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The COLONIALS by Allen French

"How long have you been with Aneeb?"

For ages the Great Lakes of North America lay in their gloomy solitudes, the garb of nature clothing their endless shores. Upon the waters of those inland seas, within the depths of the enormous forests, the petty mutterings of barbaric wars were lost. Though the record of savage migrations remained in human memory, not even a pile of stone marked a historic spot.

But at last the white man came into the region, and a new epoch began. The vast surface of the forest, the long reaches of the shores, were still almost the same; but here and there was a tiny gap in the tree-tops, here and there were the charred ruins of buildings, here and there the pick and shovel had made trenches and mounds which would remain for many years. These were the feeble beginnings of a stupendous change, while the Indian was yet master in the land, the forest still covered the earth, and while the wild beasts for many years to come were to enjoy their natural haunts.

In the late autumn of the year 1772, the shores of Lake Huron seemed still unbroken in their monotony. The black forest pushed up close to the beach; the water lapped the rounded pebbles; and on the unending surface of the lake no canoe or boat was visible. But where at the eastern point of Saginaw bay a little river entered embayed waters, some dozens of trees had been felled, the smoke of fires ascended, and the sounds of human activity were to be heard.

It was an encampment of soldiers of the English king. A few tents stood close together, a little apart from a cabin of logs. On the beach men worked at the repairing of boats; toward the land sentinels in red coats patrolled the camp. Outside its limits, but huddled close to the line, were Indian wigwams, and at a distance was a bark hut of better make, but still of savage workmanship. None but the soldiers might enter the camp; therefore from the door of the hut a white girl gazed often wistfully at the men of her own race.

The commandant of the soldiers walked by the shore, looked out on the lake, and was impatient to be gone. There were yet three days before the boats could be finished, and his injured in condition to move. He cursed his luck; he tantalized himself by the muttered name of London, London, where his promotion was already purchased!

Still in the woods—damnation! How stupid it had been. Dull soldier-life, sullen Indians, boorish provincials; changeless, inexpressibly dreary trees and water. Behind him still was the same dark forest; in front were the same sand-pits, the same lake limitless as the ocean. Detroit would be the same—a frontier blockhouse, with soldiers, provincials, Indians, land and water, all alike unbearable. No life! No gaming with men who lived but on a pittance. No drinking fit for a gentleman. Brandy was hard to come at, wine all but unknown. A single bottle, the last, was among his luggage; there was no more to be had short of Montreal.

But London! Then there would be no more of this provincial service. An allowance proper to a gentleman, a fashionable regiment, gaming, wine, women. Women! Not one handsome woman in all this wilderness. Not one! He kicked the pebbles in disgust.

His servant approached him. "Begging your pardon, lieutenant."

"Well, Tabb?"

"Those two woodsman that came this afternoon, in their canoe. I can't get nothing out o' them."

"What!" in astonishment. "Will they not guide us?"

"'Tis the younger, sir, seems to be the leader. He says they can't wait."

"Tell them I'll pay them well. Tell them they must."

"They won't take must. They say they go on to-morrow."

The lieutenant kicked at the pebbles again. "I must speak to them myself, then. Rat me, what fellows I have to deal with here."

Two voyagers had made their camp apart. Their canoe was drawn up by the river shore; their fire made. Crotched sticks made a gun-rack for their flintlocks; and hunting swords, weapons so unusual that their owners were famed among the Indians, hung there beside. A little man squatted before the fire drying wet powder in an iron dish. His companion stood and watched him, stretching long limbs cramped by a day in the canoe. The old man studied, his powder carefully; the young man luxuriated in yawns. Neither noticed the approach of the lieutenant—or it seemed so. He was forced to speak.

"Here—you," he said.

The old man grunted; the taller turned and responded, "Good evening, lieutenant."

The lieutenant of the King's Twenty-fourth Foot did not find respect to please him. He spoke with a drawl, insolently.

"The sergeant says you are good lake guides."

"Indifferent good, lieutenant, but not guides."

"That means your price is higher. Well, I'll pay. My guides are useless. See the mess they've brought me to. Caught here in a gale, two boats wrecked, my corporal and two men injured. Come, what's your price? You must bring me to Detroit."

The little man shook his head; the younger spoke frankly. "Lieutenant, you must excuse us."

"Three guineas," said the lieutenant. "Four guineas."

"We must on to-morrow."

"Rat me!" the lieutenant cried. "What if I am wrecked again?"

"You'll lose another ten days."

The lieutenant was not without resource. The airs of the messroom failing of effect, he tried conciliation. "My good fellow——"

Too late. The tall young fellow smiled. "But I'm not your good fellow."

The lieutenant exploded. "Pox you!" He turned away, and with clanking sword stalked away to his men.

The young man smiled. "As if I would delay my return a day, Benjy, a single day! I enter Boston on my birthday. Once of age my uncle cannot hinder me from what I wish to do."

"Except," said Benjy, "from what you most wish."

"Not even from that," answered the other. "If I could make up my mind to do anything so unkind to Dickie, I could enter the rope-walks. In three years I have changed. No one would know me. Can you recall the sickly boy I was when first I came away with you? And now—look at me!"

He stretched himself to his full height and squared his shoulders. His was a figure of great strength, and, more than that, of abounding health. His eyes were quick and bright, his face well tanned. His form was erect and lithe; he held his head aloft with the grace of an Indian. But the little crooked man, looking at him asquint, felt with his admiration the pain of an old man's jealousy.

"The woods are no longer enough for you," he complained. "You want other companions."

Frank laid a hand upon the other's shoulder. "Do not angry with me. But go I must."

Benjy made no reply; he know how his companion had looked forward to the birthday now approaching. And Frank stood musing—even as the young muse, sometimes—of his past.

He had been brought up in that Boston to which his thoughts now turned. The Ellery family enjoyed respect in the colonial town; the position to which its older son was born was of importance. His father died when he was but 36; therefore the estate and the family business of rope-making waited for the son's hand. His ambition had been taught to center upon them. To maintain the honor of the name in the town, by honorable manufacture and trade, was his one desire. But his uncle, in the position of his guardian, came in between.

Tastes and desires were opposed in uncle and nephew. The boy was open and simple; but he had a strong family pride, with a sense of dignity lacking in his uncle. He would not sell the old Ellery house, nor a foot of the family possessions. The uncle, thwarted by the provisions of the will which gave the boy so much power, turned in revenge to sell the personal estate, in the shape of family jewels and silver. At the same time he prepared to bind the boy apprentice to another trade. Frank was then just turned 18, weak and almost consumptive, but full of spirit. Encouraged and abetted by Benjy, an old-time servant, the boy seized the jewels boldly, claiming they were his. The man took the silver in the open street from the tradesmen who had bought them. Mr. Ellery called the law to his aid; but jewels and silver, man and boy, disappeared together.

Long living in the pine woods brought Frank Ellery strength of body. His strength of purpose never left him. To return to Boston when he was of age; to wait until his younger brother should be 21; then finally to claim his own—those he lived for. And oh, to see his home again, to see—but to see!—his brother Dickie and his friends! Long had the time been; difficult the waiting, until at last he was starting on his journey home.

So he stood thinking, and Benjy squatted again at the fire, this time to cook food. A slender figure approached them quietly, drawing near with eager and yet hesitating steps. Old Benjy, always alert, heard the jingle of a silver bell, at the same time that the movement near him caught Frank's eye. They turned, and then, as they perceived their visitor, started and stood staring.

Chapter II.

THE CAPTIVE.

It was a girl in Indian dress. "A white girl!" said they both.

Benjy scanned her carefully. He noted the embroidered deerskins, the hawksbells and silver trinkets on her bodice, and the elaborately dressed hair; all signs of a family favorite. Francis looked only at the face. Fair-haired, with a complexion despite the sun still clear and rosy, an oval countenance, blue eyes from which anxiety looked out, a sweet and gentle mouth with trembling lip—these were what he saw, upon an undeveloped form of scarce 15.

"I'm Alice, sir," she said; "Alice Tudor."

"Good God!" he said slowly. "You luckless child!"

Her eyes filled suddenly; but she kept her gaze upon the young man, saying nothing.

"You live with the Indians?" he asked.

"I live with Aneeb."

"Not"—he shrunk at the idea—"your husband?"

"He is my father."

"Aneeb?" queried Benjy. "Aneeb the Pottowattamie?"

"Yes."

Frank was still staring. "Come here," he said.

She came closer. He put his hand upon her shoulder and looked down into her face. "How long have you been with Aneeb?"

"Almost a year. But first I was with some Wyandottes—a little while."

"Aneeb bought you?"

"Yes. He was sorry for me. His daughter had just died."

"Sad! Sad!" he thought. Sadness was in her face. "You are happy?" he asked. "You like this life?"

The tears came again and overflowed. Her composure vanished. "No," she cried. "No, no; Aneeb is good, but I want my own father. Oh, let me—let me——" Fast crowding sobs checked her speech, but for an instant only. As the young man gazed with sympathy he saw her pressing back emotion, struggling for self-control. In haste she spoke again, as knowing that her fate depended upon her plain petition.

"Take me with you," she begged.

Strange voice, with childish sobs and womanly appeal sublimely blended. Strange sight, of that barbaric dress, with the fair girl reminding him of home. Touching it was to find that sweet child in the wilderness, to see her so pathetically pleading, and to him. Fierce indignation that such a thing should be, natural love for all things young and helpless, moved strong within him. The very depths of his emotions stirred.

"Yes, Alice," he cried. "You shall come."

But Benjy interposed. "Promise nothing."

Frank looked at him, indignant. He felt upon his arms hers clinging gladly.

"'Twill be difficult," urged the old man. "Impossible even. What can you do?"

Alice clung closer at the words. Benjy was right. Frank was struck to silence. She felt the change that came over him and panted with fear. "Oh! Oh! You too! You too!" She left him and stood away.

"Alice," he asked, "have others promised to help you?"

"Yes," she said. Her voice was dulled. "Others."

"Will Aneeb sell you?"

"No," she said. "Others have tried. White men, to save me. Indians, to—to——"

"To marry you?"

"Yes."

"You are too young! Too young!" he cried.

"But not too pretty," growled Benjy.

Frank stood and thought, looking at the shrinking figure. A mere child she was, but of good parentage—far too good. Hers was a body strong enough for the hardships of the woods, but with a mind too high to accept the life. He knew the existence of Indian captives; he knew they were often kindly treated, and sometimes even came to prefer the wilderness. But it would not be so with her. She would beat against her bars till she should die.

"Alice," he asked, "where is Aneeb?"

"At the bark lodge," she said. She found fresh hope, even in his question. "We were preparing to go. We had just packed. But the Panther came to talk with him, and I slipped out to you."

"Panther?" asked Benjy. To keep informed of Indian movements was the part of wisdom. "Is he here?"

"Yes," she answered. "He—he wants me. I was afraid."

Frank caught Benjy's eye; then glanced at the canoe. "Could we——?"

Benjy shook his head.

"Alice," said the young man, "go back to Aneeb. I will come presently. What I can do, I will."

She walked away, patient for yet a while.

"'Tis a vain hope," said Benjy. "You do but tantalize her with it. Could we even take her with us?"

"And the government," said Francis bitterly, "will do nothing for such a helpless child as that. 'Tis the memory of Bradstreet at Sandusky—his cowardly abandonment of people of his own race—that makes the Indians so bold to keep their captives. Were I this lieutenant here I would take her and keep her."

"Ay," said Benjy, dryly, "and have the tribes again loose, and a war on the whole frontier. Pontiac still lives. For this one girl a thousand whites would die."

"One good lesson, taught them well! Had I but one regiment to do it!"

"But have it not, what then?"

"Buy her," he answered.

"But, Frank," cried Benjy, "what will you do with her? Take her with us?"

"Ay."

The old man spread his hands. "And the journey long! And the canoe heavy loaded! Think of the delay!" Benjy touched his companion there. "We should lose so much time that the winter might overtake us. Or supposing she wished to go to her parents? And if not, she would be on your hands for support."

Frank had no answer to the host of objections, but he shook his head doggedly. "I care not. Stay you here. I go to see Aneeb."

Chapter III.

INDIAN NATURE.

The bark hut of the Pottawatomie stood a little by itself, yet near the group of Chippewa wigwams. Aneeb had been first on the ground, the soldiers came by accident, the Chippewa came in the hope of trading. Aneeb liked his neighbors not, and was preparing to depart. As Frank approached the lodge a young Chippewa left it. The white man gave the salute of an acquaintance, but the Indian made no response. "Good," said Frank. "He is disappointed." Emboldened, he entered the hut.

Familiar with Indian habits, he knew where to look in its darkness for the master of the lodge. There sat the chief, beside him his old father, Muk-kwah, the Bear. The quick, keen-eyed old warrior smiled; even the face of Aneeb brightened, and Frank heard him speak softly the name the Indians had given him—"Saggitto." As he took his seat in the place of honor Frank caught the sound of the white girl's quickened breath.

Aneeb passed him the pipe, and the three men smoked in turn. A crouching form in a dark corner rose and stooped again; it was a woman, dried and wiry, tying bundles. A boy attended her; the girl, too agitated to work, stood waiting in the shadow. As they smoked the cloud on Aneeb's brow gradually passed. Frank, patient, observant, watched till it was gone. At last the chief turned on his visitor an open countenance. "Saggitto is welcome," he said.

The young man saw that he might speak. "Thy daughter, Aneeb. Where is she?"

The chief turned his head toward Alice. "She died. I have another in her place."

The pipe came to Frank again. He smoked, then passed it. "Know you her true parents?"

Aneeb shook his head. "I bought her of Wyandots. She is my daughter now."

Again a pause. Blood-adoption was a sacred ceremony, supposed to render its object a true Indian. Frank suddenly felt doubt. "You will marry her in your tribe?" he asked after a moment.

"When she wishes."

"By blood-adoption?"

"The Panther was just here."

The chief's face darkened. "He is persistent. But I will never give her to a Chippewa."

"Ay," and Francis nodded. "They killed your brother."

Aneeb said nothing. The old man spoke, his voice quavering with emotion. "My younger son. We have had blood-gifts, but 'tis not forgotten."

Silence again. While the pipe passed Frank waited for memories to be stilled. "The white man," he said at length, "has always been your friend. Aneeb, will you marry her to a white man?"

"To a voyageur?" asked Aneeb. "To a trader? To a follower of the camp?" His voice swelled with contempt.

"There are good whites," said the young man, steadily. "You know one."

"I know one," said Aneeb. He nodded to his visitor, and Muk-kwah, quick-smiling, beamed approval. They apprehended no request. Frank paused an instant, then made it.

"Aneeb, then give her to me."

The chief looked at him in surprise. "You will marry her?"

"No. I will take her to her home."

Aneeb smiled. "She is in her home." He seemed to dismiss the subject.

One more experienced would have stopped there. Frank himself was for a moment checked, but he persisted. "Then let me buy her."

The chief looked at him. "What will you give?" he asked.

It was far from an eager question. The Indian's face was calm, even indifferent. "I will give furs," said Frank, and waited for a comment.

"I have furs," said Aneeb. Muk-kwah showed no interest. Frank bid higher.

"I will give a roll of cloth," he said, "and two good blankets."

"No more?" asked Aneeb with scornful lip, while the old man smiled. Frank was spurred, and turned in his mind to those articles which the Indian most would love.

"I have a small keg of powder," he said. "You shall have it. I will give you my best gun. Also two axes and two knives." Muk-kwah turned and looked at him, and a change came on the face of Aneeb himself. "Four steel traps," went on Frank, "the best the white men make. And a second roll of cloth."

Yet Aneeb was not moved from his calm. "Your whim makes you eager," he said. "But will you give gold?"

Frank hesitated, but only for a moment. He reached within his blouse, fumbled, and drew a belt from around his body. He dropped it at the feet of Aneeb, and it fell heavily. "Here is gold," he said.

Muk-kwah raised his hands in surprise, and Aneeb for one moment looked at Frank astonished. The young man thought he had succeeded. But then the chief spoke with quiet irony. "Now I see how the white man desires the girl. But shall I sell my daughter?" He made no further comment; his dignity drove home the rebuke.

Frank took up the gold. They sat again in silence; for minutes the three did not move. The pipe went out; the woman and the boy had ceased to work, and were waiting. The strength of custom and character loomed in Frank's view to great proportions. Indian stolidity seemed unconquerable; the case looked hopeless. Only, in the darkest corner of the hut, he knew that the white girl crouched, waiting breathless.

At length he turned to the man at his side, and studied the face of bronze. The Indian sat expressionless. "Aneeb," said Frank, "you are a father."

The chief gave assent.

"A father should make his children happy. Is the girl happy?"

"She is content."

Aneeb shut his lips.

"If your daughter had been separated from you, could she have been happy? Would she not wish and long for nothing but you?"

Still Aneeb said nothing.

"You know it," said Francis warmly. "In your heart you know it. She would call you at night. She would whisper to you in the day. Is it not so? Yet your daughter died. She is saved to you. She waits you in the spirit land. Of that you are sure. Therefore," said Frank, "of her you are at ease. Yet think. If she were prisoner to the white man, what then? Could you yourself be happy; could you rest till you saw her again? You could not!"

Still silence. The old man was attentive, but Aneeb's face had hardened.

"Aneeb," said the young man, "I am not the first that has come to you begging for this girl. But I come not for myself. Not as the Panther, to make her my slave. I come, thinking of her father. He mourns, Aneeb. He knows she wishes him. He calls to God: 'Give her back!' If the white man had your daughter, you could not rest. Will you keep his child from him?"

Aneeb turned and looked at Frank; searched his face, as if for motives. Frank ceased, and suffered the examination. Long they looked at one another.

The young man's glance was firm. It pierced the Indian's look, and saw emotions stirring behind the mask. "In my face," he said at last, proudly, "you find no guile. My brother, will you keep the maiden weeping in your lodge? Speak!"

Aneeb struggled. His eye avoided Frank's and sought the ground. Then he glanced furtively at the girl. She had crept closer. As Aneeb looked at her she broke across the hut, fell at his feet and clasped his knees—the suppliant's position in all ages. "Aneeb! Aneeb! Let me go!"

The chief covered his head with his blanket. Again for a long time there was silence in the hut.

Chapter IV.

"BY THE WHITE MAN'S GOD!"

At length the blanket fell from the head of the chief. Aneeb looked into the face of his visitor. He cast no glance at the girl at his feet; yet he laid his hand on her shoulder, as if to comfort her. Frank, meeting his eye, saw no trace of emotion—nothing but high resolve.

"She shall go," said Aneeb.

Frank bowed his head at the generous word, at the tragic sound of the voice. The old man sat still, the boy by the door stood like a statue. But the old woman, kneeling where she had been at work, dropped her face in her hands, and began to rock to and fro.

"She shall go," repeated Aneeb. The girl seized his hand to caress it; but he made no sign, not even at the touch of her warm tears. He looked steadily at Frank. "Yet not with you alone. Detroit is far, and the lake is bad in autumn. Your canoe is small. On land the way is through the country of the Chippewa. She must travel in the boat of the white soldiers. You shall guide them, lest they again be foolishly wrecked. And their captain must promise to carry her safely."

"He will take her to Montreal," answered Frank.

"And you," said Aneeb, "must promise to take her across the great water to her home."

Frank was taken aback. To go to England meant to give up Boston, for how long he could not say. His home, his ambition, must for another painful while be left.

The chief saw his hesitation and pressed him. "Promise!"

"I promise," said Frank. His heart reproached him, and he sighed. The Indian, satisfied, turned away. "And," added Frank, "to Aneeb I will send——"

The chief raised his head. "Nothing!" he said, sternly.

Frank was silent.

The Indian looked down at the girl, and withdrawing his hand from hers, placed it upon her head. His feeling, a great sadness, at last looked from his eyes. "One daughter I have lost," he said. "Now another leaves me. Bright bird, the lodge will be dark without thee. The long march will be weary without thy smile. The evening of winter will be colder, the northwest wind will blow bleaker, the deep snow will fall heavier, if thou art not with us. In plenty, the day will be sadder; in fasting, how shall we sustain us?"

He ceased, and the wailing of the woman rose. The girl's sobs answered. The boy left the door and stole to the darkness of the hut. Tears stood unchecked in Muk-kwah's eyes. Frank, moved by the scene, slipped from his seat and left the lodge. Outside, he waited until the parting should be completed. Benjy, noting from a distance, drew near, but at Frank's signal came not close.

At length the chief came, the girl with him. Her face was downcast, with sorrow and joy contending. He was expressionless. He motioned to the camp of the soldiers.

"Lead me to their chief," he said.

The lieutenant was standing, impatiently switching his boot, where the soldiers were mending the boats. Occasionally he gave directions, urging the men to haste. They were near the sentry line and Frank, approaching, spoke across it. The lieutenant turned and came forward leisurely. "Well?" he asked.

"Lieutenant," said the young man, "I will guide you to Detroit."

The other, but a few years older, but widely differing in thought and habit, nodded. "You are wiser."

"On this condition. Pay me nothing, but take this girl with you."

The others stood near. Benjy had edged close, but the lieutenant did not look at them. He surveyed Frank with a smile. "What, can you not guard your own squaw?"

"She is no squaw," said the provincial; "she is an English girl."

The lieutenant glanced lazily at the child, then his expression changed. A look of knowing appreciation came; he looked again at Frank. "Your eye is good. Have you bought her?"

"No," said the woodsman, quietly. "The chief has given her her liberty. I shall take her to her parents."

The captain looked at the girl again, appraising her. There passed no glance from eye to eye, exchanging signs of cheer; none, though she looked eagerly. He turned once more to Frank. "You would better keep her."

"Sir!" cried the other.

"Oh, rat your virtue," drawled the lieutenant. "What is it you wish me to do?"

"Take her to Detroit," said Frank. "If you go on to Montreal; take her in your party. I will guide you the whole distance. At Montreal I will begin to search for her father."

The lieutenant scarcely listened. His eyes were again on the girl. She thought she saw in his face the beginning of friendship. "Come here," he said.

She stood before him, her face gladly lifted. "Who is your father?"

"Walter Tudor, merchant."

"English or provincial?"

"English, sir. Our home is in London."

"How came you here?"

"Father came to trade, I think. We were in Montreal; I think that was the place. Then we came up the river. At one camp I went to pick berries, and Indians caught me. They were Wyandottes; Aneeb bought me from them."

A light was glittering in the lieutenant's eye. "Will you go with me?"

"Yes, sir!" she cried, her face aglow.

He turned to Frank, at last smiling. "She is a beauty. Well, I will take her. You mean her to travel in my care?"

"You promise her safe transit?"

"Yes."

"Give your word then, to the chief."

Aneeb, following the conversation lamely, understood, and he held out his hand.

"By the white man's god!" he said solemnly.

The Englishman took his hand, but carelessly. "By the white man's god," he answered. His eye wandered to the girl, and he dropped the chief's hand. "Come, child," he said, and turned away.

She threw herself into the arms of Aneeb, and kissed him sobbing. "Thank you. Oh, thank you," she repeated. Then hastily she followed the officer.

Twenty minutes later the little train of Indians entered the woods. Alice, from the window of the lieutenant's cabin, watched them through tears. They were savages, but they had been kind. The lieutenant seemed more tender than Aneeb. But his glances—oh, she did not know. New instincts made her feel uneasy. Where was that woodsman who had rescued her?

Chapter V.

BENJY.

The little wary trapper was not satisfied. While Frank went slowly back to his campfire, deep in thought, Benjy strolled about the soldiers' camp. From time to time he nodded to himself. The soldiers' tents were close together; that was good. To post sentries against the Indians, even in daytime, was also wise. The men worked hard at the boats, even though the officer was not in sight—a sure sign that they feared him. But the lieutenant's cabin was full ninety feet from the nearest tent, where, though guarded by the stream, in case of an Indian attack it could easily be taken by surprise.

Benjy edged toward it by degrees. He wished to know where Alice was, and what the officer was doing. He put on his face the look of a Yankee idler, open-mouthed and vacant, giving no sign of the quick intelligence that lay beneath. He saw the lieutenant leave the cabin and come toward him, smiling, but with thoughtful eyes. "He is planning," thought Benjy, and touched his hat to the spruce young fellow.

"Hey?" said the lieutenant, sharply. "Who are you? Oh, I see. With the girl, eh?"

"Not exactly, sir," grinned Benjy, touching his cap again. "Too old now, sir."

The lieutenant glanced him up and down, quickly and keenly. He set his lips and moved as if to pass on, but paused again, and spoke. "But once—eh?" He watched the old man closely.

"Eh? eh?" snickered Benjy.

The lieutenant's features relaxed and he smiled. "In regard to the girl. That fellow with you means to—eh? Of course he has no idea of giving her up?"

Benjy shrugged cynically. "Young blood, lieutenant."

"But look here, then," said the lieutenant with interest. "Is he particular? He likes money? He can wait?"

"We all like money, lieutenant." Benjy's cocked eye revealed depths of worldly wisdom.

"Well," said the lieutenant, pleased. "Here then." He gave a coin. "And another for your friend. There will be more at the end of the trip."

"Thank you, sir." The lieutenant walked on; Benjy turned toward his own campfire, cunningly smiling to himself. The farther he went, the more the look of cunning gave room to the lines of sober thought. Frank sat by the fire, idly employed in casting sticks into the stream. His smile to Benjy had a tinge of sadness.

"Good-by my plans," he said.

Benjy stood in front of him. "Ye should have thought of that before."

"There was only one thing to do," said the young man. "But, oh, I have looked forward to meeting Dickie again. And the good old town and friends. Now we are perhaps even going to London. May I find the child's parents soon."

"Romance!" retorted Benjy. "Think you to find them at all? Think of the trouble and the money."

"I do not care."

"And the time!" emphasized the old man.

"I know," he said and sighed.

"Why then did ye do it? Better give her up at once, and perhaps make money instead of losing it."

"Benjy!"

"'Tis advice from better judge than I," said Benjy. "I do but pass it on. There are some guineas to be made. Some three or four."

"What do you mean?" asked the young man sternly.

"Why gave you her to the lieutenant?" broke out the older angrily. "Had ye no eyes?"

"'Twas Aneeb's condition. I could not free her else."

"Have ye freed her? Think ye so? Look here, then." His voice and action took on more energy. He laid the two coins on his palm and extended the hand—all knotted sinew, bone and callous—toward the other.

"Two half guineas," said Francis. "Well?"

"Where got I them?" Benjy cried. "Where got I them? Who gave them me just now?"

The young man flushed and sprang up. He put a hand on Benjy's shoulder and searched his face with his glance. Benjy pursed his gnarled face and nodded grimly. Frank turned away. "His servant is coming," he said. "Make sure, Benjy. Draw him out."

As Tabb approached, the woodsmen were lolling again by their fire. He greeted familiarly: "Good day to you again." Cheerfully answered Benjy: "And a good day for us all." Tabb squatted by the glowing coals, and began to push pieces of wood into their depths.

"So you're going with us after all?"

"Ay," said Benjy. "Are you willing?"

Tabb grinned. "Why not? You've set fun afoot and I come in for my profit."

To conceal his wince, Frank turned his head aside. But Benjy hitched companionably forward. "Hey?" he said. "The lieutenant pays, hey?" He stretched out a tough forefinger and prodded Tabb in the waist. His mouth opened wide in a cackle.

Tabb winked and chuckled, "Pays? Indeed he pays. What, have you not something already?"

Benjy opened his hand and showed the two half-guineas. "Ay," he said, still grinning broadly. "Ay."

Tabb thrust his hand in his pocket and brought out their counterpart. "Be sure he pays. And 'tis evident that your friend knew the way to his heart. There's a morsel there in the hut"—and he winked again at Benjy—"tenderer than can be found on London streets. Ay, I'll warrant the lieutenant is in high good humor."

"For sure," agreed Benjy.

Tabb settled himself to chat. "'Twill be easier for us poor devils after this. His temper has been short. And he'll think better of his words. Odds, but he has cursed them! No gaming, he says, or wine, nor women. Well, you've supplied him with this last, and the final bottle of wine is to be opened to-night. I've put it to its neck in the stream below, to cool it."

"And the girl pleased the lieutenant?"

"Would she not you? Odds, man, she's a beauty. Better than Spain or Portugal could give, he says. And he's been there."

"Too young," objected Benjy.

"Nay," said Tabb, sagely.

"And innocent-like."

"But there's the wine. He's knowing. Wine's always the best way."

Francis sat silent, but the keen old man saw passion in the back that slightly moved. He knew his lad, and laid a hand upon his shoulder. Frank quieted. Benjy went on with his talk to Tabb.

"True," cried Tabb. "An early growth."

"The lieutenant's an old hand."

Benjy laughed and nodded, pushing Tabb again in the ribs. "Ay," he said. "Ay, ay." He ogled and laughed again, pointing with his thumb.

Tabb grinned. "What is it?" he asked. "D'ye mean me?"

"You?" cried Benjy. "Of course I mean you. Man and master like. That's what I'm thinking."

"Well," smirked Tabb. "Well, I say nothing of that." The compliment tickled him.

Then Benjy sobered. "But do we," he queried earnestly, "come in for more, at the end?"

"Ay," said Tabb easily. "Of course. Three guineas apiece, belike, and the lass herself. Are ye willing?"

"Yes," answered Benjy. "She'll be a hindrance before long, hey? 'Tis the way. But when, then? Montreal or Detroit?"

"Even before," said Tabb, "it may be. If you leave the company before we get to Detroit will not that suit ye?"

"Ay," said Francis, turning. "Before we get to Detroit. 'Twill suit well."

"Well, then," said Tabb, rising. "'Tis arranged. I'll tell the lieutenant."

"Oho!" exclaimed Benjy, rising also. "You came for this then?"

"Yes," said Tabb. "Then the girl will not be seen at Detroit, ye see. And the lieutenant will pay well."

"We shall be satisfied," said Francis.

"Good evening to ye, then." Tabb went away.

Francis turned to the fire, and appeared to be studying its glow. The deep gleam in his eyes seemed a reflection of the ruddy coals. Benjy, since Frank said nothing, threw himself on the ground and lay quiet. A long while they stayed so. Slowly the sun sank, casting upon little clouds far overhead bright reflections from the dolphin colors of the dying day. They paled; the sky grew cold blue; the night was coming. The soldiers were heard at their meal; all work had ceased, and merriment began. But while fires blazed up brightly in the English camp, the fire of the woodsmen died to ashes. Darkness was coming.

Then Frank arose in the dusk and began to gather together the articles that lay near. Benjy, attentive, helped. They brought the canoe to the water's edge, and laid their belongings within it. The powder keg, the axes and the utensils went in. But the furs Frank left lying where they were. Benjy whispered ruefully: "The black and silver fox skins?"

It was only a little bale, and worth a woodsman's fortune. But Frank thrust it under a bush. "Not an extra pound," he said. They put into the canoe their blankets, then Francis laid his rifle in. Benjy hesitated to relinquish his.

"No," said Frank again with decision. "Only our hangers." He looked to the lake then up the little river, glimmering in the last light. "You know whither the stream leads, Benjy?"

"Ay."

Francis pointed to the cabin. There was a light within it. "Quietly now!" he whispered. His words were as the breath of the wind. Quietly the two stole toward the soldiers' camp.

(To Be Continued.)

Defective Page