

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN WHICH MY FRIEND BECOMES MY FOE

IN the centre of the wigwam the customary fire burned clear and bright, showing the white mats, the dressed skins, the implements of war hanging upon the bark walls, — all the usual furniture of an Indian dwelling, — and showing also Nantauquas standing against the stripped trunk of a pine that pierced the wigwam from floor to roof. The fire was between us. He stood so rigid, at his full height, with folded arms and head held high, and his features were so blank and still, so forced and frozen, as it were, into composure, that, with the red light beating upon him and the thin smoke curling above his head, he had the look of a warrior tied to the stake.

“Nantauquas!” I exclaimed, and striding past the fire would have touched him but that with a slight and authoritative motion of the hand he kept me back. Otherwise there was no change in his position or in the dead calm of his face.

The Indian maid had dropped the mat at the entrance, and if she waited, waited without in the darkness. Diccon, now staring at the young chief, now eyeing the weapons upon the wall with all a lover’s passion, kept near the doorway. Through the thickness of the bark and woven twigs the wild cries and singing came to us somewhat faintly; beneath that distant noise could be heard the wind in the trees and the soft fall of the burning pine.

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“Well!” I asked at last. “What is the matter, my friend?”

For a full minute he made no answer, and when he did speak his voice matched his face.

“*My friend*,” he said, “I am going to show myself a friend indeed to the English, to the strangers who were not content with their own hunting grounds beyond the great salt water. When I have done this, I do not know that Captain Percy will call me ‘friend’ again.”

“You were wont to speak plainly, Nantauquas,” I answered him. “I am not fond of riddles.”

Again he waited, as though he found speech difficult. I stared at him in amazement, he was so changed in so short a time.

He spoke at last: “When the dance is over, and the fires are low, and the sunrise is at hand, then will Opechancanough come to you to bid you farewell. He will give you the pearls that he wears about his neck for a present to the Governor, and a bracelet for yourself. Also he will give you three men for a guard through the forest. He has messages of love to send the white men, and he would send them by you who were his enemy and his captive. So all the white men shall believe in his love.”

“Well,” I said dryly as he paused. “I will take his messages. What next?”

“Those are the words of Opechancanough. Now listen to the words of Nantauquas, the son of Wahunsonacock, a war chief of the Powhatans. There are two sharp knives there, hanging beneath the bow and the quiver and the shield. Take them and hide them.”

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before

Diccon had the two keen English blades. I took the one he offered me, and hid it in my doublet.

"So we go armed, Nantauquas," I said. "Love and peace and goodwill consort not with such toys."

"You may want them," he went on, with no change in his low, measured tones. "If you see aught in the forest that you should not see, if they think you know more than you are meant to know, then those three, who have knives and tomahawks, are to kill you, whom they believe unarmed."

"See aught that we should not see, know more than we are meant to know?" I said. "To the point, friend."

"They will go slowly, too, through the forest to Jamestown, stopping to eat and to sleep. For them there is no need to run like the stag with the hunter behind him."

"Then we should make for Jamestown as for life," I said, "not sleeping or eating or making pause?"

"Yea," he replied, "if you would not die, you and all your people."

In the silence of the hut the fire crackled, and the branches of the trees outside, bent by the wind, made a grating sound against the bark roof.

"How die?" I asked at last. "Speak out!"

"Die by the arrow and the tomahawk," he answered,—"yea, and by the guns you have given the red men. To-morrow's sun, and the next, and the next,—three suns,—and the tribes will fall upon the English. At the same hour, when the men are in the fields and the women and children are in the houses, they will strike,—Kecoughtans, Paspaheghs, Chickahominies, Pamunkeys, Arrowhatocks, Chesapeake, Nansmonds, Accomacs,—as one man will

they strike; and from where the Powhatan falls over the rocks to the salt water beyond Accomac, there will not be one white man left alive."

He ceased to speak, and for a minute the fire made the only sound in the hut. Then, "All die?" I asked dully. "There are three thousand Englishmen in Virginia."

"They are scattered and unwarned. The fighting men of the villages of the Powhatan and the Pamunkey and the great bay are many, and they have sharpened their hatchets and filled their quivers with arrows."

"Scattered," I said, "strewn broadcast up and down the river,—here a lonely house, there a cluster of two or three; they at Jamestown and Henricus off guard,—the men in the fields or at the wharves, the women and the children busy within doors, all unwarned—O my God!"

Diccon strode over from the doorway to the fire. "We'd best be going, I reckon, sir," he cried. "Or you wait until morning; then there'll be two chances. Now that I've a knife, I'm thinking I can give account of one of them damned sentries, at least. Once clear of them"—

I shook my head, and the Indian too made a gesture of dissent. "You would only be the first to die."

I leaned against the side of the hut, for my heart beat like a frightened woman's. "Three days!" I exclaimed. "If we go with all our speed we shall be in time. When did you learn this thing?"

"While you watched the dance," he answered, "Opechancanough and I sat within his lodge in the darkness. His heart was moved, and he talked to me of his own youth in a strange country, south of the sunset, where he and his people dwelt in stone houses

and worshiped a great and fierce god, giving him blood to drink and flesh to eat. To that country, too, white men had come in ships. Then he spoke to me of Powhatan, my father, — of how wise he was and how great a chief before the English came, and how the English made him kneel in sign that he held his lands from their King, and how he hated them; and then he told me that the tribes had called me ‘woman,’ ‘lover no longer of the warpath and the scalp dance,’ but that he, who had no son, loved me as his son, knowing my heart to be Indian still; and then I heard what I have told you.”

“How long had this been planned?”

“For many moons. I have been a child, fooled and turned aside from the trail; not wise enough to see it beneath the flowers, through the smoke of the peace pipes.”

“Why does Opechancanough send us back to the settlements?” I demanded. “Their faith in him needs no strengthening.”

“It is his fancy. Every hunter and trader and learner of our tongues, living in the villages or straying in the woods, has been sent back to Jamestown or to his hundred with presents and with words that are sweeter than honey. He has told the three who go with you the hour in which you are to reach Jamestown; he would have you as singing birds, telling lying tales to the Governor, with scarce the smoking of a pipe between those words of peace and the war whoop. But if those who go with you see reason to misdoubt you, they will kill you in the forest.”

His voice fell, and he stood in silence, straight as an arrow, against the post, the firelight playing over his dark limbs and sternly quiet face. Outside, the

night wind, rising, began to howl through the naked branches, and a louder burst of yells came to us from the roisterers in the distance. The mat before the doorway shook, and a slim brown hand, slipped between the wood and the woven grass, beckoned to us.

“Why did you come?” demanded the Indian. “Long ago, when there were none but dark men from the Chesapeake to the hunting grounds beneath the sunset, we were happy. Why did you leave your own land, in the strange black ships with sails like the piled-up clouds of summer? Was it not a good land? Were not your forests broad and green, your fields fruitful, your rivers deep and filled with fish? And the towns I have heard of — were they not fair? You are brave men: had you no enemies there, and no warpaths? It was your home: a man should love the good earth over which he hunts, upon which stands his village. This is the red man’s land. He wishes his hunting grounds, his maize fields, and his rivers for himself, his women and children. He has no ships in which to go to another country. When you first came we thought you were gods; but you have not done like the great white God who, you say, loves you so. You are wiser and stronger than we, but your strength and wisdom help us not: they press us down from men to children; they are weights upon the head and shoulders of a babe to keep him under stature. Ill gifts have you brought us, evil have you wrought us” —

“Not to you, Nantauquas!” I cried, stung into speech.

He turned his eyes upon me. “Nantauquas is the war chief of his tribe. Opechancanough is his king, and he lies upon his bed in his lodge and says within

himself: 'My war chief, the Panther, the son of Wahunsonacock, who was chief of all the Powhatans, sits now within his wigwam, sharpening flints for his arrows, making his tomahawk bright and keen, thinking of a day three suns hence, when the tribes will shake off forever the hand upon their shoulder, — the hand so heavy and white that strives always to bend them to the earth and keep them there.' Tell me, you Englishman who have led in war, another name for Nantauquas, and ask no more what evil you have done him."

"I will not call you 'traitor,' Nantauquas," I said, after a pause. "There is a difference. You are not the first child of Powhatan who has loved and shielded the white men."

"She was a woman, a child," he answered. "Out of pity she saved your lives, not knowing that it was to the hurt of her people. Then you were few and weak, and could not take your revenge. Now, if you die not, you will drink deep of vengeance, — so deep that your lips may never leave the cup. More ships will come, and more; you will grow ever stronger. There may come a moon when the deep forests and the shining rivers know us, to whom Kiwassa gave them, no more." He paused, with unmoved face, and eyes that seemed to pierce the wall and look out into unfathomable distances. "Go!" he said at last. "If you die not in the woods, if you see again the man whom I called my brother and teacher, tell him . . . tell him *nothing!* Go!"

"Come with us," urged Diccon gruffly. "We English will make a place for you among us" — and got no further, for I turned upon him with a stern command for silence.

"I ask of you no such thing, Nantauquas," I said. "Come against us, if you will. Nobly warned, fair upon our guard, we will meet you as knightly foe should be met."

He stood for a minute, the quick change that had come into his face at Diccon's blundering words gone, and his features sternly impassive again; then, very slowly, he raised his arm from his side and held out his hand. His eyes met mine in sombre inquiry, half eager, half proudly doubtful.

I went to him at once, and took his hand in mine. No word was spoken. Presently he withdrew his hand from my clasp, and, putting his finger to his lips, whistled low to the Indian girl. She drew aside the hanging mats, and we passed out, Diccon and I, leaving him standing as we had found him, upright against the post, in the red firelight.

Should we ever go through the woods, pass through that gathering storm, reach Jamestown, warn them there of the death that was rushing upon them? Should we ever leave that hated village? Would the morning ever come? When we reached our hut, unseen, and sat down just within the doorway to watch for the dawn, it seemed as though the stars would never pale. Again and again the leaping Indians between us and the fire fed the tall flame; if one figure fell in the wild dancing, another took its place; the yelling never ceased, nor the beating of the drums.

It was an alarum that was sounding, and there were only two to hear; miles away beneath the mute stars English men and women lay asleep, with the hour thundering at their gates, and there was none to cry, "Awake!" When would the dawn come, when should we be gone? I could have cried out in that

agony of waiting, with the leagues on leagues to be traveled, and the time so short! If we never reached those sleepers — I saw the dark warriors gathering, tribe on tribe, war party on war party, thick crowding shadows of death, slipping through the silent forest . . . and the clearings we had made and the houses we had built . . . the goodly Englishmen, Kent and Thorpe and Yeardeley, Maddison, Wynne, Hamor, the men who had striven to win and hold this land so fatal and so fair, West and Rolfe and Jeremy Sparrow . . . the children about the doorsteps, the women . . . one woman . . .

It came to an end, as all things earthly will. The flames of the great bonfire sank lower and lower, and as they sank the gray light faltered into being, grew, and strengthened. At last the dancers were still, the women scattered, the priests with their hideous Okee gone. The wailing of the pipes died away, the drums ceased to beat, and the village lay in the keen wind and the pale light, inert and quiet with the stillness of exhaustion.

The pause and hush did not last. When the ruffled pools amid the marshes were rosy beneath the sunrise, the women brought us food, and the warriors and old men gathered about us. They sat upon mats or billets of wood, and I offered them bread and meat, and told them they must come to Jamestown to taste of the white man's cookery.

Scarcely was the meal over when Opechancanough issued from his lodge, with his picked men behind him, and, coming slowly up to us, took his seat upon the white mat that was spread for him. For a few minutes he sat in a silence that neither we nor his people cared to break. Only the wind sang in the

brown branches, and from some forest brake came a stag's hoarse cry. As he sat in the sunshine he glistened all over, like an Ethiop besprent with silver; for his dark limbs and mighty chest had been oiled, and then powdered with antimony. Through his scalp lock was stuck an eagle's feather; across his face, from temple to chin, was a bar of red paint; the eyes above were very bright and watchful, but we upon whom that scrutiny was bent were as little wont as he to let our faces tell our minds.

One of his young men brought a great pipe, carved and painted, stem and bowl; an old man filled it with tobacco, and a warrior lit it and bore it to the Emperor. He put it to his lips and smoked in silence, while the sun climbed higher and higher, and the golden minutes that were more precious than heart's blood went by, at once too slow, too swift.

At last, his part in the solemn mockery played, he held out the pipe to me. "The sky will fall, and the rivers run dry, and the birds cease to sing," he said, "before the smoke of the calumet fades from the land."

I took the symbol of peace, and smoked it as silently and soberly — ay, and as slowly — as he had done before me, then laid it leisurely aside and held out my hand. "My eyes have been holden," I told him, "but now I see plainly the deep graves of the hatchets and the drifting of the peace smoke through the forest. Let Opechancanough come to Jamestown to smoke of the Englishman's *uppowoc*, and to receive rich presents, — a red robe like his brother Powhatan's, and a cup from which he shall drink, he and all his people."

He laid his dark fingers in mine for an instant,

withdrew them, and, rising to his feet, motioned to three Indians who stood out from the throng of warriors. "These are Captain Percy's guides and friends," he announced. "The sun is high; it is time that he was gone. Here are presents for him and for my brother the Governor." As he spoke, he took from his neck the rope of pearls and from his arm a copper bracelet, and laid both upon my palm.

I thrust the pearls within my doublet, and slipped the bracelet upon my wrist. "Thanks, Opechancanough," I said briefly. "When we meet again I shall not greet you with empty thanks."

By this all the folk of the village had gathered around us; and now the drums beat again, and the maidens raised a wild and plaintive song of farewell. At a sign from the werowance men and women formed a rude procession, and followed us, who were to go upon a journey, to the edge of the village where the marsh began. Only the dark Emperor and the old men stayed behind, sitting and standing in the sunshine, with the peace pipe lying on the grass at their feet, and the wind moving the branches overhead. I looked back and saw them thus, and wondered idly how many minutes they would wait before putting on the black paint. Of Nantauquas we had seen nothing. Either he had gone to the forest, or upon some pretense he kept within his lodge.

We bade farewell to the noisy throng who had brought us upon our way, and went down to the river, where we found a canoe and rowers, crossed the stream, and, bidding the rowers good-by, entered the forest. It was Wednesday morning, and the sun was two hours high. Three suns, Nantauquas had said: on Friday, then, the blow would fall. Three

days! Once at Jamestown, it would take three days to warn each lonely scattered settlement, to put the colony into any posture of defense. What of the leagues of danger-haunted forest to be traversed before even a single soul of the three thousand could be warned?

As for the three Indians, — who had their orders to go slowly, who at any suspicious haste or question or anxiety on our part were to kill us whom they deemed unarmed, — when they left their village that morning, they left it forever. There were times when Diccon and I had no need of speech, but knew each other's mind without; so now, though no word had been spoken, we were agreed to set upon and slay our guides the first occasion that offered.