

Odalie laughed, but Captain Demeré could not compass a smile.

Stuart's next question she thought a bit of his fun. "Have you here," he said, with deep gravity, "some stout gown, fashioned with plaits and fullness in the skirt, and a cape or fichu,—is that what you call it,—about the shoulders? And, yes,—that large red hood, calash, that you wore the first day you arrived at the fort,"—his ready smile flickered,—“on an understanding so little pleasing to your taste. Go get them on, and meet me at the north-western bastion.”

The young soldier, Daniel Eske, still standing guard in the block-house tower, looked out on a scene without incident. The river shone in the clear June daylight; the woods were dark, and fresh with dew and deeply green, and so dense that they showed no token of broken boughs and riven bole, results of the cannonade they had sustained, which still served to keep at a distance, beyond the range of the guns, the beleaguering cordon of savages, and thus prevent surprise or storm. Nevertheless there were occasional lurking Indians, spies, or stragglers from the main line, amongst the dense boughs of the blooming rhododendron; he saw from time to time skulking painted faces and feathers fluttering from lordly scalp-locks, which rendered so much the more serious and probable the imputation of com-

municating with the enemy that the presence and gestures of Choo-quallee-qualoo, still lingering there, had contrived to throw upon him. Her folly might have cost him his life. He might have been sentenced to be shot by his own comrades, discovered to be holding communication with the enemy, and that enemy the Cherokees,—good sooth!

Suddenly rampant in his mind was a wild strange suspicion of treachery. His abrupt cry, "Halt, or I fire!" rang sharply on the air, and his musket was thrust through the window, aiming in intimidation down alongside the parapet, where upon the exterior slope of the rampart the beautiful Carolina girl, the French wife of the Scotch settler, had contrived to creep through the embrasure below the muzzle of the cannon, for the ground had sunk a trifle there with the weight of the piece or through some defect of the gabions that helped build up the "cheek," and she now stood at full height on the berm, above the red clay slope of the scarp, signing to Choo-quallee-qualoo with one hand, and with the other motioning toward the muzzle of his firelock, mutely imploring him to desist.

How did she dare! The light tint of her gray gown rendered her distinct against the deep rich color of the red clay slope; her calash, of a different, denser red, was a mark for a rifle that clear day a long way off. He was acutely conscious of those



skulking braves in the woods, all mute and motionless now, watching with keen eyes the altercation with the sentry, and he shuddered at her possible fate, even while, with an unrealized mental process, doubts arose of her loyalty to the interests of the garrison, which her French extraction aided her strange, suspicious demonstration to foster. He flushed with a violent rush of resentment when he became aware that Choo-quallee-qualoo was signing to him also, with entreating gestures, and so keen-eyed had the Indian warfare rendered him that he perceived that she was prompted to this action by a brave,—he half fancied him Willinawaugh,—who knelt in the pawpaw bushes a short distance from the Cherokee girl and spoke to her ever and anon.

"One step further and I fire!" he called out to Odalie, flinching nevertheless, as he looked down into her clear, hazel, upturned eyes. Then overwhelmed by a sense of responsibility he raised the weapon to fire into the air and lifted the first note of a wild hoarse cry for "Corporal of the guard,"—and suddenly heard O'Flynn's voice behind him:—

"Shet up, ye blethering bull-calf! The leddy's actin' under orders."

And not only was O'Flynn behind him but Stuart.

"Sign to Mrs. MacLeod that she may go," said that officer, "but not for long. Shake your head,

—seem doubtful. Then take your hat and wave it to the Cherokee wench, as if you relent for her sake!"

"Oh, sir,—I can't," exclaimed the young soldier even while he obeyed, expressing the revolt in his mind against the action of his muscles.

"It's mighty hard to kape the girls away from ye, but we will lend ye a stick nex' time," said Corporal O'Flynn, in scornful ridicule of his reluctance, not aware of the imputation of colloquing with the enemy to which the long-range flirtation with Choo-quallee-qualoo had seemed to expose him in Captain Stuart's mind.

Captain Stuart had placed in a loop-hole the muzzle of a firelock, which he sighted himself. O'Flynn leveled another, both men being of course invisible from without; as the young sentinel obeyed the order to openly lounge in the window and look toward Choo-quallee-qualoo he could see within the parapet that the gunners of the battery were standing to their shotted pieces, Captain Deméré, himself, in command. With this provision against capture, or for revenge, one might fear, rather than protection, Odalie took her way down the steep slope amongst the impeding stakes of the fraises, thickly sown, and looking, it might seem, like dragons' teeth in process of sprouting. More than once she paused and glanced up at the sentinel



leaning in the window with his firelock and entreated by signs his forbearance, which he seemed to accord qualified, doubtful, and limited. She soon crossed the ditch, the glacis, so swift she was, so sure and free of step, and paused in the open space beyond; then Choo-quallee-qualoo, too, began to advance. Better protected was the Cherokee girl, for she carried in her hand, and now and again waved, laughingly, as if for jest, a white flag, a length of fluttering cambric and lace.

"By the howly poker!" exclaimed Corporal O'Flynn, beneath his breath, "that is the cravat of a man of quality, — some British officer of rank, belike."

He glanced with anxiety at Captain Stuart, whose every faculty seemed concentrated on the matter in hand.

"The Cherokees know that a white flag is a sign which we respect, and that that squaw is as safe with it as if she were the commandant of the post. I only wish Mrs. MacLeod could have a like security." This aspiration had the effect of fastening O'Flynn's eye and mind to the sighting of his firelock and obliterating his speculations concerning the cravat as spoil stripped from some slain officer of rank.

The two women met in the open space, with the rifles of how many keen-sighted, capricious savages

leveled toward the spot Demeré hardly dared to think, as he watched Odalie in a sort of agony of terror that he might have felt had she been a cherished sister. They stood talking for a time in the attitudes and the manner of their age, which was near the same, swinging a little apart now and then, and coming together with suddenly renewed interest, and again, with free, casual gestures, and graceful, unconstrained pose, they both laughed, and seemed to take a congenial pleasure in their meeting. They sat down for a time on a bit of grass, — the sward springing anew, since it was so little trodden in these days, and with a richness that blood might have added to its vigor. Odalie answered, with apparent unsuspiciousness, certain shrewd questions concerning the armament of the fort, the store of ammunition, the quantity of provisions, the manner in which Stuart and Demeré continued to bear themselves, the expectation held out to the garrison of relief from any quarter, — questions which she was sure had never originated in the brain of Choo-quallee-qualoo, but had been prompted by the craft of Willinawaugh. Odalie, too, had been carefully prompted, and Stuart's anticipatory answers were very definitely delivered, as of her own volition. Then they passed to casual chatting, to the presentation of a bauble which Odalie had brought, and which seemed to touch Choo-quallee-qualoo to the point



of detailing as gossip the fact that the attack on the white people had been intended to begin at MacLeod Station, Willinawaugh retaining so much resentment against the Scotchman to whom he had granted safe-conduct, thinking him French, when he only had a French squaw as a captive. Savanukah, who really spoke French, had made capital of it, and had rendered Willinawaugh's pretensions ridiculous in the eyes of the nation, for Willinawaugh had always boasted, to Savanukah at least, that he understood French, although it was beneath his dignity to speak it. This was done to reduce Savanukah's linguistic achievements, and to put him in the position of a mere interpreter or such people, when Savanukah was a great warrior, and yet could speak many languages, like the famous Baron Des Johnnes. And what was there now at MacLeod Station? Nothing: stockade, houses, fields, all burnt! Great was the wrath of Willinawaugh!

This talk, however, was less to the taste of Choo-quallee-qualoo than questions and answers concerning the young sentinel, whom the Cherokees had named *Sekakee*, "the grasshopper," as he was so loquacious; she often paused to put the strings of red beads into her mouth, and to gaze away at the glittering reaches of the river with large liquid eyes, sending now and then a glance at the window where that gruff young person leaned on his firelock.

Savanukah's wife said *Sekakee* must be hungry, Choo-quallee-qualoo told Odalie. Was *Sekakee* hungry? She would bring him some beans. Savanukah said they would all be hungry soon. And the fort would be the Indians', and there would be nobody in the land but the Cherokees, and the French to carry on trade with them—was Odalie not glad that she was French?—for there had been great fighting with the English colonel's men, and Willinawaugh had told her to tell the captains English both that fact: much blood did they shed of their own blood, as red as their own red coats!

Odalie regarded this merely as an empty boast, the triumphs of Montgomery's campaign rife this day in the garrison, but it made her tremble to listen. Nevertheless, she had the nerve to walk with Choo-quallee-qualoo almost to the water-side, near the shadowy covert of the dense woods. Nothing lurked there now,—no flickering feather, no fiercely gay painted face. Her confidence seemed the ally of the Indians. The French captive of the Carolina Scotchman would be to them like a spy in the enemy's camp!

Perhaps the ordeal made the greater draughts on the courage of the men who stood in the shelter of the works and sighted the guns. The tension grew so great as she lingered there in the shadows that cold drops stood on Demeré's face,



and the hand with which Stuart held the firelock trembled.

"It's a woman that can't get enough of anything," O'Flynn muttered to himself. "I'll have the lockjaw in me lungs, for I'm gittin' so as I can't move me chist to catch me breath."

But Odalie turned at last, and still signaling anxiously to the sentry, as if to implore silence and forbearance, she crossed the open space with her swift, swinging step, climbed the red clay slope among the spiked staves of the fraises, knelt down, slipped through the embrasure, and was lifted to her feet by Deméré, while the gunners stood by looking on, and smiling and ready to cry over her.

Twice afterward, the same detail, all enjoined to secrecy, loaded their cannon, and stood with burning matches ready to fire at the word, while the maneuver was repeated; an interval of a day or so was allowed to elapse on each occasion, and the hour was variously chosen — when it was possible for the French woman to escape, as Choo-quallee-qualoo was given to understand. Both times Deméré protested, although he had accorded the plan his countenance, urging the capricious temper of the Indians, who might permit Mrs. MacLeod's exit from the fort one day, and the next, for a whim, or for revenge toward her husband, who had incurred their special enmity for outwitting them on

his journey hither, shoot her through the heart as she stood on the crest of the counterscarp. And of what avail then the shotted cannon, the firelocks in the loop-holes!

"You know they are for our own protection," he argued. "Otherwise we could not endure to see the risk. The utmost we can do for her is to prevent capture, or if she is shot to take quick vengeance. Loading the cannon only saves *our* nerves."

"I admit it," declared Stuart, — "a species of military sal-volatile. I never pretended to her that she was protected at all, or safe in any way, — she volunteered for a duty of great hazard."

Deméré, although appreciating the inestimable value to the garrison of the opportunity, was relieved after the third occasion, when Alexander MacLeod, by an accident, discovered the fact of these dangerous sorties in the face of a savage enemy, no less capriciously wicked and mischievous than furious and blood-thirsty. His astonished rage precluded speech for a moment, and the two officers found an opportunity to get him inside the great hall, and turning the key Stuart put it in his pocket.

"Now, before you expend your wrath in words that we may all regret," he said, sternly, "you had best understand the situation. Your wife is not a woman to play the fool under any circumstances,



and for ourselves we are not in heart for practical jokes. Mr. MacLeod, we have here more than three hundred mouths to feed daily, nearly three hundred the mouths of hearty, hungry men, and we have exhausted our supply of corn and have in the smoke-house barely enough salted meat to sustain us for another fortnight. Then we shall begin to eat the few horses. We are so closely beleaguered that it has proved impossible to get an express through that cordon of savages to the country beyond. To communicate with Colonel Montgomery as early as practicable is the only hope of saving our lives. Mrs. MacLeod's sorties from the fort are a part of our scheme—the essential part. You may yet come to think the dearest boon that fate could have given her would have been a ball through her brain as she stood on the escarp—so little her chances are worth!"

This plain disclosure staggered MacLeod. He had thought the place amply victualed. A rising doubt of the officers' capacity to manage the situation showed in his face.

Stuart interpreted the expression. "You see,—the instant disaster is suggested you can't rely on us,—even you! And if that spirit were abroad in the garrison and among the settlers, we should have a thousand schemes in progress, manipulated by people not so experienced as we, to save themselves

first and—*perhaps* the others. The ammunition might be traded to the Cherokees for a promise of individual security. The gates might be opened and the garrison delivered into the enemy's hands by two or three as the price of their own lives. Such a panic or mutiny might arise as would render a defense of the place impracticable, and the fort be taken by storm and all put to the sword, or death by torture. We are keeping our secret as well as we can, hoping for relief from Montgomery, and scheming to receive assurance of it. We asked Mrs. MacLeod's help, and she gave it!"

The logic of this appeal left MacLeod no reply. "How could you!" he only exclaimed, glancing reproachfully at his wife.

"That is what I have always said," cried Stuart, gayly, perceiving that the crisis was overpast. "How *could* she!"

There was no more that Odalie could do, and that fact partially reconciled the shuddering MacLeod to the past, although he felt he could hardly face the ghastly front of the future. And he drew back wincingly from the unfolding plans. As for Odalie, the next day she spent in her room, the door barred, her hair tossed out of its wonted perfection of array, her dress disordered, her face and eyes swollen with weeping, and when she heard the great guns of the fort begin to send forth their thunder,



and the heavy shot crashing among the boughs of the forest beyond, she fell upon her knees, then rose, wild and agitated, springing to the door, yet no sooner letting down the bar than again replacing it, to fall anew upon her knees and rise once more, too distraught for the framing of a prayer.

Yet at this same moment Mrs. MacLeod, in her familiar gray serge gown and red calash, was seen, calm and decorous, walking slowly across the parade in the direction of the great hall of the northwest bastion. The soldiers who met her doffed their hats with looks of deep respect. Now and again she bowed to a settler with her pretty, stately grace, — somewhat too pronounced an elegance for the wife of so poor a man as MacLeod, it was thought, he being of less ornamental clay. She hesitated at the door of the block-house, with a little air of diffidence, as might befit a lady breaking in upon the time of men presumed to be officially busy. The door opened, and with a bow of mingled dignity and deprecation she entered, and as the door closed, Hamish dropped the imitation of her manner, and bounded into the middle of the room with a great gush of boyish laughter, holding out both arms and crying, "Don't I look enticing! To see the fellows salaaming to the very ground as I came across the parade! — what are you doing to my frock, Captain

Demeré?" he broke off, suddenly. "It's just right. Odalie fixed it herself."

"Don't scuffle up these frills so," Captain Demeré objected. "Mrs. MacLeod is wont to wear her frock precisely."

"Did O'Flynn mistake you for Mrs. MacLeod?" asked Stuart, relishing the situation despite his anxiety.

"I wish you could have seen the way he drew down that red Irish mouth of his," said Hamish, with a guffaw, "looking so genteel and pious!"

"I think it passes," said Demeré, who was not optimistic; but now he too was smiling a little.

"It passes!" cried Stuart, triumphantly.

For the height of Odalie and Hamish was exactly the same — five feet eight inches. Hamish, destined to attain upward of six feet, had not yet all his growth. The full pleated skirt with the upper portion drawn up at the hips, and the cape about the shoulders, obviated the difference between Odalie's delicately rounded slenderness and Hamish's lank angularity. The cape of the calash, too, was thrown around the throat and about the chin and mouth, and as she was wont to hold her head down and look up at you from out the dusky red tunnel of its depths the difference in the complexion and the expression of the hazel eyes of each was hardly to be noticed in passing. To speak would have been fatal, but



Hamish had been charged not to speak. His chestnut curls, brushed into a glossy similarity, crept out and lay on the folds of the red cape of the calash with a verisimilitude that seemed almost profane.

Admonished by Stuart to have heed of long steps, and the dashing swing of his habitual gait, he was leaning on Sandy's arm, as they went out, in an imitation of Odalie's graceful manner. The young sentry, Daniel Eske, — no one else was permitted at these times to stand guard in this block-house tower, — noted this, with the usual maneuver of Mrs. MacLeod's escape through the embrasure, and he was filled with ire. He had fancied that her husband did not know of this recklessness, as he was half inclined to think it, although evidently some fine-spun scheme of Captain Stuart's; it seemed especially futile this evening, so near sunset, and the odd circumstance of the cannonade having sufficed to clear every Indian out of the forest and the range of the guns. Mrs. MacLeod could not speak to Choo-qualee-qualoo now, he argued within himself; the girl would not be there in the face of this hot fire! How rapidly Mrs. MacLeod walked; only once she paused and glanced about her as if looking for the Cherokee girl, — what folly! — for with a flash of fire and a puff of white smoke, and a great sweeping curve too swift to follow with the

eye, each successive ball flew from the cannon's mouth over her head and into the woods beyond.

From the opposite bank of the river an Indian, crouched in the cleft of a rock, yet consciously out of the range, watched her progress for one moment, then suddenly set off at a swift pace, doubtless to fetch the young squaw, so that when the firing should cease she could ascertain from the French woman what the unusual demonstration of the cannonade might signify.

It was only for a moment that the sentry's attention was thus diverted, but when he looked again the gray gown, the red calash, the swiftly moving figure had disappeared. The gunners had been ordered to cease firing, and the usual commotion of sponging out the bore, and reloading the guns, and replacing all the appliances of their service, was interrupted now and again by the men looking anxiously through the embrasure for Mrs. MacLeod's return. They presently called up an inquiry to the sentinel in the tower, presuming upon the utility of the secret service to excuse this breach of discipline. "Why," said the soldier, "I took my eye off her for one minute and she disappeared."

"You mean you shut your eyes for five minutes," said Corporal O'Flynn, gruffly, having just entered. "Captain Stuart told me that he himself opened the little gate and let her in by the sally-port. And



there she is now, all dressed out fresh again, walking with her husband on the parade under the trees. An' yonder is the Injun colleen,—got here too late! Answer her, man, according to your orders."

Against his will the young sentinel leaned out of the window with a made-to-order smile, and as Choo-quallee-qualoo waved her hand and pointed to the empty path along which Odalie was wont to come, he intimated by signs that she had waited but was obliged to return to the fort and was now within, and he pointed down to the gorge of the bastion. To-morrow when there should be an eastern sky she would come out, and Choo-quallee-qualoo signed that she would meet her. Then she lingered, waving her hand now and again on her own account, and he dutifully flourished his hat.

"Gosh," he exclaimed, "if treachery sticks in the gizzard like this pretense there is no use in cord or shot,—the fellow does for himself!"

He was glad when the lingering twilight slipped down at last and put an end to the long-range flirtation, for however alert an interest he might have developed, were it voluntary, its utility as a military maneuver blunted its zest. Choo-quallee-qualoo had sped away to her home up the river; the stars were in the sky, and in broken glimmers reflected in the ripples of the current. The head-men among the cordon, drawn around Fort Loudon, sat in

circles and discussed the possible reasons of the sudden furious cannonade, and the others of minor tribal importance listened and adjusted their own theories to the views advanced; the only stragglers were the spies whom the cannonade had driven from the woods that afternoon, now venturing back into the neighborhood, looking at the lights of the fort, hearing often hilarious voices full of the triumph of Montgomery's foray, and sometimes finding on the ground the spent balls of the cannonade.

It had so cleared the nearer spaces that it had enabled Hamish, in a guise become familiar to them, to gain the little thicket where Choo-quallee-qualoo and Odalie were wont to conclude their talks. Close by was the mouth of the cavernous passage that led to MacLeod's Station, which no Indians knew the white people had discovered. With a sudden plunge the boy was lost to sight in its labyrinthine darkness, and when Hamish MacLeod emerged at the further end five miles away, in his own garb, which he had worn beneath the prim feminine attire,—this he had carefully rolled into a bundle and stowed in a cleft in the rocks of the underground passage,—he issued into a night as sweet, as lonely, and as still, in that vast woodland, as if there were no wars or rumors of wars in all the earth. But, alas! for the sight of Odalie's home that she had loved and made so happy, and where he had been as cher-