but notice how her chagrin ministered to his mischievous delight.

"How *can you*, Mrs. MacLeod!" he cried. "Captain 'Quawl' will have me clapped into irons at the first offence! And this is the vaunted tender-heartedness of women!"

Even Captain Demeré joined in the laugh at her, only becoming grave to insist that she should not, without notice to him, divulge the fact that she was not French, but of Carolinian birth and parentage, and the further fact — and his serious face relaxed — that she, herself, was the commandant at MacLeod's Station, and that Sandy and Hamish,

Fifine and "Dill," were the mere minions of her power.

She found discretion the better part of valor, and thought it wise to laugh a little at herself and her own pride, although the dimples came and went in very red cheeks, and her eyes were so bright as they rested on the merry face of the big blond officer that they might be said to flash. She diverted with difficulty Hamish's attention from Captain Demeré's half-finished map on the table at the other end of the room, over which the boy had been poring during the entire interview, and then they took their leave.

Little did any of the party realize how important the mistaken impression of the Cherokee women was to prove!

CHAPTER VII

THE winter wore gradually away. While the snows were still on the ground, and the eastern mountain domes were glittering white against a pale blue sky, all adown the nearer slopes the dense forests showed a clear garnet hue, that betokened the swelling of congregated masses of myriads of budding boughs. Even the aspect of more distant ranges bespoke a change, in the dull soft blue which replaced the hard lapis-lazuli tint that the chill, sharp weather had known. For the cold had now a reviviscent tang — not the bleak, benumbing, icy deadness of the winter's thrall. And while the flames still flared on the hearth, and the thumping of the batten and the creak of the treadle resounded most of the day from the little shed-room where Odalie worked at her loom, and the musical whir of her spinning-wheel enlivened all the fire-lit evenings as she sat in the chimney corner, the thaws came on, and brought the mountain snows down the Tennessee River with a great rushing turbulence, and it lifted a wild, imperious, chanting voice into the primeval stillness. A delicate vernal