Oconostota and Willinawaugh, sitting together on the ground, in the flickering sunlight and the sparse wintry shadows of the leafless woods, looking like two large rabbits of some strange and very savage variety, watched the rear-guard file over the hill in the narrow blazed way that seemed a very tolerable road in that day. When the last man had vanished, they listened for a long time to the throb of the drum — then the sound was lost in the distance; a mere pulsing in the air continued, discriminated by the keen discernment of the Indians. At last, when not even a faint ripple of sound-waves could be felt in the still atmosphere, Oconostota keeled over suddenly and laid his ear to the ground. No vague reverberation, no electrical thrill, no stir of atom of earth striking against atom; nothing! The army was gone! The two savage old rabbits squatted again upright and seemed to ruminate on the situation. Then, as if with a single impulse, they looked at each other and broke into sudden harsh gutturals of triumphant laughter.

CHAPTER VIII

PEACE was welcome — so welcome. Hence the turning of the soil by the pioneers commenced betimes in the chill spring with heartfelt thankfulness to be anew between the stilts of a plow. The sap was rising; the winter had gone like a quiet sleep ensuing on the heavy tumults of troubled dreams.

One day a wren came and perched in a loop-hole of the block-house of the northwestern bastion and sang very loud and sweet and clear, till all the men sitting about the fire turned to look at it, amazed at its temerity, and enjoying in a lazy, sensuous way the jubilance and thrilling crystalline purity of its tone. Two of the youngsters, Lieutenant Gilmore and Ensign Whitson, ready to wager anything on anything, disputed as to the size of the creature, — if it had on no feathers, — one maintaining that it was two inches long, the other, an inch and a half. The bird brought a straw and arranged it carefully in place in the loop-hole, and then singing, flew away, and came back with a feather. His intention was evident.

"My young friend," said Stuart, carelessly eyeing him, "you are a fine figure of a settler, but that loop-hole is ours!"

"Let him have it," said Demeré. "We shall never need it."

The door opened suddenly, and the orderly, saluting, announced the express from over the mountains. At once there ensued a great stir of the tobacco smoke, and a laying aside of pipes in any coign of vantage to better handle the mail from home, as soon as the official dispatches should be read. And then, "Here's something from Fort Prince George," said Demeré, from where he sat at the rude table with the papers scattered before him. "A goodly packet," he continued, as he broke the seal, in the expectant, pleased silence of the others. "Ensign Milne is writing — both the official communication and a long personal letter," noting the signature.

At the first glance along the lines his face fell.

"Captain Coytmore is dead," he said in a low voice.

Murdered by the Indians he had been, in front of the fort, in the presence of the officers of his own command! As the news was unfolded, startled, amazed glances were exchanged; no word was spoken; the silence was only broken by the low, tense voice as Demeré read, and now and again the

wren's clear, sweet, reedy note, full of joyance, of life, as the bird fluttered in and out and builded his nest in the loop-hole.

Without warning the blow had fallen. One morning it happened, the 16th of February, when naught of moment seemed to impend. On the bank of the Keowee River opposite to Fort Prince George, two Indian women appeared, and as they loitered, seeming to have something in hand, the sentinel called the attention of an officer of the fort, — Doharty it was, — who at once went out to speak to them, thinking they might have some news. He called out to them, having a trifle of Cherokee at command, but before they could answer they were joined by Oconostota, the king of the Indian tribe, arrayed in his buckskin shirt and leggings, and mounted upon a very excellent chestnut horse. He told Doharty that he desired to speak to the commandant of the fort. Doharty, thinking it a matter of importance, and possibly having reference to the surrender of some of the murderers of the settlers in exchange for the hostages, went in great haste and summoned Captain Coytmore, who instantly came, accompanied by Lieutenant Bell with Foster, the interpreter, following. The writer detailed that he himself was within, engaged in inspection duty as officer of the day, or his interest and curiosity would have carried him in

their company. In expectation of developments they all went down to the water's edge, and Coytmore asked the chief if he would not ford the stream and come over. But Oconostota stated that he was in haste touching matters of great moment which he wished to impart to the royal governor of South Carolina. It was imperative that he should treat of the subject in person, and thus he would go to Charlestown to see Governor Lyttleton if Captain Coytmore would send a white man to accompany him as a safeguard in the white settlements. Captain Coytmore seemed to consider for a moment whom he could send; and then, evidently desirous of furthering any pacific negotiation, said that he could detail a man for that duty. Oconostota replied that that courtesy was all he would ask of the commandant — a white man as a safeguard. He himself would furnish a horse for the man to ride. He had come prepared for the purpose, and he lifted a bridle, which he had brought over one arm, to show it. He then remarked that he would get the horse, which he had left a little distance back, while Captain Coytmore gave the man his instructions. So saying, he lifted up the bridle in his hand, whirling it three times around his head, and wheeling his horse, galloped off, while from an ambush amongst the trees and underbrush a fire of twenty or thirty muskets was poured upon the little

group at the river bank. Captain Coytmore was shot through the left breast and died that day. Bell and Foster were each wounded in the leg. Doharty and the sentinel had much ado to get them into the fort with Coytmore's help, for the commandant was able to run to shelter with the rest through the sally-port, and until Parker, who the writer said had had considerable experience as a chirurgeon, examined Coytmore's wound, neither he nor the others knew that it was mortal. Milne, being now the officer in command, thought it fit to order the hostages into irons, fearing some outbreak within the fort as well as an attack from without. One and twenty stalwart savages were dangerous inmates at large, with the freedom of the parade as they had had much of the time. They resisted; one of the soldiers was killed in the effort to shackle them, for arms appeared among them, evidently brought and secreted by their friends who had been permitted to visit them, much leniency having been accorded them, being hostages and not themselves criminals. Another soldier was wounded in the head with a tomahawk. Upon the death of their comrade, and the announcement that the commandant was dying, the garrison was seized with an uncontrollable frenzy, fell upon the hostages, and within five minutes had slaughtered the last man of them.

"I know you will feel for me," Milne wrote.

"I dared scarce reprimand the men, for they were full of fury. I see here and there signs of sullenness. They watch me — their way of showing regret. I can scarcely blame — yet the Cherokees were hostages and I am sorry; I was much alone, with the temper of the soldiers to consider. Coytmore dead, and Bell gone into a delirium with the fever — his wound bled very little — the ball is near the bone. Doharty had been ill of a pleurisy and seems to relapse. On the night after, I sat for a time in the block-house where we had laid the commandant, feeling very low in my mind. There is one of the men a bit of a joiner, and a great billet of the red cedar, used in building the fort, being left over, he made a decent coffin, the wood working easily and with a fine grain and gloss. I could hear as I sat there the tapping of his mallet and chisel as he worked on the coffin, while Coytmore lay with the flag over him, his sword and hat by his side — there was no fire, because of him, and only a candle at his head, or I think the savages would have seen the light. But the work being finished and everything still, they supposed all asleep. I cannot think why they did not smell the blood — for the ground of the room where the hostages lay reeked of it. Twenty-one! — I could not think how I could bury them inside the fort and I dared not send out a detail, nor do I think the men would

obey — the barracks seemed steeped in the smell, though none there. Of a sudden, the night being fine and chill as I sat there with Coytmore, a sentry outside the door, I heard a great voice like a wind rushing. I thought I had been sleeping. And again I heard it — words in Cherokee. *O-se-skinnea co-tan-co-nee!* I slipped outside the block-house where was the sentinel, much startled, and bade him fetch the interpreter, alive or dead. He came limping — not greatly hurt. The words he said meant, "Good tidings for the unhappy." Then as we stood there other words sounded signifying 'Fight manfully and you will be assisted!' They were spoken to the hostages and close to the rampart hard by their hut, unknowing their — I cannot think how they should not smell the blood! Then from a greater distance came the "Whoo-whoop!" and a thick hail of musketry. The men got under arms very quick and tractable, and I think wished to atone. The fire of the savages had no effect, the balls being buried in the earth of the escarp, or falling spent within the fort. But we were kept at it all night, the men tireless and dutiful. The savages now and then paused at first, expecting some token from the hostages. Then they fought with great persistence — realizing. With what loss we do not know, since they carried off their dead. Sure, how strange 'tis to be fighting all night, firing through

the loop-holes of the block-house around Coytmore, with never a word from him, an order, or a sign. I miss him more since he is out of sight. I am afraid to speak of burying the savages inside the fort, along with the commandant and Private Mahone — and yet I *must* get rid of them. Twenty-one! — in so narrow an enclosure ——

"Much gratified by a deputation of Indians, realizing at last, and asking for bodies. Would not open gates for fear of surprise. Had each hoisted up and slipped out of embrasure; could hardly force men to touch them. I said, 'You were too quick once!' — drew my pistol. The Indians seemed mighty glad to get them, yet women went off howling. Soldiers seemed relieved to find in the hut tomahawks buried in ground, and a phial of liquid, which they think was poison for well. I poured this out on the earth, and broke bottle. Men's spirits improve — quite cheerful. Hope you have better luck at Ft. Loudon. Pray some one of you write to me! Bell and the others too ill to send remembrances — doubtless would."

The circle listened in appalled silence, and when the reading was concluded, except here and there a murmur of commiseration, or a deep imprecation, hardly a stir was in the room until the joyous notes of the building wren arose, so clear that they had a suggestion of glitter, if the quality of light can

ever be an attribute of sound. Then Captain Stuart asked for the letter and silently read it from end to end, while a fragmentary conversation concerning the personality of the slain hostages, all men of great note in their respective towns, began to be prosecuted by the others.

That evil days were upon the land hardly admitted of a doubt, and they fell to discussing the improbability of measures of relief and reprisal being undertaken so early after the bootless return of Governor Lyttleton's troops without striking a blow. The Cherokees, too, were surely cognizant of the fact that it was scarcely possible in view of the great expense of mustering and sending forth this force that such an expedition would again be soon set on foot. Acting upon this theory, and always instigated by the subtle French, their demonstration probably heralded a systematic and vigorous outbreak all along the frontier, to exterminate the settlers and free their land forever from the encroachments of the hated English. This view was confirmed by an attack which presently ensued on Fort Ninety-six, and being without effect, the repulsed Indian forces drew off and fell upon the more defenseless settlements, ravaging the frontier throughout the borders of the two Carolinas and Virginia and practicing all the horrible atrocities of savage warfare. The settlers about Fort Loudon

quaked in their little log-cabins and looked upon their limited clearings in the wilderness and their meager beginnings of a home, and wondered if it were worth coming so far and risking so much to attain so little. As yet, save for glances of a flashing ire and sullen silence, the Indians had made no demonstration, but it was a period of poignant doubt, like waiting for the falling of a sword suspended by a hair.

One day Odalie was startled by seeing Fifine, seated on the threshold, persistently wreathing her countenance into a grimace, which, despite the infantile softness of her face and the harsh savagery of the one she imitated, was so singularly recognizable that the mother took her hands from the bread-trough where she was mixing the pounded corn meal and went near to hear what the child was saying:—

"Fonny! Fonny!" with the terrible look of malevolent ridicule with which Willinawaugh had rebuked Hamish's poor pleasantries on that heart-breaking journey hither.

Odalie's pulses seemed to cease to beat. The child could hardly have remembered an incident of so long ago without some recent reminder.

"Where, Josephine? Where did you see Willinawaugh?"

But Fifine had no mind to answer, apprehending the agitation in the sharp tones, and translating it

as displeasure. She drew her countenance straight in short order, and put a meditative forefinger in her mouth as she looked up doubtfully at her mother.

Odalie changed her tone; she laughed out gayly.

"Fonny! Fonny!" and she too imitated the Indian. Then exclaimed — "*Oh*, isn't it droll, Fifine?"

And Fifine, deceived, banged her heels hilariously against the door-step, laughing widely and damply, and crying, "Fonny! Fonny!" in infantile derision.

"You didn't see 'Fonny' yesterday. No, Fifine! No!" Odalie had the air of detracting from some merit on Fifine's part, and as she played her little *rôle* she trembled so with a realization of terror that she could scarcely stand.

Yes, Fifine protested with pouts and anger. She *had* seen him; she had seen him, only yesterday.

"Where, Fifine, where?" cried Odalie bewildered, for the child sat upon the threshold all the day long, while the mother spun and wove and cooked within the sound of the babble of her voice, the gates of the stockade being closed in these troublous times, and always one or more of the men at work hard by in the fields without.

The mystery was too fraught with menace to be disregarded, but Odalie hesitated, doubting the policy of this direct question. Fifine's interest, however, was suddenly renewed and her importance expanded.

"Him wasn't all in," she explained. "Him top-feathers — him head — an' him ugly mouf!" She looked expectantly and half doubtfully at her mother, remembering her seeming anger.

"Oh, how droll! One might perish with laughter!" screamed Odalie, with a piercing affectation of merriment, and once more Fifine banged her heels hilariously against the door-step, as she sat on the threshold, and cried in derision, "Fonny! Fonny!"

"Where, Fifine? At the stockade? Some hole?"

Fifine became angry at this suggestion, for had not "Dill" built the stockade, and would he build a stockade so Indians might get through and cut off her curls — she bounced them about her head — that Dill said were "'andsomer than any queen's."

But Odalie *knew* she had seen "Fonny" at the stockade, and Fifine contradicted, and after a spirited passage of "Did!" "Didn't!" "Did!" "Didn't!" Fifine arose to go and prove her proposition.

There at the little spring, so sylvan sweet, so full, yet with the merest trickle of a branch that hardly wet the mint, so shyly hidden amongst its rocks, was a fissure. Odalie had often noted it; dark it was, for the shadows fell on it, and it might be deep; limited — it would but hold

her piggin, should she thrust it there, or admit a man's head, yet not his shoulders — and this was what it had done yesterday, for protruding thence Fifine maintained she had seen Willinawaugh's face with "him top-feathers, him head, an' him ugly mouf!"

Odalie laid her ear to the ground to listen; smooth, quiet, full, she heard the flow of water, doubtless the branch from the little spring always brimming, yet seeming to send so tiny a rill over the slopes of the mint. There was evidently a cave beneath, and they had never dreamed of it! She began to search about for fissures, finding here and there in the deep herbage and the cleft rocks one that might admit the passage of a man's body. She remembered the first sudden strange appearance of the Cherokee women at her fireside, and afterward, and that Sandy and Hamish and Dill often declared that watch the gate as they might they never saw the squaws enter the stockade nor issue therefrom. Doubtless they had come through the cave, that had a hidden exit.

Her heart throbbed, her eyes filled; "I ought to be so thankful to discover it in time — to think how safe we felt here when the gates were locked! But, oh, my home! my sweet, sweet home!"

The way the men's faces fell when they were summoned, and stood and looked at the slope, might