

Stratemeyer Edward

**Marching on Niagara: or, The
Soldier Boys of the Old
Frontier**



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Edward Stratemeyer

Marching on Niagara Or The Soldier Boys of the Old Frontier

PREFACE

"Marching on Niagara" is a complete story in itself, but forms the second of several volumes to be known by the general title of "Colonial Series."

In the first volume of this series, entitled "With Washington in the West," we followed the fortunes of David Morris, the son of a hardy pioneer, who first settled at Will's Creek (now the town of Cumberland, Virginia), and later on established a trading post on one of the tributaries of the Ohio River. This was just previous to the breaking out of war between France and England, and when the French and English settlers in America, especially in those localities where trading with the Indians was profitable, were bitter foes. David becomes well acquainted with Washington while the latter is a surveyor, and when Braddock arrives in America and marches against Fort Duquesne the young pioneer shoulders a musket and joins the Virginia Rangers under Major Washington, to march forth and take part in Braddock's bitter defeat and Washington's masterly effort to save the remnant of the army from total annihilation.

The defeat of the British forces left this section of the English colonies at the mercy of both the French and their savage Indian allies, and for two years, despite all that Washington and other colonial leaders could do, every isolated cabin and every small settlement west of Winchester was in constant danger, and numerous raids were made, savage and brutal in the extreme, and these were kept up until the arrival of General Forbes, who, aided by Washington and others, finally compelled the French to abandon Fort Duquesne, and thus restored peace and order to a frontier covering a distance of several hundred miles.

Following General Forbes's success at Fort Duquesne (now the enterprising city of Pittsburg), came English successes in other quarters, not the least of which was the capture of Fort Niagara, standing on the east bank of the Niagara River, where that stream flows into Lake Ontario. This fort was of vast importance to the French, for it guarded the way through the lakes and down the mighty Mississippi to their Louisiana territory. In the expedition against Fort Niagara both David and Henry Morris take an active part, and as brave young soldiers endeavor to do their duty fully and fearlessly.

In the preparation of the historical portions of this work the author has endeavored to be as accurate as possible. This has been no easy task, for upon many points American, English, and French historians have differed greatly in their statements. However, it is hoped that the tale is at least as accurate as the average history, giving as it does statements from all sides.

Again thanking the many readers who have taken such an interest in my previous works, I place this volume in their hands, trusting they will find it not only entertaining but likewise full of instruction and inspiration.

Edward Stratemeyer.

Independence Day, 1902.

CHAPTER I IN THE FOREST

"Do you think we'll bag a deer to-day, Henry?"

"I'll tell you better about that when we are on our way home, Dave. I certainly saw the hoof-prints down by the salt lick this morning. That proves they can't be far off. My idea is that at least three deer are just beyond the lower creek, although I may be mistaken."

"I'd like to get a shot at 'em. I haven't brought down a deer since we left the army."

"Well, I reckon we had shooting enough in the army to last us for a while," returned Henry Morris, grimly. "I know I got all I wanted, and you got a good deal more."

"But it wasn't the right kind of shooting, Henry. I always hated to think of firing on another human being, didn't you?"

"Oh, I didn't mind shooting at the Indians – some of 'em don't seem to be more than half human anyway. But I must say it was different when it came to bringing down a Frenchman with his spick and span uniform. But the Frenchmen hadn't any right to molest us and drive your father out of his trading post."

"I'm afraid General Braddock's defeat will cause us lots of trouble in the future. Mr. Risley was telling me that he had heard the Indians over at Plum Valley were as impudent as they could be. He said half a dozen of 'em made a settler named Hochstein give 'em all they wanted to eat and drink, and when the German found fault they flourished their tomahawks and told him all the settlers but the French were squaws and that he had better shut up or they'd scalp him and burn down his cabin."

"Yes, Sam Barrington was telling something about that, too, and he said he wouldn't be surprised to hear of an Indian uprising at any time. You see, the French are backing the redskins up in everything and that makes them bold. If I had my way, I'd get Colonel Washington to raise an army of three or four thousand men – the best frontiersmen to be found – and I'd chase every impudent Frenchman out of the country. We won't have peace till that is done, mark my words on it," concluded Henry Morris, emphatically.

David and Henry Morris were cousins, living with their folks on a clearing not far from what was then known as Will's Creek, now the town of Cumberland, Virginia. The two families consisted of Dave and his father, Mr. James Morris, who was a widower, and Mr. Joseph Morris, his wife Lucy, and three children, Rodney, the oldest, who was something of a cripple, Henry, who has just been introduced, and little Nell, the sunshine of the whole home.

In a former volume of this series, entitled "With Washington in the West," I related the particulars of how the two Morris families settled at Will's Creek, and how James Morris, after the loss of his wife, wandered westward, and established a trading-post on the Kinotah, one of the numerous branches of the Ohio River. In the meantime Dave, his son, fell in with George Washington, when the future President was a surveyor, and the youth helped to survey many tracts of land in the beautiful Shenandoah valley.

At this time the colonies of England and of France in America were having a great deal of trouble between themselves and with the Indians. Briefly stated, both England and France claimed all the territory drained by the Ohio and other nearby rivers, and the French sought in every possible way to drive out English traders who pushed westward.

The driving out of the English traders soon brought trouble to James Morris, and after being attacked by a band of Indians he was served with a notice from the French to quit his trading-post in three months' time or less. Unwilling to give up a profitable business, and half suspecting that the notice was the concoction of a rascally French trader named Jean Bevoir, and not an official

document, Mr. Morris sent Dave back to Winchester, that they might get the advice of Colonel Washington and other officials as to what was best to do.

When Dave arrived home he found that there was practically a state of war between the French and English. Washington was preparing to march against the enemy, and to get back to the trading post unaided was for the youth out of the question. Such being the case, Dave joined the Virginia Rangers under Washington, and with him went his cousin Henry, and both fought bravely at the defense of Fort Necessity, where Henry was badly wounded.

The defeat of the English at Fort Necessity was followed by bitter news for the Morrises. Sam Barringford, a well-known old trapper of that locality, and a great friend to the boys, came in one day badly used up and with the information that the trading-post had fallen under the combined attack of some French led by Jean Bevoir and some Indians led by a rascal named Fox Head, who was Bevoir's tool. James Morris had been taken prisoner and what had become of the trader Barringford could not tell.

Poor Dave, cut to the heart, was for looking for his father at once, and his relatives and Sam Barringford were equally eager. But the trading-post was miles away – through the dense forest and over the wild mountains – and the territory was now in the hands of the enemy. Under such circumstances all had to wait throughout the severe winter and following spring, a time that to the boy seemed an age.

General Braddock had been sent over from England to take charge of affairs against the French, and soon an expedition was organized having for its object the reduction of Fort Duquesne, which was built where the city of Pittsburg now stands. The expedition was composed of English grenadiers brought over by Braddock and several hundred Virginia Rangers, under Washington. With the rangers were Dave and Barringford. Henry wished to go, but was still too weak, and it was felt that Joseph Morris could not be spared from the homestead.

Braddock's bitter defeat in the vicinity of Fort Duquesne came as a great shock to all of the English colonies, and it was only by Colonel Washington's tact and gallantry, and the bravery of the rangers under him, that the retreating army was saved from total annihilation or capture. During this battle Dave was shot and captured, but his enemies soon after abandoned him in the woods, and while wandering around, more dead than alive he fell in with White Buffalo, a friendly Indian chief, and, later on, with Barringford and with his father, who had been a prisoner of the French since the fall of the trading post.

The home-coming of Dave and his father was viewed with great satisfaction by Joseph Morris and his family, who did all in their power to make the two sufferers comfortable. From Mr. Morris it was learned that the pelts stored at the trading post had been saved through the kindness of another English trader, so that the Frenchman, Jean Bevoir, and his Indian tool, Fox Head, had not gained much by the raid.

"I am certain that the raid was not the work of the French authorities," said James Morris. "But now the war is on they will of course stand up for everything Jean Bevoir and his followers have done. Nevertheless, I hold to it that the trading post, and the land staked out around it, is mine, and some day I shall lay claim to it."

"Right you are, brother," came from Joseph Morris. "And, so far as I am able, I will stand by you in the claim. But I am fearful that matters will be much worse before they are better."

"Oh, there's no doubt of that. This victory will make the French think they can walk right over us."

"Yes, and it will do more," put in Rodney, who was now a young man in years. "Many Indians have been wavering between taking sides with us or the enemy. Now many of these will stake fortunes with the victors, – that's the usual way." He stretched himself on his chair and gave a sigh. "I wish I was a little stronger, I'd join the army and fight 'em."

"We haven't any army to speak of now," resumed James Morris. "When I was last down at Winchester Colonel Washington had but a handful of soldiers, – all the rest having gone home to attend to their farms and plantations – and over at Will's Creek fort it was no better. The pay offered to the soldiers is so poor nobody cares to stay in the ranks. Patriotism seems to be at a low ebb."

"It's not such a lack of patriotism," said Joseph Morris. "None of our home soldiers liked the ways of the troops from England, and it made them mad to have their officers pushed down and Braddock's underlings pushed up. Even Washington had to remonstrate, although they tell me he was willing to fight no matter what position they gave him. And matters are going no better in the North. Either England and our colonies must wake up, or, ere we know it, all will be lost to the French and their Indian allies."

"What of the Indians?" put in Mrs. Morris. "Have those under White Buffalo gone over to the French?"

"White Buffalo's braves have not," answered her husband. "But the tribe is badly split up, and White Buffalo himself is nearly crazy over the matter. He says some of the old chiefs swear by the French while the younger warriors all cling to Washington. White Buffalo says that he himself will never lift a tomahawk against the English – and I feel certain he means it."

"White Buffalo is a real nice Indian," came from little Nell, who sat on the door-step playing. "Didn't he make me this doll? If they were all as good as he is I wouldn't be afraid a bit." And she hugged to her breast the crude wooden figure, the "heap big pappoose" with which White Buffalo had gained her childish confidence.

"Nor would I be afraid," came from Mrs. Morris. "But all Indians are not as kind and true as White Buffalo, and if they should ever go on the war-path and move this way – " She did not finish, but shook her head sadly.

"If they should come this way we will do our best to fight them off," said James Morris. "But let us hope it will never come to that. The butchery at the trading post was enough, I should not wish to see such doings around our homestead."

CHAPTER II

DEER AND INDIANS

Dave and Henry had left home an hour before, hoping to bring back with them at least one deer if not two. Henry was a great hunter, having brought down many a bird on the wing and squirrel on the run, and he knew that if he could only get a fair sight at a deer the game would be his. As old readers know, Dave was likewise a good shot, so it was likely that the youths would bring back something if any game showed itself.

It was a cool, clear day, with just a touch of snow on the ground, ideal weather for hunting, and as the boys pushed on each felt in excellent spirits despite the talk about the Indians. So far as they knew there was no Indian settlement within miles of them nor were there any wandering redskins within half a day's journey.

"Hullo, there go half a dozen rabbits!" cried Dave, presently, and pointed through a little clearing to their left.

"Don't shoot!" cried his cousin, although Dave had not raised his flint-lock musket. "If you do you'll scare the deer sure – if they are within hearing."

"I wasn't going to shoot, Henry. But just look at the beggars, sitting up and looking at us! I reckon they know they are safe."

"Since the fighting with the French there hasn't been much hunting through here, and so the game is quite tame. But they won't sit long – there they go now. Come."

The pair resumed their journey through the forest, Henry leading the way, for he had been over this trail several times before. Birds were numerous, and they could have filled their canvas bag with ease, had they felt inclined. But the minds of both were on the deer, and to Henry at least it was such game or nothing, although Dave might have contented himself with something smaller. Yet both knew that Mrs. Morris would look forward with pleasure to getting some fresh venison for her table.

At length the pair reached the lower creek which Henry had mentioned. Here the stream which flowed past the Morris homestead split into several arms, one flowing through a wide clearing and the others entering the forest and passing around a series of rough rocks and a cliff nearly fifty feet high. At this point the forest had never yet felt the weight of the white man's axe and trees had stood there until brought low by storm or the weight of years.

"Go slow now," whispered Henry, as he caught his cousin by the arm. "If they hear us the game is up."

"The wind is with us," returned Dave. Nevertheless, he slowed up as desired, and then the pair moved forward with extreme caution, each having seen to it that his firearm was ready for immediate use.

Suddenly Henry came to a halt and dropped almost flat behind a rock, and Dave instantly followed. Coming around a short turn they had caught sight of four deer, standing hoof-deep in the water drinking. All the heads were down, but as the youths looked in the direction that of an old buck came up with a jerk and he sniffed the air suspiciously.

"Take the nearest," whispered Henry, softly and quickly. "Ready?"

"Yes," was the low reply.

There was a second of silence and then the two guns spoke as one piece, the reports echoing and re-echoing throughout the mighty forest and along the cliff. The deer Henry had aimed at fell down in the water, plunging wildly in its dying agonies, while that struck by Dave hobbled painfully up the bank. The others, including the old buck, turned and sped off with the swiftness of the wind.

"Huzza! we have 'em!" shouted Henry. "Come on!" and he leaped to his feet with Dave beside him. Not far off a dead tree lay across the stream and they quickly climbed this, so as not to get their feet wet. When they gained the spot where the deer had been drinking they found Henry's quarry quite dead. The deer Dave had hit was thrashing around in some brushwood.

"I reckon he'll want another shot," said Dave, and reloaded his firearm with all speed. Then he primed up and approached the deer, but before he could pull trigger Henry stopped him.

"He don't need it," came from the older youth. "Save your powder and ball. I'll fix him."

Giving his gun to Dave, Henry rushed up behind the deer, at the same time drawing the long hunting knife he had lately gotten into the habit of carrying. Watching his chance he plunged the knife into the deer's throat. The stroke went true and soon the beast had breathed its last.

"Good for you," cried Dave, enthusiastically. "No use in talking, Henry, you were cut out for a hunter. You'll be as good as Sam Barrington if you keep on."

"Oh, you did about as well as I did, Dave," was the modest rejoinder. "But this is a prime haul, no use of talking. Mother will be tickled to death."

"I reckon we'll all be pleased – we haven't had deer meat for some time. But we're going to have some work getting these two carcasses home. No use of trying to get those other deer, is there?"

"Use? Not much! Why that old buck must be about two or three miles away by this time. Say, he was a big fellow, wasn't he? I should like to have had those horns, but I knew there was no use in fetching him down, – his meat would be too tough and strong."

"I fancy the best we can do is to make a drag for each deer and each pull his own load home," went on Dave. "If we leave one here the wolves and foxes will soon finish the meat."

"Yes, that's the only way. And we might as well hurry, for it is getting late and it will take us a good three hours to get back with such loads."

They were soon at work, Henry with his hunting knife and Dave with his pocket blade, cutting down some long, pliable brushwood which would make excellent drags for both loads. Their good luck put each in good humor, and as he worked Dave could not refrain from whistling, his favorite airs, being, as of old, "Lucy Locket Lost Her Pocket" and "The Pirate's Lady, O!"

The brushwood cut, they lost no time in binding their loads fast, and then Henry led the way along the watercourse, without crossing to the trail they had previously pursued.

"It's almost as near this way as the other," he said. "And I reckon it will be a bit easier pulling."

"Well, make it as easy as you can, Henry. It's no light load, I can tell you that. Sam Barrington was once telling me how he dragged three deer from Plum Valley to Risley's new place, over the snow. I don't see how he did it."

"Oh, it's easy when the crust of the snow is hard enough – the drag goes like a sled. But I admit Sam is a wonderfully powerful man."

"Indeed he is. Why, it was a sight to see – the way he fought when Red Fox and his followers attacked the trading post. He was a whole host in himself."

Inside of quarter of an hour they had reached a bend in the stream, and now Henry left the watercourse and pushed on over a low hill backed up by a series of rocks.

"It will be a slight pull up hill," he said. "But it will save us nearly half a mile. We can rest a few minutes when we get to the top. When we get up there I'll show you the spot where I saw those four bears three years ago."

"Don't know as I want to meet four bears just now."

"Oh, the spot isn't on this hill – it's on the hill to the left. Pow-wow Hill Sam Barrington called it. He said it used to be a great Indian resort when the Miamies were in this neighborhood. But the redskins from Shunrum came and drove 'em out."

The top of the rise gained, Dave was glad enough to rest, and both sat down on the trunk of a fallen monarch of the forest, the home now of some chipmunks that fled quickly at their approach.

"There is the spot where I saw the bears," said Henry, pointing with his hand to a clump of trees on the next hill, quite a distance away. "They were in a bunch under that – Hullo! What can that mean?" He broke off short. "Down behind the tree, Dave! Quick!"

The sudden note of alarm was not lost on Dave and in a twinkling both the young hunters were crouched behind the fallen tree. Dave caught his gun and placed his hand on the trigger, but Henry shoved the barrel of the piece downward.

"What did you see?" came from the younger of the youths.

"Indians!" was the short reply. Henry peeped carefully forth. "Yes, sir, Indians, just as sure as you are born. Look for yourself."

"By the king, but you're right!" exclaimed Dave, in excitement. "Two, three – I see four of them."

"I think I saw a fifth – behind that rock to the right. Yes, there he is."

"Can you make out what they are?"

"No, excepting that they are none of White Buffalo's tribe."

"If they don't belong in this neighborhood they are here for no good," said Dave, decidedly.

"I agree with you there, Dave. Possibly they are on a hunt. But why should they come here when there is better game further west?"

"If they are on a hunt it's not for wild animals," came from Dave, significantly. "Have they got their war paint on?"

"I can't see them clearly enough for that."

For several minutes both youths remained silent, watching the distant Indians as they moved around. They had evidently killed some wild animal, although what it was the watchers could not make out.

"If they shot anything it must have been before we reached this neighborhood," said Henry, presently. "I heard no reports."

"Nor I. But never mind that. What shall we do?"

"I don't know, excepting to go home with our game and report them. I don't care to let them see us, do you?"

"Not if they are enemies, and I reckon they are."

"Do you suppose they spotted us?"

"I think not – although you can never tell, they are that cute. They may have a spy working his way over here at this very minute."

"Then let us go on without delay."

It was easy to say this, but how to proceed without being noticed was a problem. Henry's deer lay behind the fallen tree, but Dave's was in front and the younger hunter did not wish to leave his game behind him.

"I'm going to risk it," said Dave, and crawling cautiously around the stump-end of the fallen tree he reached forth and caught one of the ends of the drag. But the task was a difficult one and as he pulled the deer slipped to the ground and the end of the tree branch was suddenly raised high in the air.

"Drop it," cried Henry, and Dave did so. "They must have seen that, Dave. See, two of them are looking this way. We had better clear out and be quick about it."

"I'm going to have that deer," returned the younger hunter, and catching the game by the hind legs he dragged it behind the tree. Then both boys hurried down the opposite side of the hill with all speed. Here they placed both deer on the single drag and continued on their way homeward with all possible speed.

CHAPTER III

DISCOVERY AND PURSUIT

It must be confessed that both youths were thoroughly alarmed, and with good reason. Since Braddock's defeat they had heard of the uprising of the Indians at Nancoke, Lusher's Run, Willowbury, and several other small settlements, and had heard of the murder of several German families twenty-five miles to the north of Will's Creek fort, and the murder of Lee Cass, and his wife and four children, thirty miles down the valley. The outbreaks had not resulted from any united efforts on the Indians part, but there was no telling how soon the different tribes would dig up the war hatchet and descend upon all the frontier settlements in force and simultaneously.

From the top of the hill Henry had expected to go straight home, but this course would necessitate the crossing of a clearing quarter of a mile in extent and such a path he now deemed unwise to take.

"If they are following us, it will be dead easy for them to spot us in the open," he said. "We had better stick to the forest. Of course they can follow the trail of the drag easily enough, but I hate to think of giving up so much meat, – after we had such a journey to bring it down."

"Don't let's give it up yet," pleaded Dave. The deer was the largest he had yet laid low, and he was correspondingly proud of the showing. "Perhaps they aren't after us at all."

On they went, traveling as fast as their somewhat tired limbs permitted. There was another rise to cross, beyond which was a watercourse leading down to the rear of their homestead.

"I think I know where there is a rough raft to be found," said Henry. "And if I can find it, we can place the deer on that and tow them home. We may get wet, but it will be easy work and we can make quicker time than over the ground."

"Right you are, Henry, and remember, water leaves no trail," responded Dave.

They were soon at the side of the stream, which at this point was several feet deep and five to ten yards wide. The banks were thickly overhung with bushes, now, however, bare of leaves. At one spot was an inlet and here Henry pointed out the raft he had mentioned, a crude affair of four short logs lashed together with willow withes.

"We can pull that with ease," said Dave, as he surveyed the affair. "Come, let us dump the deer aboard at once. We can wade along the bank and – ."

He broke off short and clutched his cousin's arm. His glance had strayed up the stream to a bend several rods away and there he had seen the prow of an Indian canoe and the headgear of several painted warriors.

"By ginger! More Indians!" ejaculated Henry, and both dropped flat on top of their dead game. "How many did you see, Dave?"

"Three or four, – and there are several more!"

"Yes, and they are in their war-paint! Dave, do you know what I think?"

"That they are on the war-path? Oh, Henry, if that is so – ." Dave did not finish, but looked anxiously at his cousin.

"If that is so, it means that every homestead for miles around is in danger. And we haven't a single soldier within fifty miles!" added the older youth, with almost a groan.

All the while they were talking they kept their eyes on the Indians, and they now saw the redmen come out on the stream and cross to the side they occupied. Then of a sudden the warriors sent up a shout calculated to strike terror to their hearts.

"They have discovered us! They are after us!" burst from Dave's lips. "What shall we do?"

"We've got to run for it," was Henry's answer. "Hurry up, before it's too late."

"But the deer – ."

"We'll have to let them go. Come!"

Side by side they darted into the forest back of the watercourse and made their way with all possible speed between bushes, trees and rocks. There was no trail and neither knew exactly where he was going. Once Dave tripped on some roots and pitched headlong, but he picked himself up in a hurry and, panting for breath, kept on as before.

The retreat of the two young hunters came none too quick, for scarcely had they reached the shelter of the wood when several of the Indians let fly with their arrows, one of which almost clipped Henry's shoulder. This fixed the situation beyond all dispute.

"They are on the war-path, or they wouldn't fire on us," said Dave. "Are you winged?"

"No, but it was a pretty close aim. Who can they be?"

"I believe they are some of Fox Head's dirty band. If they catch us I believe they'll kill us."

"Or keep us to torture," answered the older youth. "But they are not going to catch us if I can help it – and I think I can."

While the two were talking they sped on and on, deeper and deeper into the forest. Both wished to turn in the direction of home, but did not dare do so, fearing the Indians would be waiting to head them off.

At the start the shouts of their pursuers had sounded unpleasantly close but now they died out utterly. But whether the redskins had given up the chase or were coming on in silence they could not tell.

"I don't think they'll give up so quick," was Henry's comment, as they paused a few seconds to get their breath. "I reckon they've found it doesn't pay to yell. We may get another volley of arrows before we know it."

Once more they went on. Their course was now in a wide semi-circle, calculated to bring them up in the clearing on the east side of their homestead.

"We'll pass Uriah Risley's new cabin," said Dave. "It is our duty to warn him of this danger. He isn't much of an Indian hunter, and if the redskins come here he and his wife will be at their mercy."

Uriah Risley was an Englishman who had settled in the vicinity with his wife several years before. When Dave was once on a trip to Annapolis with his uncle the two had stopped at Risley's home and been agreeably entertained. Since that time, the Englishman, having grown more accustomed to pioneer life, had moved further westward and built himself a cabin twice as large as that previously occupied. But though the man was a good farmer and wood cutter, he was a poor marksman and hunter, and both he and his wife lived in dread of large wild animals and unfriendly Indians.

As said before, night was coming on, and under the lofty trees it was dark. They had now to pick their way with care, for fear of falling into some dangerous hole. Half a mile more was covered when Henry called a halt. Dave was glad of this for he had stepped on a loose stone but a moment before and given his ankle a nasty twist.

"I'm wondering which is the most direct road to Risley's," said the older youth.

"I believe that is the direction," answered Dave, pointing with his hand.

"I reckon you are right, Dave. And how far do you calculate we are from his cabin?"

"The best part of a mile."

"I agree again. Let us take a direct course. The Indians must be far to the rear – if they haven't given up the chase altogether."

A few minutes later they were again tearing their way through the forest, the growth being here so thick they could scarcely pass. Overhead a slight breeze was blowing, but they felt little of this. Far to the westward the sun was slowly sinking behind the mountains, casting long shadows across the tree-tops. Here and there the night birds were tuning up, but otherwise all was as quiet as a graveyard.

The coming of night, and the gravity of their situation, made the boys thoughtful, and for a long while not a word was spoken. Henry was thinking of his parents and his sister and brother, and wondering if they were yet in peril, while Dave's thoughts turned to his father, who had said that morning that he intended to go to Will's Creek fort on business. Was his parent at the fort, and would the soldiers there get news of the coming Indian raid?

Both of the young hunters were thus deep in thought when Henry espied a light directly in front of them. They had just come over a rise of ground and found the light in a hollow between several rocks. It was an Indian encampment, and around the blaze were seated fully a score of warriors, smoking their long pipes, and listening to the speech being made by a tall chief who stood in their midst.

"More Indians!" muttered Henry, and threw himself flat. "The neighborhood seems to be full of them. Dave, this means an awful uprising! We must get back as fast as we can and warn everybody!"

"I have seen some of those Indians before," whispered the younger youth. "They were in the band that attacked the trading post while father came on here. They belong to Fox Head's band and I believe that is Fox Head himself addressing them, for he had a fox's head trailing over his shoulder, and a fox brush among his head feathers. I'd like to shoot him where he stands. He deserves it, – for all he has done to injure us." And Dave gave his gun a sudden tight clutch which was very suggestive.

"No! no!" interposed his cousin. "If you dropped him the whole pack would be on us like so many wolves. The only thing we can do is to get away and give warning. Let us crawl back to the other side of the rise and go around."

Without delay they started to do as Henry had advised. It was no easy matter, for the brushwood was thick and the rocks sharp and uneven. They had not gone a distance of fifty feet when Henry struck a loose stone and sent it bumping down over a dozen others.

Instantly half a dozen Indians leaped to their feet and the speech of the leading Indian came to a sudden end.

"The game is up!" cried Dave. "Let us run!" And run they did, as fast as the darkness and the nature of the ground would permit. The Indians came after them, calling on them to halt and then sending forth several arrows and a gun-shot, none of which, however, took effect.

"We are in for it now!" panted Dave, as they came to a halt in a small clearing, hedged in on all sides by rocks and dense thickets. "I'm sure I don't know how to turn, do you?"

"If it comes to the worst, we can take a stand against these rocks," answered his cousin, grimly. "But, come, I think I see an opening."

He moved over to the rocks and stepped cautiously into the darkness. There was an opening they had not noticed before, a crevice several feet wide and both deep and long. Into this he squeezed, and Dave came after him. They pushed forward among the dead vines, leaves and rubbish for a distance of thirty feet, and then halted in what would have been a small cave had it not been for the slit of an opening at the top. With bated breath they waited, while their pursuers gradually grew closer.

CHAPTER IV

BURNING OF THE CABIN

It was not long before the two young hunters heard the Indians quite plainly. Evidently the redmen did not deem it necessary to advance with more than ordinary caution for they conversed with each other in a low tone, to which Dave and Henry listened with interest, although they could understand little of what was said.

Presently one warrior took up a position in front of the crevice and not over five yards from where the youths lay concealed. Evidently he was listening for some sound from them, and they hardly dared to breathe. As might be expected Dave at that instant felt a strong inclination to sneeze, but he suppressed the desire, although almost bursting a blood vessel in consequence.

Soon another Indian came up and then a third. A talk lasting several minutes followed, and one warrior started to light a torch. But the others stopped this, fearing it might draw the fire of the whites. Then one redman shifted to the right, another to the left, while a third crawled up over the rocks and through the bushes growing above the opening.

By the time the Indians were out of hearing, and they dared to breathe more freely, the darkness of night had settled heavily and high overhead the stars came peeping forth one by one. They waited a little longer and then Henry caught Dave by the arm.

"What do you think?" he whispered. "Are they gone?"

"I think so," returned the younger lad. "But there is no telling when they will be back. Still I reckon we had better get out of here."

"I agree. But we can't take the course we were following. I think the best we can do is to turn further to the left and strike Risley's from the west," added Henry.

Dave was willing, and as cautiously as possible they climbed back out of the crevice the way they had come. Just as Dave was about to step into the clearing a sudden whirr of noise caused him to jerk back.

"What's that?" came quickly from his cousin.

"Some wild animal," was the answer after a pause.

"Did it attack you?"

"No, but it came pretty close. I thought first it was an Indian leaping up out of the grass."

They moved off, side by side, and each with his gun ready for use. As Henry was the hunter of the Morris family and knew the forest better than anyone, Dave allowed him to do such guiding as seemed necessary. They pursued their course over one rise and then another, and after that followed the windings of a tiny brook which Henry said ran to within gun-shot of the Risley homestead.

They were just making a bend of the watercourse when another wild animal started up directly under Henry's feet. It was a fox resting in a hollow log, and in its anxiety to get away the animal struck against Dave's legs, upsetting him.

"Oh!" cried Dave as he went down. "Help! shoot him!"

"It's a fox!" ejaculated Henry, and as the animal shot past him he made a dive and caught the beast by the brush. The fox gave a snarl and tried to bite him, but ere the head came around the young hunter swung the fox in a circle and brought him down with a dull thud on the log. The first blow was followed by another, which crushed the beast's skull as though it were an egg-shell.

"There! he'll never bother anybody again," said Henry, as he threw the beast down. "Wish I had time to skin him. But we had better not lose a minute."

"Henry, you're a wonder of a hunter!" burst out Dave. "I don't believe I could have done that. It was much better than shooting him, for it saved powder and saved making a noise too."

"Sam Barringford taught me that trick – although not on a fox. I once saw him hammer the life out of a limping wolf that way, and he often catches up snakes by the tail and snaps their heads off, whip fashion."

Leaving the fox where it had fallen, they continued on their way along the stream until a tiny clearing was gained. Beyond this was a belt of tall and heavy timber, which, on the opposite side, marked the boundary of Uriah Risley's new land claim, one he had obtained, through Colonel Washington, from old Lord Fairfax, who still resided at Greenway Court.

"I see a light!" said Dave, as they stopped on the edge of the timber. "Look!"

Henry did so. It was a small blaze, apparently, and in the direction where stood Risley's cabin.

"Can that be an Indian camp-fire?" went on the younger hunter.

"I don't think so, Dave. It's worse than that."

"Worse? Oh, Henry, do you think it is Risley's cabin that is burning?"

"Just what I do think. See, the flame is growing brighter. Either it's the cabin or that cattle shed he has been building. Come on; we'll soon know."

Henry now set off on a run through the timber, picking the way with all the skill of an old frontiersman. Dave kept close behind his cousin. As they advanced they saw the fire more plainly and beheld it spread out and mount further skyward. It was Uriah Risley's cabin beyond a doubt, and now the new cattle shed had caught and was also being consumed by the devouring element.

"This is the work of the redskins," panted Henry, as they leaped over rough rocks and tore their way through a clump of saplings. "And it proves beyond a doubt that they are on the war-path."

While he was speaking a gun-shot sounded out, coming from a great distance. Another report followed and then all became as silent as before.

"That must be Risley, or somebody else, fighting the Indians off," said Dave. "We'll have to be careful or we'll run into a trap."

"Keep in the timber," answered Henry. "For all we know there may be a hundred redskins in this vicinity. Hark! They are around the cabin sure enough."

They listened and amid the crackling of the flames they now heard the whooping and yelling of a score of Indians, while the flickering glare showed to them the dusky forms moving in one direction and another. Some of the Indians had found a demijohn of liquor belonging to the Englishman and were gulping this down in great glee, while others paraded around with various spoils of war in their hands.

"I'd like to give 'em a shot – they deserve it," muttered Dave.

"Don't you do it," interposed Henry, hastily. "They'd be on us like a wind-fall."

"What do you suppose has become of Mr. Risley and his wife?"

"Heaven alone knows, Dave. I trust they have escaped."

"If that was Mr. Risley shooting, do you suppose his wife is with him?"

"There is no telling. Perhaps he wasn't home when the Indians came up. If that's so then Mrs. Risley is either dead or a prisoner."

"Was she alone?"

"I think so – at least I didn't hear of anybody going over lately."

"I wonder if we can't get a bit closer without being seen? Perhaps we can learn something to our advantage."

"We might skirt the timber a bit. But be careful, and if the Indians come for us we had better run without stopping to fire, – unless, of course, they get too close," added Henry.

Once again he led the way, slowly and cautiously, flitting from one tree to another in absolute silence. The fire was now at its height, lighting up the sky for a long distance around. The sparks were blowing in their direction, but the light fall of snow had wet the trees and brushwood, so no harm was done.

Presently they found themselves again close to the brook, which at this point crossed a garden patch that Uriah Risley had gotten into shape the season before. At the side of the brook was a roughly constructed milk-house, made of large stones for walls and untrimmed timbers for a roof. Behind this the boys crouched, to take another view of what was going on in the center of the clearing.

The Indians who had been drinking from the demijohn were growing hilarious and their wild whooping could be heard for a long distance. At the start of the fire some furniture had been hauled forth, a chest of drawers and a bureau, and now some of the redmen set to work to break open both articles, to see what they contained.

"They are after everything of value they can lay hands on," muttered Dave. "What a shame! Do you see anything of – ?"

The young hunter broke off short, for at that instant came a low moan of pain from the interior of the milk-house.

"Are you – you white people!" came in a gasp. "If you are, for the love of heaven – sa – save me!"

"It's Mrs. Risley!" burst out Dave, for he remembered that voice well. He raised his head up to a crack in the rude planking. "Mrs. Risley, are you alone?" he questioned. "It is I, Dave Morris, who is speaking."

"Dave Morris!" A groan followed. "Oh, Davy, lad, save me, won't you? I am almost dead!"

"I'll do what I can for you, Mrs. Risley. My cousin Henry is with me. We were out hunting when the Indians almost captured us. The woods are full of them. Is Mr. Risley around?"

"No, he went to Will's Creek on business. I saw the Indians coming and I tried to run away. But they shot at me with their arrows and one passed through my left shoulder. Then I pretended to go into the house and hide, and when they came in I leaped through a back window and ran for this place. I got into the water up to my shoulders and pulled a bit of a board over my head, to keep out of sight. They came down here and I thought sure they'd find me, but they did not. But I am nearly perished with the cold, and the wound from the arrow has made me very faint. You will help me, won't you?"

"To be sure we'll help you," put in Henry. "But all we can do at present is to lead you into the woods, and you can have my dry jacket if you want it. We had better start directly for our house."

"I see a glare of a fire. Have they – they – ?" The poor woman could not finish.

"Yes, I am sorry to say the cabin is about burnt up," said Dave. "But come, if your husband isn't around, we had better not waste time here. We may be needed at home. It may be just as bad there, you know."

Both of the young hunters crawled around to the milk-house door and went inside. The board was quickly raised and they helped Mrs. Risley from the watery hole in which she had been squatting with her chin resting on her knees. She was so chilled and stiff, and so weak from her wound, she could scarcely stand, and they had literally to carry her into the timber whence they had come.

CHAPTER V

UPRISING OF THE INDIANS

Supporting Mrs. Risley between them, the two youths did not stop until they had passed into the timber for a distance of five or six rods. They had crossed the stream once more and now reached a slight knoll from which they could see the cabin, which still blazed away, although the roof and one side had fallen in.

The faint light from the conflagration, sifting through the bare tree branches, was the only light they had, and by this they set the sufferer down and proceeded to make her as comfortable as possible. As fortune would have it, Dave wore two jackets, both somewhat thin. One of these he gave to Henry, who in turn gave his thick jacket to Mrs. Risley.

"You – you are quite sure you can spare it?" she asked.

"Yes, yes," answered Henry. "I am sorry I can't give you something to put over your dress, but I haven't anything. Before you put on the jacket let me bind up that arrow wound."

There was now no time to stand upon ceremony and she allowed him to dress the wound with all the skill he could muster, Dave in the meantime keeping watch, that the Indians might not surprise them. Fortunately Henry, having suffered similarly himself, knew what to do, and after he had finished Mrs. Risley announced that the sore place felt greatly relieved.

"But I don't see how I can travel far," she said, trying to stand up. "My limbs are all in a tremble under me."

"We will help you along," said Henry, sympathetically, and Dave echoed the words.

With the wounded woman between them, it was no easy matter to pick their way through the black forest and more than once one or another stumbled over a tree root or into a hole. Looking back, they saw that the fire was now dying down. The whooping of the redmen also lessened and finally ceased altogether.

"I know you wish to get home," panted Mrs. Risley, presently. "But – but – I cannot go – go another step!" And with these words she pitched forward and would have gone in a heap had not their strong youthful arms supported her.

"She has fainted," said Henry, "and it is not to be wondered at. Come, here is something of a shelter in between the rocks and those trees. We may as well let her rest there, for we cannot carry her all the way home."

"But the delay – " began Dave.

"Surely you don't wish to leave her to her fate, Dave?"

"No! no! You know me better than that, Henry, but I was thinking of those left at home. They may be in trouble, too, and if so they will need us."

"I've been thinking of a plan. I'm stronger than you and perhaps I can get her along alone, after she recovers. Can you find the house from here?"

"I think I can. The creek is just beyond that next patch of timber, isn't it?"

"Yes, in that direction." Henry pointed with his hand. "If you find everything all right you might bring father back to help – if he isn't afraid the Indians will arrive in the meantime."

So it was arranged, and without loss of another moment Dave started on his solitary way through the somber woods, now as silent as the grave, for the wind had gone down and the last of the night birds had given their final calls.

Under ordinary circumstances Dave would have been sleepy, for the day's tramping had been sufficient to tire anybody, but now all thoughts of rest were banished and he was as alert as ever as he stole forward, gun before him, and his eyes shifting from one dark object to another, on the lookout for a possible enemy.

Dave was in the midst of the next patch of timber, – some beautiful walnuts and chestnuts, – when he saw something glimmer through the darkness far to his left. He was immediately interested, wondering what the light could be. He came to a halt and gazed attentively in the direction.

"It must be an Indian camp-fire," he mused. "What a lot of the redskins there must be in this vicinity!"

He was about to move on, giving the fire a wide berth, when something prompted him to turn toward it, to make sure that it was not the encampment of friends. It might possibly be Barringford or some other trapper in the woods, and if so to pass him by would be far from wise, since such a person might be able to afford just the assistance needed.

Careful of every footstep taken, Dave gradually drew close to the camp-fire. There was a small, dry clearing, fringed by a series of low rocks, and behind these rocks the young hunter crouched. The sight that met his gaze held him spell-bound.

The camp-fire in the center of the clearing was divided into two parts, one to the east and the other to the west. That in the east was beset with sharp stakes while its companion was being used for cooking purposes.

Around both camp-fires were fully thirty Indians; all more than ordinarily hideous in their daubs of red, blue, and yellow war paint, and their crowns of colored feathers and strings of animals' teeth and human scalps. The redmen had been marching around the camp-fires but now they halted and all sank cross-legged upon the soil.

Suddenly, after a second of silence, one Indian, tall and straight, leaped to his feet and holding his arms out at full length before him began to rock his body from side to side. Then he ran for one of the fires, and pulling a sharp stick from its place in the ground smote the burning end on his breast.

"This is the fear Spotted Wolf has for the English," he cried, in his native tongue. "Even as he has pulled this stake from the ground so will he pull the English from their cabins and burn them at the stake. The English shall flee at the sound of his war whoop, and the children of the English shall die of fright when he draws near. The French are our friends but the English will be our enemies so long as one of them is allowed to live. I will go forward to kill! Spotted Wolf has spoken."

He sat down, and immediately another warrior leaped up and with another burning stick went through the same performance. "I am called Black Eagle," he cried, "because I have eyes that never sleep and a strength handed down to me from Elk Heart, my father, and Janassarion, my grandfather, he who slew the mighty Little Thunder of the Delawares. Our medicine men have spoken and the English must be driven out like wolves in the winter season. If we allow them this land, and the French the land to the north and the west, where shall the Indian find his hunting ground when he would hunt, and where raise his wigwam when he would rest with his squaw and his children? I, too, will kill and burn until our land knows them no longer! I have the strength of ten white men and I will use it. Black Eagle has spoken."

He had not yet finished when two others sprang up, followed by others, until nearly all were again on their feet, talking of their alleged wrongs and boasting of their strength, and promising each other to do all in their power to wipe out all English settlers west of the Blue Ridge mountains. The bragging was often ludicrous, yet it was easy to see that the Indians were working themselves up into a state of mind where they would hesitate at nothing in order to accomplish their purpose.

Dave could understand only a few words of what was said, yet, from having such scenes described to him by his father and Sam Barringford, he knew that this was a "big war talk," as White Buffalo called them. Once he fancied he heard his Uncle Joe's name mentioned and his heart almost stopped beating. Surely they must be planning an attack on his home, and that for very soon!

"I must get back and give the warning!" he told himself. "Henry will have to do the best he can with Mrs. Risley. If they get to the cabin and kill Uncle Joe, what will become of Rodney, Aunt Lucy and little Nell? Oh, I must get back!"

Turning, he crawled from the spot with care, and once back into the timber, commenced to run, with his gun slung over his shoulder and his hands held out before him, to keep from running afoul of any obstruction. More than once he bumped into a tree or fell sprawling over some exposed roots, knocking the wind out of him. But he always picked himself up and went on again with undiminished speed. Indeed, the nearer he got to home the greater was his fear that something might have happened in his absence and finally he fairly flew, when he reached familiar ground.

"Hi! who goes there?"

It was a call from close at hand and it made Dave jump as though stung by a snake. He whirled around, to behold a man behind a tree, a leveled gun in his hands.

"Don't shoot!" he called out, for he fancied he knew the voice. "Is that you, Mr. Risley?"

"Yes. Dave Morris, is it not?"

"Yes." Dave ran to meet the Englishman. "Tell me quickly is everything all right over to our house?"

"It was all right when I left, an hour or so ago, lad. But your uncle had been talking to Hans Lomann and said the German had heard of something of an Indian uprising."

At this Dave gave a sigh of relief. But immediately his heart sank, at the thought of the news he had to impart to his friend.

"The Indians are rising, all over this section of the country. They attacked your cabin."

"My cabin!" The Englishman could scarcely utter the words. "Davy, is it the truth? And what of my wife – tell me quickly!"

"Your wife is safe, although she got an arrow through the shoulder. The redskins attacked the cabin and set fire to it. She leaped out of a rear window and hid in the milk-house. Henry and I came up just in time to get her into the woods. We ran as far as we could and then she fainted. Henry said he would stay with her and told me to come on and give the alarm. We were afraid the Indians had attacked our place, although we didn't hear any shooting or see any fire."

"Then the cabin is destroyed? But never mind that. You are sure the wound wasn't fatal?"

"Quite sure, for Henry dressed it as well as he could. But she was very weak from having been in the water under the milk-house floor so long."

"And where are they now?"

"About a mile or more from here – in that direction. But you want to be careful. There are Indians all around here – one band is over yonder holding a war talk – and I'm sure they'll show you no mercy if they catch you."

The Englishman nodded his head half a dozen times. "I know it, lad, I know it. They are a bloodthirsty set. Sometimes I am sorry I came to this country to settle among them. But times were bad with us in old England, and we had to do something. But you'll take me to my wife, won't you, that's a brave lad."

"I – I don't know," faltered Dave. He was still anxious to go home. "Perhaps you can find them alone."

"I'm not equal to it, lad – the forest is almost as much of a mystery to me as the day I landed here. Do come, and then we can all go back to your home with all possible speed."

The young hunter could see that Uriah Risley was sorely distressed, and unwilling to add to the man's misery, he consented to go back, although he knew the way was full of ever-increasing perils. Soon they were on the way, and tired as he was Dave set a pace that caused the settler to puff and blow to keep up with him.

CHAPTER VI

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HENRY

It must be confessed that though he walked swiftly, Dave's heart was anything but light. Turn the subject as he might he felt it "in his bones," as he afterward declared, that a big uprising was close at hand and that this might mean the wiping out of every pioneer for scores of miles around.

"The soldiers at Will's Creek fort and at Winchester ought to know of this," he observed to Uriah Risley. "Someone will have to carry the news."

"Perhaps someone has already done so," was the Englishman's answer. He heaved a sigh. "So the cabin is to the ground. Alack! it was a sorry day when I pushed to the front instead of taking up ground close to Winchester, as the good housewife wanted me to." And he shook his head dolefully.

In moving toward the spot where he had left Henry and Mrs. Risley, Dave took great care to steer clear of the camp-fires of the various Indians he had encountered. This was no easy task and more than once they came close to running into a "hornet's nest," as he called it.

Once Uriah Risley gave a cry of alarm and came close to discharging his firearm. A wolf had slunk across their path in the darkness and the Englishman took the form to be that of a sneaking Indian.

"A redskin! He will scalp us!" he cried, and was on the point of pulling the trigger when Dave stopped him.

"No! no! It's only a wolf!" cried the youth. "Don't waste your powder and ball. Besides, a shot will arouse every Indian for quarter of a mile around."

"A wolf? So it must have been." Uriah Risley drew a long breath and lowered his musket. "He gave me a good scare, I must vow."

"Hush! It won't do to talk so loud," went on the boy. "For all we know the Indians may be trailing us and be ready to pounce on us at any moment."

These words caused the Englishman to glance back apprehensively, and hurry on faster than ever. "It's a beastly woods," he said. "I wish we were out of it."

"We are safer here than in a clearing," was the answer. "Come close behind me and keep quiet, and I think we'll be safe."

On and on they went. Dave's lower limbs ached and trembled under him, for he was now almost fagged out and it was only will-power that kept him up. Slowly they climbed the last rise of ground. At a distance glowed the dying embers of a camp-fire.

"There's a redskins' nest," said the youth, as he paused for a moment. "But it looks as if they had deserted the place."

"Then we'll have to be doubly cautious, lad. They may be scattered in this vicinity."

"You are right. But I hope not, for we are now close to where I left your wife and Henry."

With added caution Dave crept forward another couple of hundred feet. Then he stopped and peered around him in perplexity.

"What is it, lad?"

"They are gone!"

"Gone?"

"Yes, gone."

"You are certain this is the spot?"

"I am. I know it well, by this fallen tree and that rock. They have moved to another quarter – or else –"

"Or else the redskins have attacked them and carried them off," finished Uriah Risley. He gave a groan. "Oh, lad, what is best to do now? Tell me, for you are better versed to this sort of thing than I."

"I – I don't know what to do," faltered the young hunter, staring first at the helpless man before him and then at the gloomy surroundings. "Wait a minute, and keep your hands on your gun. But don't shoot me or Henry or your wife by mistake."

Leaving Risley in the center of the little opening Dave started to walk around in a wide circle. He did this with extreme caution, his head bent close to the ground and his eyes noting every root and rock that covered his path. Then he took another circle, still wider, and at last came back to where his companion stood, the picture of misery and despair.

"I found nothing," he said, in reply to the Englishman's questioning. "They are gone, and I don't believe there are any Indians close to us. I'm going to make a light and risk it."

He brought forth his flint and tinder and soon had a tiny light, which he applied to some dry leaves and then a stick of wood which was full of pine pitch. This latter made a fairly good torch, and holding it close to the ground he continued the search.

Suddenly he uttered a cry of horror. He had come to a spot where the ground was torn up by many footprints. Close at hand was a white birch tree and on its bark were several spots of deep red.

"There has been a fight," he said, as Uriah Risley came closer. "See how they struggled. There is blood on the tree and there is a bit of cloth torn from Henry's jacket – or rather, the jacket I left him." Dave gave a deep shudder. "I – I wonder if Henry is dead?"

"My wife, my poor, poor Caddy!" moaned Uriah Risley, and for a moment covered his face with his hands. "Oh, lad, this is monstrous, monstrous! Heaven help her if she is in the power of such savages!"

"Yes, heaven help them both," returned Dave.

Torch in hand, the youth followed a bloody trail through the forest until it ended abruptly by the side of one of the numerous streams in that vicinity. Here he came to a halt, and as Risley rejoined him both stared vacantly at each other.

"Well?" said the Englishman.

"They went up or down the stream," answered Dave. "But which way I can't say. But one thing is certain – neither of them was killed."

"How do you know that?"

"If they were we should have found their bodies. The Indians wouldn't bother to carry 'em off. They'd simply scalp 'em and let it go at that."

"Perhaps they threw the – the bodies into the water."

Dave shook his head. "No, I'm pretty certain they carried 'em off as prisoners."

There was an awkward pause and something like a lump arose in Dave's throat. If Henry was a prisoner and the Indians were on the war-path this could mean but one thing for the youth – burning at the stake or some similar torture. The silence was broken by Uriah Risley.

"It's a burning shame, lad, an outrage. But what can we do now?"

"I don't know what to do excepting to go home and give the alarm. It won't do any good to stay here. The Indians may fall on us half a hundred strong – just as they most likely fell on Henry and your wife."

"But – but I cannot desert my poor wife, my beloved Caddy. She is all the world to me. I'd rather die myself than see a hair of her head injured."

"Then you had better continue the hunt, while I go home. If you should fall in with 'em tell Henry how matters stand. But, Mr. Risley, let me caution you not to be rash, if you catch sight of Mrs. Risley in the hands of the redskins. If you give them the chance they'll burn you at the stake – and it won't help her a bit either."

"I'll try to be cautious, lad. I hate to have you go, but I suppose after all it's for the best. Do what you can to save Mrs. Morris and little Nell and the rest. Leave me the torch. I'll go up and down the stream a bit and investigate."

A minute more and they had parted, shaking hands in a fashion that meant a great deal. Perhaps they would never again meet in this world. Dave turned away and stole off silently, his eyes staring straight ahead and his throat working convulsively. Ah, how little do the boys of to-day, living in their comfortable homes and surrounded with every luxury and convenience, realize how much their great-grandfathers of those days had to endure in the shape of privation and peril!

So tired that he could scarcely drag one limb after the other, Dave pursued his course through the forest. Fortunately his "bump of locality" was well developed and there was small danger of his getting totally lost, even though he might go more or less astray. It was now beginning to snow again, but it was so warm that the particles of white melted as soon as they fell. Not a star was to be seen anywhere and the way was blacker than ever.

Reaching the first rise of ground, the youth felt compelled to rest and threw himself at the foot of a large tree with his musket across his knees, ready for use should he be surprised. Once or twice his eyes closed in spite of his efforts to keep them open. But he invariably straightened up, determined to keep awake at all hazards.

"I'll not rest until I know all at home are safe," he told himself. "I must get along somehow." And he staggered up and continued his course.

He had not gone over a rod when he saw something dark moving ahead. The object looked like a pair of Indians, coming slowly toward him, and his heart leaped into his throat. He raised his gun and pointed it.

But ere he was called on to fire he saw the object more distinctly and uttering something of a cry of joy he lowered his weapon and rushed forward.

"Widgeon!" burst from his lips, and in a moment more he had hold of the mane of one of Uriah Risley's horses – an animal that had escaped from the Indians when the shed was set on fire. "Where did you come from? How lucky I am to find you!"

The horse seemed to recognize Dave, for he gave a low whinny and rubbed his cold nose on the youth's jacket sleeve. A broken halter dangled from his neck, but he possessed neither saddle nor bridle. He was covered with a cold moisture, showing that he had run considerably after having broken away.

Having found the horse Dave's spirits arose a little. He led the animal forward and struck out for a new route homeward, longer than that which he had been pursuing but free from thickets and pitfalls. As soon as he thought it safe to do so he leaped upon Widgeon's back, spoke to the horse, and set off on a comfortable jog, which later on, when the ground became more familiar, he increased to a gallop.

Once Dave fancied he heard Indians in pursuit and holding on to Widgeon's mane with one hand, drew up his gun with the other. But the noises died away in the distance, and after that came no more alarms. At last he came in sight of home and found to his joy that it remained as he had left it, undisturbed.

CHAPTER VII

A DOUBLE WARNING

As my old readers know, the cabin of the Morris family was located in a wide clearing, between a fair-sized creek and a brook flowing into the larger stream. When we saw it before, it was a long, low but comfortable building, containing four rooms on the ground floor, and a loft under the sloping roof which was principally used for the storage of winter supplies.

During the past summer Mr. Joseph Morris had made an addition to the cabin by building on at what was the kitchen end. This was now a new kitchen while the old kitchen had become the general living room. The old living room, so called, had been divided into two bedrooms, so that the house was now large enough not alone for the regular family but also for such occasional visitors as came that way.

The coming of night made all of those at home anxious for the return of the two young hunters. Feeling that both would be thoroughly hungry, Mrs. Morris had cooked a liberal supper, of which after waiting an hour, those in the cabin had eaten their share. The remainder now simmered in the pot and kettle hung over the big open fire, while Mrs. Morris moved uneasily about, clearing away the dirty dishes and occasionally glancing out of the doorway in the direction she fancied they must come.

"It is strange what is keeping them," she said to the others. "I trust they haven't gotten into trouble."

"Perhaps they have struck more deer than they bargained for," answered her husband, who had just entered with a bucket of water from the well. "Henry said he felt certain he would bag something – and he rarely deceives himself when it comes to game. Like as not they'll come along toting all they can carry."

"I wish they'd bring mamma another bear skin," put in little Nell. "Wouldn't it be beautiful – if it matched the one Mr. Washington let cousin Dave have?"

"No! no! A bear might harm them!" put in Mrs. Morris hastily. "It's a bad time of year to tackle such beasts, so I heard Sam Barrington say."

"You let Henry and Dave alone when it comes to any kind of game," came from Rodney, who sat in his easy chair close to the roaring fire. "Why, the worst game they could meet wouldn't be half as bad as the Indians and French they had to face when they went to war. You forget, mother, what splendid shots both of them are."

But the mother turned away shaking her head doubtfully. Perhaps her instinct told her what grave trouble was brooding. She looked out of the doorway once more and spoke to her husband.

"Did James say when he should be back?"

"He couldn't tell, because he didn't know if he could complete his business right away or if he would have to wait to see certain parties. Like as not he won't come back until to-morrow, or the day after. He knew there was no need to hurry. We can't do anything much on the farm just now."

As even home-made candles were somewhat scarce, the family did without any light excepting that afforded by the fire in the big-mouthed chimney, the genial glare of which threw fantastic shadows on the walls. Little Nell did not particularly fancy those shadows and so asked permission to climb into Rodney's lap.

"Why of course," said the cripple, and took her up at once. Then she insisted that he tell a story, "but not about bears, or wolves, or Indians, but about a fairy and a princess, and a castle full of gold," and Rodney did his best to tell the most marvelous story his brain could invent. But long before the good fairy had given the princess a beautiful prince for a husband, and the castle full of gold in the bargain, little Nell was sound asleep, so the story was never finished.

As the night wore on even Mr. Morris began to show his anxiety, and without saying a word he got down his musket from over the chimney shelf and brought forth his horn of powder and his little bag of home-made bullets.

"You are going after them?" asked Mrs. Morris.

"I'll wait a bit longer," he answered. "But I thought I'd be prepared, in case anything was wrong."

Having put little Nell to bed, Mrs. Morris brought forth her knitting and for some time only the click-clicking of the polished needles broke the silence. Then Rodney, who had been sitting with his chin in his hands, watching the burning logs, roused up.

"I don't suppose there is any use of my staying up," he said. "My back doesn't feel quite as well as it did yesterday. I'll go to bed," and he shuffled off to the bedroom he occupied. This was the one nearest to the kitchen, on the south side, and had been given to the cripple because it was warmer in the winter than the others.

Left to themselves, the time seemed to drag more heavily than ever to Mr. and Mrs. Morris. Every thought was centered on their son Henry and nephew David. What could be keeping the pair?

"They must have met with an accident," said the pioneer at length. "Perhaps one of them fell in a hole and broke a leg. I know there are several nasty pitfalls in the vicinity of the salt lick. I guess I had better go out and look for them."

Joseph Morris was soon ready for the journey, promising, whether he found them or not, to be back inside of two hours. He went on horseback, riding Fanny, Dave's favorite mare, the animal that had once been stolen and so fortunately recovered.

Left to herself, Mrs. Morris knitted faster than ever. But even the flying needles could not stop her anxiety, and more than once she threw down the work, to go to the doorway and gaze earnestly in every direction. How dark and lonely the mighty forest looked. Something caused her to shiver in spite of herself. She listened intently.

What was that? A sound at a great distance. As it drew closer she made out the hoof-beats of a horse on a gallop. She ran into the cabin and in true pioneer fashion armed herself with a musket, ready to consider every newcomer an enemy until he proved himself a friend. Swiftly the horse came closer and she now made out a youth hanging heavily over the animal's neck.

"Dave! is it you?"

"Yes, Aunt Lucy," was the answer. The boy rode up and dropped heavily to the ground. "Are you all safe?"

"Safe? Of course we are. What has happened? Where is Henry?"

"I don't know where Henry is – just now. I left him in the woods doing what he could for Mrs. Risley. The Indians surrounded their cabin and burnt it down, and Mrs. Risley escaped to the milk-house. We rescued her from her hiding place in the water and got her into the woods. Then I started for home, but I met Mr. Risley and had to take him back to where I had left Henry and Mrs. Risley. We couldn't find either of them, and it looked as if they had had a fight. Mr. Risley remained to investigate and I came home as quickly as I could to give the alarm. The Indians are rising all over and are going to massacre everybody they can lay hands on."

While talking Dave staggered into the kitchen and sank down heavily on a bench.

"Mercy on us, Dave, you don't really mean it! The Risley cabin burnt down, and the Indians on the war-path! Why, we'll all be murdered!"

"We shall be unless we take means to defend ourselves, Aunt Lucy. Where are father and Uncle Joe?"

"Your father has gone to Winchester and won't be back before to-morrow or next day. Your uncle went off a spell ago to look for you and Henry. Are the Indians coming this way? Tell me about Henry."

As anxious as she was the good woman saw that her nephew was not only tired out but also hungry, and as she talked she bustled about and prepared his meal for him at the corner of the table nearest to the fire. Dave devoured his supper in short order, telling all he had to relate at the same time. It is needless to state that Mrs. Morris was greatly alarmed. The loud talking of the pair aroused Rodney, who called from the bedroom to know what was wrong, and when told the cripple lost no time in dressing himself.

"If they come here we'll have to defend ourselves as best we can," said Rodney. "I can't run but I can shoot pretty straight, and if mother will load for us I guess we can give 'em some pretty good shots. What we want to do first of all is to shut all the shutters tight and get in all the water we can – to drink and to put out fires with. It's lucky father cut those port-holes in the roof. They'll be just the spots to bring down Injuns from."

"My boy, you cannot do it!" cried Mrs. Morris, in increased alarm. "Even if your father gets back what can three do against a horde of redskins? They will fire the cabin and shoot you down the moment you are driven out by the flames."

"Well, I don't believe in letting the rascals have our cabin and belongings," returned Rodney, stubbornly. "I'm only a cripple, but I'm willing to fight to the last. If we run for it, how much can we take along? Not much, I can tell you that."

"Yes, but our lives are more precious to us than our things here," said his mother. "And remember Nell, Rodney. If she fell into the Indians' hands – " Mrs. Morris did not finish, but her breast heaved and two big tears started from her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

"Well, you wouldn't want to go before father got back, would you?" asked Rodney, after a pause.

"He is coming now – at least I hear somebody on horseback!" cried Dave. "Perhaps it's an Indian," and he reached for his gun, which he had brought in and placed beside the door.

He went out, and Mrs. Morris and Rodney came behind him, each with some sort of firearm. As the horseman came closer they saw that it was indeed an Indian. But the white feathers and the general bearing of the new arrival soon reassured them.

"White Buffalo!" called Dave, and ran to meet the Indian chief who had been the family's friend for so many years.

"How-how!" returned the Indian, and came straight up to the cabin door. "Where is my white brother Joseph, and my white brother James?" he questioned anxiously.

"Father is at Winchester," answered Dave. "Uncle Joseph went off awhile ago to look for Henry and me. We were out hunting but found out the Indians are rising. Do you know about that, White Buffalo?"

"So the white boy knows the news already?" White Buffalo's face fell a little, for he had hoped to be the first to bear intelligence. "Yes, it is true, they have dug up the war hatchet, and have murdered many people already. I came to help you, and I bring a message from Captain Tanner."

"And your tribe – will they join those who rise against the English?" asked Rodney.

For a moment White Buffalo hung his head on his breast. Then with an effort he straightened up. "Some of the Delawares are fools – they will not listen to White Buffalo but listen to Skunk Tail and drink the fire-water the French give them. We have had a pow-wow and some would go to the French and some to the English. At Big Tree I left eighteen braves who will follow me and fight for the English. The others have joined Skunk Tail and Fox Head of the Miamis, and the tribes under Rolling Thunder and Canshanran, and will fight for themselves and for the French. They think not of right or of honor, but will burn and murder and steal all they can. A black day and a black night are coming, and how it will end only He who rules the Happy Hunting Ground can tell."

CHAPTER VIII

DEPARTURE FROM HOME

It was not until White Buffalo came into the light of the kitchen fire that they saw he was wounded. Blood was trickling from an arrow thrust in the left shoulder. At the sight of this Mrs. Morris uttered a slight scream.

"You are wounded, White Buffalo! Why didn't you say so before? Let me bind it up for you."

"No big heap hurt," answered the Indian. "Only little cut him." Nevertheless, he was glad enough to have the lady of the cabin bind it up, after which he said it felt better.

White Buffalo had but little to add to what has already been narrated excepting that in coming to the cabin to give warning he had fallen in with some rival Indians, three of whom had sought to stop him. A hand-to-hand fight had resulted and White Buffalo had sent one man to earth by a blow from his tomahawk and ridden over a second in such a fashion that the enemy had not stirred afterward. The arrow wound had been received previous to this, but the chief had not noticed it until some time later.

The continued talking had roused little Nell and now she came running out of the bedroom in her robe of white begging to know what was the matter. She gave a scream when she saw the Indian, but quickly recovered when she recognized White Buffalo.

"I thought it was one of the bad Indians," she said, in her simple fashion. "I'm not afraid of you, White Buffalo, am I?"

"White Buffalo glad not," answered the chief, taking her by the hand. "White Buffalo would not harm one hair of little Nell's head," and he stroked the curly top affectionately.

"You said you carried a message," put in Rodney, suddenly. "Where is it?"

From among his feathers White Buffalo produced a single sheet of paper. It was covered with a hasty scrawl, running as follows:

"Friend Morris: The Indians are rising. I think it best that all settlers in this vicinity gather at Fort Lawrence for safety. Shall send messengers wherever I can. Garwell's cabin is in ashes and himself murdered and Mrs. Garwell carried off, and it is said that Risley's cabin is also burning.

"John Smith Tanner."

"Captain Tanner wants us to gather at Fort Lawrence for safety," said Dave, after listening to the reading by his cousin. "I believe, Aunt Lucy, he is right. The rising is so widespread that it would be foolhardy to remain here. We might – "

The youth broke off short and ran toward the doorway. But White Buffalo was ahead of him. Both had heard the approach of a horse. It was Joseph Morris returning, and he was alone.

"Thank heaven you are safe!" ejaculated the pioneer, as he leaped to the ground and came into the cabin. "I was afraid you might all be murdered. So Dave is here. Where is Henry?"

"Gone," answered Dave. "You saw nothing of him, or of Mrs. Risley or her husband?"

"I did not. But I saw Indians – hundreds of them. They are on the war-path. We must get out of here. There is not a moment to spare."

"Oh, father!" The cry came from Mrs. Morris and she clung close to her husband, while little Nell set up a wild sobbing. "Must we leave it all – everything?"

"All but what we can conveniently carry on horseback, Lucy. I believe the redskins will be here within the hour."

Only a few more hurried words passed, and Joseph Morris glanced at the note White Buffalo had brought. The Indian looked very grave.

"My white brother Joseph will go to Fort Lawrence?" he questioned.

"Yes. I see no other way. I would rather go to the fort at Will's Creek, but the Indians are covering that trail already. You will stick to us, White Buffalo, won't you?"

"To the death."

The pioneer grasped the chief's hand warmly. "I knew I could depend on you. Where are the braves under you?"

"Two miles from here – at the Big Tree. Say where I shall meet you and if White Buffalo can do it it shall be done."

"We will go to Fort Lawrence by the brook way, – past where you and I shot the bear and her two cubs two winters ago. Meet me on that trail. Hurry, for we may need you sorely."

Without a word White Buffalo darted from the cabin and a moment later they heard him ride away at the best speed his steed could attain.

There was now a great confusion in the cabin. Knowing that she must really leave, Mrs. Morris set to work to gather her most precious things into several bundles which might be carried on horseback. As well as he was able Rodney helped her, and little Nell also took a hand, bound to save the few precious toys she possessed, including the doll White Buffalo had made for her. It made the good woman's heart ache sorely when she realized how little could be carried and how much of all that was dear to her must be left behind for the Indians to burn or plunder.

While this was going on in the cabin Dave ran to the outbuilding where he brought forth the several horses and saddled and bridled them. Then he let out the live stock, turning the cows into the forest, to shift for themselves. He wanted to take the cows along, but his uncle doubted if there would be time.

While the others worked Joseph Morris looked to all the firearms and got them into readiness for use. Then he rode around the clearing to learn if the trail he had mentioned to White Buffalo could still be used.

"Come, we must go!" he cried, presently. "Hark, don't you hear the distant war-whoops? The Indians are advancing. If we wait another five minutes we may be lost!"

From the cabin came Mrs. Morris, Rodney and little Nell, carrying the several bundles they had made up. Little Nell cried piteously and the silent tears coursed down Mrs. Morris's cheeks.

Fortunately there were horses for all, with an extra animal for some of the bundles. The latter were hurriedly adjusted and fastened.

"Now, Dave, you lead the way," said Joseph Morris. "I will fix things so that the redskins may be deceived when they come up."

"All right, Uncle Joe. But don't stay back too long," was the lad's answer.

Astride of his favorite mare Fanny, Dave headed the silent procession across the clearing, and into the woods. As soon as possible he struck into the brook, that their trail might be hidden by the water. He knew this way well, so there was no hesitation. Behind him came Mrs. Morris and little Nell, and Rodney brought up the rear, with the extra horse. Each carried all that was possible, but the youths had their bundles strapped on, that they might have free hands for their guns, should they wish to use the weapons.

Left to himself, Joseph Morris closed the shutters of the cabin and dampened down the fire with ashes. Then he ran up to the loft, opened one of the port-holes in the roof and placed in it the shining barrel of an old musket which had long ago seen its best days. Behind the musket he placed a pillow upright and on the top an old hat.

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