

Ellis Edward Sylvester

The Riflemen of the Miami



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Содержание

CHAPTER I.	5
CHAPTER II.	13
CHAPTER III.	19
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	21

Edward S. Ellis

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CHAPTER I. THE RESCUE

If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly.

— *Macbeth*.

"Quick, boys, and be careful that they don't see your heads."

Four men were moving along under the bank of the Miami, with their bodies bent, at a gait that was almost rapid enough to be called a run. They were constantly raising their heads and peering over the bank, as though watching something in the wood, which in this section was quite open. All four were attired in the garb of hunters, and were evidently men whose homes were in the great wilderness. They had embrowned faces, and sinewy limbs, and the *personnel* of the woodman — of the men who hovered only upon the confines of civilization, rarely, if ever, venturing within the crowded city or village. It is hardly necessary to say that each carried his rifle and his hunting-knife.

Between the three foremost was a striking resemblance; it appeared impossible that more than five years divided them in age. Two were brothers, George and Lewis Dernor, while the third answered to the *sobriquet* of Dick — his real name being Richard Allmat. The fourth — he who brought up the rear — possessed an individuality which must have marked him in any situation. Barely more than five feet in height, and with bowed legs, instead of owning a jovial temper, as one would have a right to expect from his jolly-looking face, he was, in reality, a most irascible fellow. Never known to express satisfaction at any occurrence, gift or suggestion, he was constantly finding fault, and threatening dire vengeance upon those who surrounded him. These threats never being carried out, attracted little attention. "Tom" (as he was called) was considered a privileged individual, and, in spite of his disposition, was a favorite with those who knew him. This may seem strange when we add that, in addition to his sour temper, the natural defect of his legs prevented him from placing any dependence upon them. At his best speed he was but an ordinary runner. A stranger well might wonder that he should adopt a life where fleetness of foot was so necessary — in fact, so almost indispensable. Tom O'Hara turned ranger from pure love for the wild, adventurous life; and, despite the natural defects to which we have referred, possessed accomplishments that rendered him a most valuable ally and companion. He never had met his superior with the rifle, and his knowledge of woodcraft was such that, although he had spent ten years on the border, his slowness of foot had never operated against him; nor once had he been outwitted by the red-men of the woods. Besides this, he had the enviable reputation of being a *lucky individual* — one whose rifle never missed fire, or sped wide of its mark — one to whom no unfortunate accident ever occurred; so that, take him all in all, few hunters were safer in the wood than this same Tom O'Hara.

These four were known as the *Riflemen of the Miami*, of whom Lewis Dernor was the leader. Another member, then a long way off, will be referred to hereafter.

"Quick, boys, and be careful that they don't see your heads," admonished Lewis, ducking his own and gesticulating to those behind him. "*Sh!* look quick! there they go!"

The four stretched their necks, glancing over the bank, out into a small clearing in the wood.

"They'll cross that in a minute," whispered the first speaker. "Don't raise your heads too high or you'll be seen."

"You don't appear to think nobody knows nothing but you," growled Tom, with a savage look.

"*Quiet!* There they go!"

One Indian strode into the clearing, followed by another, then by two abreast, between whom a woman was walking, her head bent as if in despair, with steps painful and labored. Behind these came three other savages. They passed across the clearing – the whole seven, with their captive like the moving figures in a panorama, and entered the wood upon the opposite side.

"Every mother's son of them is in his war-paint," said Lewis – who, by the way, divided his words with Tom, the other two rarely speaking except when directly appealed to.

"Who said they wasn't?" demanded Tom. "And what difference does it make? They've got somebody's gal there, hain't they? eh? Say. And what's the odds whether they've daubed themselves up with their stuff or not?"

"Well, what's the next move? To set up a yell and pitch after them?"

"None but a fool would want to do that."

"But don't you notice the bank gets so low down yonder that it won't hide us, and we'll have to show ourselves?"

"It'll hide us as long as we want to be hid. Come, don't squat here, or we'll let the rascals slip, after all."

Again the three moved down the bank, as rapidly, silently and cautiously as spirits, ever and anon raising their heads as they gained a glimpse of the Indians passing through the wood. The latter were following a course parallel with the Miami, so that the relative distance between the two parties remained nearly the same. It was manifest to the hunters that the Indians intended crossing the river with their captive at some point lower down, and were making toward that point. It was further evident from the deliberation in their movements, and from the fact that they were not proceeding in "Indian file," that as yet they had no suspicion of being pursued, although every one of their number knew of the existence of the Riflemen of the Miami – that formidable confederation whose very name was a word of terror even to their savage hearts. Entirely unsuspecting of the danger which menaced them, every thing was in favor of the hunters.

For several hundred yards further, the two parties maintained their relative distance, the Indians proceeding at a usual walk, and the whites at a very irregular one – now running rapidly a few steps, and then halting and gazing over the bank to ascertain the precise whereabouts of their enemies; then skulking a few yards further, and halting as before, remaining all the time nearly opposite the "braves." Suddenly the latter came to a stand.

"Now for a confab," said Lewis, as his companions gathered about him. "I wonder what they are going to jabber about?"

"What do you want to know for, eh?" asked Tom.

"It's pretty plain they're going to cross the river, but, confound it, how can we tell where it's going to be done? I've told you that the bank gets so low, just yonder, that it won't hide us any longer."

"Who wants it to hide us? They intend to cross the river *here*, and in about ten minutes, too. Just watch their actions, if you can do it without showing your head."

The Indians stood together, conversing upon some point about which there seemed a variance of opinion. Their deep, guttural, ejaculatory words were plainly audible to the hunters, and their gleaming, bedaubed visages were seen in all their hideous repulsiveness. They gesticulated continually, pointing behind them in the direction of their trail, and across the river, over the heads of the crouching Riflemen, who were watching every motion. Nothing would have been easier for the latter than to have sent four of these savages into eternity without a moment's warning; yet, nothing was further from their intentions, for, of all things, this would have been the surest to defeat

their chief object. The captive would have been brained the instant the savages saw they could not hold her. The great point was to surprise them so suddenly and completely as to prevent this.

From the present appearance of matters, this seemed not very difficult of accomplishment, as it was a foregone conclusion upon the part of the hunters that the savages would endeavor to ford the river at the point where they lay in ambush for them. It only remained for the Riflemen to bide their time, and, at the proper moment, rush upon and scatter them, and rescue the captive from their hands.

"I wonder whether they're going to talk all day," remarked Tom, impatiently, after they had conversed some twenty or thirty minutes.

"They're in a dispute about something. It won't take them long to get through with it."

"How do you know that, I should like to know? Like enough they'll talk till dark, and keep us waiting. Confound 'em, what's the use?"

No one ventured to reply to Tom's sulky observation, and, after several impatient exclamations, he added:

"The longer they talk the louder they get, which is a sure sign the dispute is getting hotter, which is another sign it'll be considerable time before they get through."

"I am sure we can wait as long as they can," said Dick, mildly.

"My heavens! who said we couldn't? Just hear 'em jabber!"

The conversation of the Indians had now become so earnest, that every word spoken was distinctly heard by the Riflemen. The latter, from the dress and actions of the savages, understood they had no chief with them, but were merely seven warriors, who had been out on this barbarous expedition, and were returning to their town with the booty and the captive they had secured.

"They're talking in the Shawnee tongue," said Lewis. "Can't you understand what they're driving at?"

"If you only keep your jaws shut a minute or two, I could; but if you three fellers mean to talk all the time, I should like to know how I am going to understand any thing they say. See whether you can keep quiet a minute, just."

Tom's companions did as requested, while he bent his head forward, and seemed to concentrate all his faculties into the one of listening. Upon the part of the Riflemen all was still as death. After several minutes of the acutest attention, Tom raised his head, and said, with a glowing expression:

"They're talking about *us*."

"The deuce! what are they saying?"

"Don't you see they're pointing up the river and across it? Well, the meaning of all that is, that they're wondering which way we'll come from."

"What seems to be the general expectation?"

"The trouble is just there – the expectation is altogether too general. Some think we're on their trail, others that we're following the other side the river down, and waiting for the chance to let drive at 'em, while one, at least, feels certain we're *coming up* the stream to meet 'em."

"Is that their dispute?"

"A part of it, of course, but the trouble is – what to do. Some want to strike off in the woods and take a roundabout way to reach home; but the greatest number want to cross the stream at this point."

"They'll probably do it then."

"Of course they will – no; I'll be shot if they ain't going further into the woods!" suddenly exclaimed Tom.

"They're going to start in a minute, too. Get ready, boys, for a rush – it's all we can do."

"Hold still a minute," commanded Tom, excitedly.

Then dropping his rifle, he ran down to the river's edge, and picked up several large pebbles, one of which he placed in his right hand as if about to throw it.

"What are you going to do with that?" asked Dick.

"That's none of your business; you've only to wait and see. Just keep your heads down now, if you don't want them knocked off."

Tom, drawing his hand back, struck it quickly against his thigh, accomplishing what is generally termed "jerking" the stone. The latter went circling high over the heads of the disputing Indians, and came down upon the other side of them, cutting its way through the dry leaves of the trees with a peculiar *zip-zip*, which was distinctly heard by the Riflemen themselves.

The unusual sound could not fail instantly to attract the attention of the Indians. They paused in their conversation, and turned their alarmed gaze toward it, as if in expectation of some danger. With their instinctive caution, they separated, and partially protecting themselves behind the trees, prepared to receive what they supposed to be their enemies. A noticeable fact did not escape the eyes of the Riflemen. The captive, a weak, defenseless girl, was not allowed to screen herself, as did her captors, but was compelled by them to stand out in full view, as an additional safeguard against their bullets.

It was at this moment that Tom hurled the second stone over the heads of the Indians, it descending with the same sharp, cutting sound, and resolving their suspicions into a certainty that their white enemies were indeed at hand. Lewis Dornor, now that the moment of action had arrived, was as shrewd and far-sighted as either Tom or any of the others. It was these very qualities, coolness and self-reliance in the crisis of danger, that made him nominally the leader of the Riflemen of the Miami. He saw the great advantage gained by O'Hara's artifice in attracting the attention of the Indians to the point opposite to that from which the peril threatened; but, at the same time, he well knew that those same Shawnees were too well skilled in woodcraft to suffer their gaze to be diverted for any length of time from the river-bank.

As matters now stood, the captive herself was the only one who was looking in the direction of the latter, while her gaze was a mere mechanical one, wandering hither and thither without resting for a moment upon any particular object. Lewis felt that the all-important point was to make her aware of the vicinity of friends. She being a total stranger to them, and evidently with no hope of any immediate rescue, made this a matter of considerable difficulty; but, without hesitating a moment, Lewis suddenly arose to the upright position, thereby exposing his head and shoulders, and beckoned to the girl to approach him. The instant he had done this, he dropped on his face and disappeared.

The attempt was only a partial success. At the moment of rising, the gaze of the captive was toward a point further down-stream; but the figure of the hunter, as it rose and sunk from view, was in her field of vision and did not entirely escape her notice. The unusual occurrence drew her look thither, making it certain that a second attempt, could it be made, would succeed far better than the first. All this Lewis comprehended, and as quick as possible repeated his movement precisely as before.

This time the girl saw him and perfectly understood his meaning; but, with a precipitancy that filled the hunters with the greatest alarm, she started directly toward them, with outstretched arms, as if imploring assistance. It was at this instant that Lewis discovered a quickness of perception, coolness and promptness of action that was absolutely wonderful. Looking out upon the exciting drama being enacted before him, he saw with unerring certainty how far the girl could run before being fired at by the savages. Waiting until she had gone the distance, he raised his head and shoulders to view, and called out in a voice of thunder:

"I say, gal, drop flat on your face and stay there."

The quickness with which this command was obeyed, and the almost simultaneous crack of two rifles, might well have caused the belief that she had fallen because shot through the heart; but

such was not the case. The command of Lewis broke upon her like a thunder-peal, and as quick as a flash of lightning did she comprehend the fearfully imminent peril in which she was placed. So marvelously close had been the calculation of the hunter, that at the very instant she obeyed him, the rifle of the nearest Indian was pointed full at her. This did not escape the eagle eye of O'Hara, who, with the same coolness that characterized the action of his leader, discharged his piece at the bronzed head of the Shawnee, his aim scarcely occupying a second. The bullet sped sure, striking the savage at the very moment his own weapon was fired, and his death-yell mingled with the whistle of his own harmless rifle-ball.

Even in this moment of terrible danger, the manner in which the Indians shifted to the opposite side of the trees could but attract the notice of the hunters. It was simultaneous on the part of all, and resembled that of automata, moved by machinery. First, every copper-colored body was exposed to full view; and the next minute six gleaming rifle-barrels only showed where they had sheltered themselves from the fire of the whites. They no longer doubted the point from which their danger threatened, and a genuine strategic Indian fight now commenced.

Had the captive, who was now literally between two fires, done nothing but merely fall upon her face, her situation could not have been improved in the least thereby. But the nature of the ground near her was such that, by lying perfectly motionless, the bullets of the Shawnees could not strike her, unless they could gain a position nearer to the hunters. As matters stood, she was safe only so long as her captors could be kept from changing their places.

This was manifest to both the whites and the Indians; and while the latter were now actuated by the desire to slay the girl, the efforts of the former were turned toward her salvation. It was further evident that the Shawnees were aware that they were now opposed to the Riflemen of the Miami, and were nothing loth for a trial of skill. The loss of one of their number was such a matter of course, that it operated only as an incentive for exertion and skill upon their part.

A portion of the dress of the girl, as she lay upon the ground, could be seen by several of the Indians, and they fired numerous shots at it. Finding this accomplished nothing, they resorted to a far more dangerous expedient – that of shooting away enough earth in front of her to allow the free passage of one of their bullets to her body. It will be seen that great skill was required to do this, but the expertness of the Shawnee marksmen was equal to the task. They commenced their work by sending a ball so as to strike the earth immediately before her, and a few inches below the surface. The instant this was done, another fired his bullet directly after, with such skill that it varied but the fraction of an inch from following directly in its path. The force with which these balls were discharged was such that the twelfth one would most assuredly take the life of the girl.

None knew this better than Lewis Dernor, who, in the same trumpet-like tone that had characterized his former command, called out:

"Young gal, clean away the dirt in front of you and hide yourself better, or the imps will riddle you."

It required no more incentive to do this, and she used her hands with such vigor that a few moments accomplished all she could wish. The ground, being soft and moist, favored her, and when she dragged herself a few feet forward, all of her dress disappeared from the view of the Indians, and she was as safe from their bullets as if behind the river-bank itself.

A few more shots convinced the Shawnees of this, and they now sent several bullets whistling over the heads of the Riflemen as if to remind them that they were to receive attention. So long as the members of the two parties maintained their respective positions, this affray could amount to nothing; accordingly, several of the savages made an effort to change their posts in such a manner as to outflank the whites. Despite the admirable skill with which this attempt was made, the deadly rifle of George Dernor brought down a warrior as he flitted from tree to tree. This, for the present, put a stop to the movement and turned the efforts of the savages in another direction.

Two brawny Shawnees, convinced that nothing could be done against the Riflemen, renewed their attempts to secure a shot at the girl, who all this time lay as motionless as if dead. They commenced working their way slowly but surely toward the river, while she, unconscious of the murderous stratagem, patiently awaited the turn of affairs which would free her from her terrible thralldom. Finally, an Indian, who was squatted behind a tree, gained a view of a tuft of her hair and brought his rifle to his shoulder. The sunlight that scintillated along the barrel of his weapon made it resemble a burnished spear, poised in his hand, while following it up to the stock, not only his crooked arm which supported the gun, but his entire profile was visible. Forgetting his own peril in his anxiety to slay the helpless girl, the Shawnee leaned several inches further forward, thereby discovering one-half of his shaven head. Ere he could draw it back, the whip-like crack of another rifle broke the stillness, and he fell forward on his face, pierced through and through the brain.

"I've a great notion to break your head for you!" exclaimed Tom, in an excited whisper to Dick, for it was the latter who had fired the fatal shot.

"Why, what's up now?"

"I'd just got that Shawnee sure when you picked him off. Don't you serve me that trick again."

With this ebullition, Tom subsided, and turned his attention once more toward their common enemy.

The shot of Dick really decided the affray. It convinced the Indians that not only were they unable to shoot the girl or avenge themselves upon the Riflemen, but the latter had so much the advantage of them, that to prolong the contest would only be to insure their own annihilation. Three of their number were already slain, and the remaining four, from their respective positions, had not the shadow of a chance to pick off any of the whites. What might naturally be expected under the circumstances occurred. The savages commenced a retreat, conducting it with such caution that the whites could not gain another shot. The last seen of them was a shadowy glimpse in a distant part of the wood, as the four fled, thereby doing only what the Riflemen of the Miami had before compelled many a body of Indians to do.

A few minutes later, Lewis rose up and said:

"This way, gal; there's none of the imps left."

The girl, timidly raising her head, glanced about her, and then, Lewis' invitation being repeated, she arose and walked toward him, looking furtively backward as though still fearful of her late captors.

"Bless your dear soul," said Lewis, warmly welcoming her, "you've had a skeery time with them Shawnees, but you're safe for the present. You may set that down as a question that needn't be argued."

"Oh! how can I thank you for rescuing me! I can never, never repay you," said she, with streaming eyes.

"Who the deuce wants you to pay us?" asked Tom, gruffly.

"Come, come, Tom, see whether you can't be civil once, even if you've got to be sick for it. Don't mind him, little gal; he loves you all the more for what he said."

"I know he does, or he would never have risked his life to save a stranger as he has just done."

Tom, from some cause or other, was obliged to gouge his eye several times with his crooked finger. One might have suspected that they were more moist than usual, had he not looked particularly savage at that moment. Dick, who, by the merest accident, glanced in his face was nearly startled off his feet by the irascible fellow shouting:

"What you looking at? Say! Can't a chap rub his eyes without your gaping at him that way?"

Dick meekly removed his gaze, while Tom looked ferocious enough to annihilate the whole party.

The girl, just rescued from the Shawnees, was a comely maiden. Though attired in the homespun garb of the backwoods, she would have attracted attention in any society. If not

beautiful, she certainly was handsome, being possessed of a countenance rich with expression, and a form of perfect grace. Blue eyes, golden hair, a well-turned head, small nose and a health-tinted complexion, were characteristics to arrest the eye of the most ordinary observer. Even under disadvantageous circumstances like the present, these were so striking that they could but make an impression, and a skillful reader of human nature would have seen that Lewis had been *touched*— that, in short, the leader of the Riflemen of the Miami had reached the incipient stages of the passion of passions, in the short interview to which we have referred. That he would rather have been scalped than have been suspected of it by his companions, was very true.

Taking the small hands which were confidently placed in his own, he said;

"Let us hear all about this scrape, my little one."

"My home is, or was until night before last, many miles from here. On that evening, I was left alone by my dearest friend, who little dreamed of the danger which hovered over our house. The Indians must have been aware of his absence, for, before it was fairly dark, three of them stalked in the door without saying a word, and led me away. They have traveled constantly ever since, and I was almost wearied to death, when you came up, and by the assistance of kind Heaven, saved me. How came you to be so interested in a stranger?"

"As for that matter," replied Lewis, "it ain't the first time, my little one, that *we've* been interested in strangers. I might say we've a particular interest in all the whites and reds of this region. The Riflemen of the Miami – "

"Are you the men who are known by that name?" asked the girl, with a glowing countenance.

"At your service," replied Lewis, with a modest blush.

"Indeed, I have heard of you, and have heard your name blessed again and again by the settlers further east."

"Which certainly is pleasant to us. As I was going to say, we were coming down the Miami, this morning, when we chanced to strike the trail of these identical Indians. It was easy enough to see that it was but a short time since they had gone along, and, as it was in our line, of course we jogged on after them. The red imps were taking it coolly, and in a couple of hours or so we got sight of them going down the river. Well, we followed on after them till they made their halt out here, when – well, you know the rest."

"Of course she does," said Tom, "so what's the use of talking? What's the gal want to do? Go back to her friends, I s'pose?"

"If you could take me there, I could not express my thankfulness."

"Where is it you belong?"

The girl gave the name of a settlement nearly a hundred miles distant. Lewis bent his head a moment, as if deliberating something, and then said:

"We've got a job on our hands that *must be done* this very night, and it is going to be such a lively one that it won't do to have you in the vicinity. Consequently, although there isn't one of us but what would risk his life to take you back to your friends, it can't be done *just now*."

"You will not leave me?" plead the girl.

"Leave you? that's something the *Riflemen*, I make bold to say, never did yet. No; of course we'll not *leave* you. I'll tell you the plan. About five miles off from the river, lives old Caleb Smith and his two big sons, all as clever and kind as so many babies. We've got to be back at our rendezvous to-night, where the other member of our company is to meet us; and on our way there, we'll leave you at Old Smith's and return for you in a few days. Won't that be the best we can do, Tom?"

"S'pose so."

The girl herself expressed great satisfaction at this conclusion; and, as it was getting well along in the day, the Riflemen set out with their charge. In due time they reached "Old Smith's house," who was well known to them, and who received them with the most hearty cordiality. He

gladly took charge of the rescued girl, promising that she should be guarded as much as if his own child. Just as the shadows of evening were closing over the wood, the Riflemen took their departure.

Three days later they returned to fulfill their promise to the girl, when old Smith told them that, fearing some unexpected occurrence had detained them, he had sent his two sons to conduct her to her home.

CHAPTER II. THE SETTLERS

We will rear new trees under homes that glow
As if gems were the frontage of every bough;
O'er our white walls we will train the vine,
And sit in its shadow at day's decline,
And watch our herds as they range at will
Through the green savannas, all bright and still.

Mrs. Hemans.

The incident narrated in the preceding chapter occurred one autumn, many years ago. In the spring succeeding this autumn, a company of settlers, with their loaded teams, and unwieldy baggage, were making their slow way through the labyrinths of an Ohio forest to a sparse settlement buried many miles further in the wilderness.

At that day, so comparatively recent, such a sight was rarely witnessed in this section, as a deep-rooted hostility existed between the settlers and Indians, and an undertaking like the present was attended with too great danger for it to be often repeated. The rut of a single wagon, half obliterated by accumulated leaves and rankly-growing grass, showed that this route had been traveled over but once before, and that on the preceding season. At regular intervals, trees were passed with chips hacked from their sides, the track having first been "blazed" before being passed over.

Like the emigrant-party which had preceded it, the present one possessed but a single wagon, drawn by two pair of slow but powerful oxen. It had a substantial cover, beneath which were stowed an immense quantity of baggage and some six or eight children, including also four women, two of whom were married and two unmarried. At the side of the front oxen walked the driver, whose whole attention was devoted to their direction. Several yards in advance rode two horsemen, and beside them three men plodded forward on foot. In the rear, scarcely a yard behind the lumbering wagon, walked "old Caleb Smith," and his two overgrown sons, as proud of them as was any monarch of his favorite generals. In addition to the men enumerated, there were three more – who may properly be called the scouts of the party. One of these was a couple of hundred yards in advance, stealing his way along, as carefully as if pursued by an unrelenting foe, his whole soul occupied in watching for signs of the dusky red-men of the woods. At a somewhat less distance on either side of the road, and in such a position as to be opposite the wagon, was one of the remaining scouts, as watchful, vigilant and skillful as the one referred to. Thus the party progressed, neglecting no precaution that could make their safety more secure, and although numerically small, still far more powerful than were many emigrant-parties who had preceded them in penetrating other portions of the Great West.

One of the young women, that we have mentioned as being in the wagon, was Edith Sudbury, the heroine of the preceding chapter. She had not a single relation among all those around her, and it was certainly singular that she should have united her destinies with those who, several months before, were entirely unknown to her. But, though not related, every one was her friend. Her amiable disposition, her grace and beauty of manners, her own prepossessing appearance, and above all, her unremitting kindness to every one with whom she came in contact, had won upon the hearts of all. Old Smith's two sons, Jim and Harry, one eighteen the other twenty, both over six

feet in height, looked upon "little Edith" as nothing more than a baby, and woe betide the one who dared to offer her harm or insult in their presence!

"I say, father, how much further ahead is that creek we've got to cross?" asked Jim, in a free and easy manner, as he would have spoken to an equal.

"Well, sonny, it must be nigh on to ten mile."

"Won't get over afore morning then?"

"Don't expect to, as you see it's well along in the after noon."

"Let's see – we've come over forty mile, hain't we?"

"Yes, Jim, nearer fifty."

"Well, we're that much nearer the settlement, *that's* certain. If we get over the creek without much trouble with the oxen, we may fetch up there by sundown, eh?"

"That's the expectation, I believe."

"Provided, of course, *the Injins don't make trouble*."

"Sh! not so loud, Jim," continued Harry. "They might hear us in the wagon, and I don't s'pose you'd want to scare Edith, when there's no need of it."

"I should like to see any one try that same thing on 'em. They'd be somebody else scared, I reckon. But, father," asked Jim, in an earnest whisper, "how is it about the Injins? We haven't seen a sign of one yet, and that's what gets me."

The parent and his children fell a few yards further behind, and commenced conversing together in suppressed voices.

"I tell you what, boys," said the father, "it won't do to expect to get through without hot work. I've been talking with the scouts, and they think the same. I believe a number are following us, and waiting only for the proper place to come in upon us."

"Where do you suppose that will be?"

"*The creek!*"

"Shouldn't wonder if 'twas," said Harry, in a matter-of-fact tone; "if we only had the women-folks out the way, we might count on some tall fun. I wish Edith was taken care of."

"That's the deuce of it. I should think she got enough of the imps last autumn, when the Riflemen left her at our house; but that's the *Injin*, especially the Shawnee part of it. If there's any chance to get scalps with long hair, they're bound to do it. However, boys, it won't do to lose heart."

"That's the fact, father, and I reckon none of this crowd intend to do that thing just now. Sam, in front, isn't likely to get asleep, is he?"

"No danger of him. They say he never shuts both eyes at the same time."

"I'll answer for them on the sides of the road," added Harry. "If there's a greasy Shawnee in a mile, Jake Laughlin will scent him. You mind the time, Jim, when he went with us over into Kentucky, and he saved us from running into that ambush?"

"Tain't likely I'll ever forget it, being I got my arm bored with some of their lead."

"Well, that affair satisfied me that Jake Laughlin understands as much as it is worth while to understand about Injin deviltries, and that he ain't likely to be blind when there's so much to practice eyesight on."

"I'd give our yoke of oxen this minute, if I could only set eyes on Lew Dernor and his boys, the Riflemen of the Miami," said the parent. "They've been long together, as I s'pose, and have been in more Injin fights and scrimmages than any men living, and yet not one of them has been grazed by a bullet. There's Tom O'Hara, whose legs are so short that he's about as tall when he sits down as he is when he stands up, and yet, I'll be hanged if he isn't the luckiest one of the lot. They're a wonderful set of boys, are those Riflemen."

"Father," said son Jim, with a meaning smile, "you remember the night that Lew brought Edith to our house?"

"Of course I do."

"Didn't it strike you that he acted queerly then?"

"What do you mean? I don't understand you. I noticed nothing."

"I did. I saw how he watched Edith, and I made up my mind that he was in *love with her!* Since then I've found out it *was* so!"

"Why, Jim, I never dreamed of such a thing. He hasn't been to our house since to see her."

"Just because he *is* in love! I've met him in the woods a dozen times since, and by the way in which he questioned me, I'd been a downright fool if I hadn't understood him."

This avowal seemed to trouble the father, as he bent his head; and, for a while, nothing further was said. But Jim, who had little reverence for sentiment or romance, added, in a meaning voice:

"That isn't all, father."

"What else have you to tell?"

"That Edith loves him!"

"Thunder! I don't believe it."

"Well, I can't say *positively* that she does; but I know she *likes* him, and if Lew Dornor has a mind he can get her. You don't appear to like it, father."

"I don't care much, but the gal seems so like my own da'ter, being I never had any, that I should hate despritley to lose her."

"Fudge! it's got to come to that sooner or later, and who could she get better than Lew Dornor, the leader of the Miami Riflemen?"

"None, that's the fact, but – "

A footstep attracted their attention, and looking up, they saw Jake Laughlin step into view. He raised his hand, as if to command silence, jerking his thumb at the same time significantly toward the wagon and the rest of the settlers. He stepped carefully into the wagon-track, and the father and sons halted.

"It's so," said he, nodding his head several times.

"Are you sure?"

"I've seen sign a half-dozen times since noon."

"Shawnees, I s'pose?"

"Yes. There are plenty of them in the woods."

"What are they waiting for?"

"The chance. There ain't enough, and we're too wide awake to allow them to attack us at present. They're waiting to take us off our guard or to get us at disadvantage. I've an idee where that'll be."

"The creek?"

"Most certainly. There's where the tug of war will come, and I think if we should encamp to-night without a guard there would be no danger of attack from the Shawnees."

"Are you going to warn others?"

"Not until night, I think, as there is no necessity for it."

"Well, we don't need to tell you to be on the look-out. You know we've got a lot of women-folks to take care of."

"Never fear."

With this, Laughlin stole back into the wood, as cautiously as he had emerged from it, and the father and his sons quickened their pace in order to gain the ground they had lost. As they resumed their places in the rear of the wagon, no one would have suspected from their actions and appearance, that they had been conversing upon a subject so important to all.

It was about the middle of the afternoon, and the emigrant-party plodded patiently forward, chatting and conversing upon ordinary topics with such pleasantry and zest that no one would have suspected the least thought of danger had entered their heads. So long as the silence of the scouts

continued, the emigrants knew there was no cause for alarm. Should danger threaten, they would be warned in time.

An hour later, as they were proceeding quietly along, the near report of a rifle broke upon their ears. Every face blanched, and every heart beat faster at the startling signal of danger. This it meant, and nothing else; and the members of the company instinctively halted, and made a partial preparation for an attack. They had scarcely done so, when Laughlin, with his cat-like tread, stepped in among them.

"What made you fire, Jake?" asked Dravoond, one of the leaders of the party.

"Me fire? I haven't pulled trigger since I shot the wild turkey yesterday. It must have been Sam or Myrick."

As he spoke, the latter two, who were the other scouts, also made their appearance, when, to the surprise of all, it was discovered that neither of them had fired the alarming shot. Consequently, it must have been done by a stranger. The moment this fact became known, the scouts separated and resumed their duties, while the emigrants, after a short consultation, moved on again, more slowly and carefully than before.

On the whole, although the report of the rifle could not be explained by any of the emigrants, the majority were disposed to take it rather as a favorable sign than otherwise. If made by an Indian, it could not have been done accidentally, for such a thing rarely if ever was known among them; and, as it could not have been fired by an enemy, with the full knowledge of the vicinity of the emigrants, the savages, if savages they were, must either be unaware of the latter fact, or else the strange shot came from a white man.

If there were lurking Indians in the wood, ignorant of the presence of the whites, they were soon apprised, for both of the leading oxen, who had not done such a thing for days, now paused and bellowed terrifically for several moments. The driver endeavored to check their dreadful noise by whacking them over the heads, but it availed nothing. They were determined, and continued the clamor, pausing now and then, as though pleased with the echo, which could be heard rolling through the woods for over a mile distant. Having finished, they resumed their progress, as if satisfied with what they had done.

"Father, them's our oxen," said Jim, "and, by thunder, if they bawl out that way agin I'll shoot 'em both. How far did you say the settlement is off?"

"Forty or fifty miles. Why do you ask again?"

"Nothin', only if they've put any of their babies asleep to-day, them oxen have set them all to squalling agin."

The sun was getting well down toward the horizon, and the dim twilight was wrapping the woods in its mantle, when the teamster halted the oxen, and the emigrants commenced their preparations for the encampment. The wagon was left standing in its tracks, the oxen simply unfastened, and with their yokes on, led to where some bundles of hay were spread upon the ground. A large fire was soon blazing and crackling a short distance away, around which the women were engaged in preparing the evening meal, while the men, who wandered hither and thither apparently without any definite object, neglected no precaution which could insure them against attack through the night. The three scouts had extended their beats several hundred yards, and completely reconnoitered the ground intervening between them and the camp-fire, so that they felt some assurance of safety as they joined their friends in the evening meal.

Just as they all had finished partaking of this, a second rifle report, as near to them as was the first, broke the stillness. The men started to their feet and grasped their weapons. They gazed all around them, as if expecting the appearance of some one, but failing to see any thing, commenced speculating upon the cause of this singular repetition of what had puzzled them so at first.

"It beats my larning to explain it," said old Smith.

"I tell you what it is," said son Harry, "that ain't an Injin's piece, nohow you can fix it."

"How do you know that?" queried brother Jim.

"It's the same gun we heard this afternoon, and when you see a Shawnee do that I'll believe our oxen don't know how to beller."

"We must be ready, my friends, for the worst," said one of the emigrants, who, up to this time, had not referred to the danger at all.

Another reconnoissance was made by the scouts, but with no better success than before. The darkness of the wood was such that they labored at great disadvantage, and it would have been no difficult matter for a single person to have remained concealed within a short distance of the whites.

As the night progressed, the females and children retired to the wagon, and the men chose their stations around it. The oxen, one by one, sunk heavily to the earth, contentedly chewing their cud, and a stillness as profound as that of the tomb settled upon the forest. The fire had smouldered to a few embers, which glowed with a dim redness through the ashes, and occasionally disclosed a shadowy form as it hurried by.

Several of the men were sleeping soundly, for enough were on duty as sentinels to make them feel as much ease as it was possible to feel where they could never be assured of perfect safety. Two of the most faithful sentinels were Jim and Harry Smith, who were stationed within a few feet of each other. Now and then they exchanged a word or two, but the risk was too great to attempt any thing like a continued conversation.

Three separate times Jim was sure he heard a footstep near him, and as often did he turn his head and fail to discover the meaning of it. Finally, he caught a glimpse of some one as he brushed hurriedly by and disappeared in the darkness. He raised his gun, and was on the point of firing, when he lowered it again. The thought that probably it was a white man, and a dislike to give the camp a groundless alarm, was the cause of this failure to fire.

Several times again through the night did he detect a foot-fall, but he was not able to catch sight of the stranger. Shortly after midnight the evidences of his visit ceased, and Jim concluded that he had withdrawn so as to be beyond sight when daylight broke.

What was his surprise, therefore, when he saw, as the gray light of morning stole through the wood, the form of a man seated on the ground, with his head reclining against a tree and sound asleep. If this surprise was great, it became absolute amazement when he examined his features, and saw that the man was no other than Lewis Dornor, the leader of the Riflemen of the Miami! Jim could scarce believe his senses as he walked forward and shook the sleeper by the shoulder.

"I should as soon have expected to see Mad Anthony himself as to see you, Lew Dornor, sitting here sound asleep," said he, as the Rifleman opened his eyes and looked about him. A smile crossed his handsome countenance as he replied:

"I believe I have been sleeping."

"I believe you have, too. Have you been hanging around here all night?"

"Yes, and all day, too."

"And was it you who fired those shots?"

"I fired my rifle once or twice, I believe."

"Good! Well, Lew, we're glad to see you, and we would be a deuced sight gladder if we could see the rest of the Riflemen. Where are they?"

"Up the Miami, I suppose. At any rate, that's where I left them."

"Well, I'm afraid we're getting into hot water here, Lew, to tell the truth, and there's no one whose face would be more welcome just now than yours. I see they are beginning to wake up and show themselves. Gavoon has started the fire, so s'pose we go in and you make yourself known."

The hunter followed young Smith to the camp, where, in a short time, he met and shook hands with most of the settlers, who were indeed glad enough to see him; and this gladness was increased to delight when he expressed his willingness to accompany them across the dreaded creek. In the course of a half-hour the females began to make their appearance. Near by was a small

stream where they performed their ablutions, which finished, they gathered around the camp-fire, and busied themselves with preparing the breakfast of the party.

Dernor, the Rifleman, was conversing with one of the settlers, when some one touched him on the shoulder. Looking around, he encountered his friend, Jim Smith.

"Here's a person I s'pose you've no objection to see," said he, with a light laugh.

The bronzed face of the hunter deepened its hue as he saw Edith Sudbury approaching, and although gifted with a natural grace of manner, he displayed some embarrassment as he advanced to greet her. Her conduct, too, was not without its suspicious air. Rosy and fresh as the flowers of the green woods around, perhaps the carnation of her cheeks was caused only by the morning exercise. Jim noticed these manifestations, and quietly smiled, but said nothing.

In regard to the Rifleman, at least, he was right. As that brave and gallant-hearted ranger wandered through the grand old forests of Ohio, and the cane-brakes of the "Dark and Bloody Ground," a fair face had haunted his waking and dreaming hours. As he knelt beside the sparkling brook to slake his thirst, he beheld the same features reflected beside his own in its mirror-like surface. As alone he threaded his way through the labyrinths of those dim solitudes, he had a fairy companion as faithful to him as his own shadow. And when with his tried and faithful followers, it was the same. Only in the excitement of the fight, or the moments when his strategic skill was in rivalry with that of his dusky enemies, did this shadowy being cease to haunt him. Night and day, it was the same – and now he had met the *reality*, and was conversing with her.

The conversation lasted but a few minutes. The services of Edith were needed, and she tripped away to assist the others at their duties. As she disappeared, Jim came up and laughingly remarked to the Rifleman:

"A fine girl that, Lewis."

"Indeed she is. I never have heard her name – that is, nothing more than Edith. What is the rest?"

"Sudbury – Edith Sudbury."

The hunter started, as if bitten by a rattlesnake, and turned as pale as death. Young Smith noticed his emotion, and asked, with some alarm:

"What's the matter, Lew? What is there about that name that so troubles you?"

"Never mind, Jim. I did not think it was *her*!"

Smith had too much natural kindness of heart to refer to a subject so painful to the hunter, although his curiosity was great to know what could possibly have affected him so strangely. As nothing further was said by Dernor, this curiosity remained unsatisfied for a long time.

The emigrant-party shortly after was under way. When within a mile or so of the creek to which we have referred, one of the scouts reconnoitered it, and came in with the report that quite a body of Shawnees were on its banks, and beyond a doubt were waiting for the company to come up. Dernor coincided in this opinion, and held a consultation with the male members of the party. The result of this consultation was a determination on his part to make all haste to the rendezvous of the Riflemen of the Miami, and bring them hither, the settlers agreeing to halt and await their arrival. The danger that menaced them was certainly great to make this step necessary.

CHAPTER III. THE RIFLEMEN OF THE MIAMI

There they sat and chatted gayly, while the flickering of the blaze
Led the shadows on their faces in a wild and devious maze;
And among them, one I noted, unto whom the rest gave place,
Which was token he was foremost in the fight or in the chase.

Dr. English.

One cold, drizzly, sleety day, in a winter toward the latter part of the last century, a party of Shawnee Indians crossed from the Kentucky cane-brakes into Ohio. Penetrating its deep, labyrinthine forests, they came upon a double cabin, where dwelt two widows, with several children. These they inhumanly massacred, and burnt their dwellings to the ground. Then, laden with their plunder, they set out on their return to Kentucky.

It so happened that two brothers, George and Lewis Dernor, who were upon a hunting expedition in this section, came upon the burning cabin within an hour after the savages had left it. They saw by the numerous tracks that the party was too large for them to think of attacking; nevertheless, they took the trail with the resolution of ascertaining to what tribe the savages belonged; and, if possible, to pick off one or two, as a slight payment for the outrage they had committed. Following on for several miles, they gained a glimpse of them, as they crossed a ridge, and discovered, as they had suspected all along, that they were a party of Shawnees returning to Kentucky, although the majority of this tribe of Indians at this time had their towns in Ohio. A half-hour later, by signs known only to experienced woodmen, they became convinced that some one else was also upon the trail of the Indians. After a great amount of maneuvering and stratagetic reconnoitering, they learned that it was a hunter like themselves, and no other but their old friend Dick Allmat. Accompanied by him, they continued the pursuit, and a mile further on, discovered that still another person was dogging the Shawnees. Pretty certain that this must also be a friend, they managed to make themselves known to him without the tedious ceremony which had characterized their introduction to Allmat. He proved to be Tom O'Hara, whose utmost exertions were necessary to keep pace with the retreating savages. He was in a perfect fury that they should proceed so fast, when he could see no necessity for it, and was half tempted to expend some of his wrath upon those of his friends who laughed at his discomfiture.

The party, now numbering four experienced hunters, felt considerable confidence in their strength, and the proposition was made to attack the Shawnees. The latter numbered seven or eight, and from their deliberate and incautious movements, it was manifest, had not learned that they were pursued. Perhaps they believed no white man could brave the blinding, seething storm then raging, for they neglected those precautions which seem to be second nature with the North American Indian.

The proposition made by Lewis Dernor was agreed to, and the plan matured. The conflict took place in a sort of open hollow, and probably was one of the most sanguinary personal conflicts that ever occurred on the frontier. The hunters came out of it with no wounds worth mentioning, while only two of the savages escaped. These plunged into the woods, and disappeared with the speed of the wind, and the whites were left undisputed masters of the field.

This was by no means the first outrage which had been committed by similar bands of Indians, and just at this particular time the arm of the General Government was so weakened from the repeated disastrous campaigns against them, that they insulted the whites with impunity,

and entertained, in reality, no fear at all of punishment or retribution. This was the subject of conversation with the hunters, and so impressed them, that Lewis Dornor proposed that they should bind themselves together for an indefinite period, (which was not intended to be over a couple of years or so at the most,) to do their utmost to check the monstrous outrages which were becoming so common along the border. The four hunters mentioned were well known to each other, and had the reputation of being the best riflemen and woodmen of any then known. In addition to this, they were all unmarried, and without any prospects of changing their condition; consequently they were at perfect liberty to wander whither they pleased.

The proposition was considered, and received a unanimous and enthusiastic response from all. The brothers Dornor, in their hunting expeditions, had spent several nights in a cave along the Miami, which they had discovered by accident, and which afforded them not only a comfortable, but also a perfect concealment. It was agreed that this should be their rendezvous, and in order that all might learn its locality, and the manner of approach to it, the following night was spent within it.

Now commences the history of the Riflemen of the Miami, as they were christened by the settlers, to whom their exploits soon became known, and as they were proud to acknowledge themselves. Instead of disbanding at the end of two years, as was originally contemplated, this confederation had an existence for over a dozen years. They participated in Anthony Wayne's great battle with the Indians, in 1794, where two of the members fell, and which concluded their history, as the surviving members retired to private life, and were too old to participate in the Tecumseh's war of 1812.

It would require a volume to detail the exploits of these Riflemen. Unlike many other confederations that were formed about this period, their only object was that of self-defense, and of offering protection to the settlers who were constantly penetrating the Great West. No innocent Indians ever suffered at their hands, and many was the one they befriended and assisted in his extremity. But woe betide the offender that fell into their hands. To the cruel they were unsparing; to the merciless they showed no mercy. While their name was loved and revered by the whites, it was feared and execrated by the savages. The Shawnees were unusually active and vindictive at this time, and it was with them that the most frequent encounters took place. The incident detailed in the first chapter was but one among many that were constantly occurring, and it scarcely equaled in importance numerous exploits that they had before performed.

There was a fifth member, who joined the Riflemen only a year or two previous to the period in which we design to notice their actions more particularly. He was known as Ferdinand Sego, and became a member from a part which he performed one night on the Ohio, when the Riflemen were attacked by three times their number. He displayed such activity, skill and courage, that he was importuned to unite with them, although, up to this time, they had refused to receive any accessions to their number. He consented, and from that time forward the Riflemen of the Miami numbered five hunters.

Sego joined them, however, with the understanding that he should be obliged to absent himself from time to time. At regular intervals he left them, and was gone sometimes for over a week. As he had no rifle, the cause of these excursions remained a mystery to his friends until he chose to reveal it himself. It then turned out that it was nothing less than a female that exercised such a potent influence upon him. Sego, as he became intimately acquainted with his friends, often spoke of this girl, and of the great affection he bore her. One day he gave her name – Edith Sudbury. This excited no unusual interest, until Lewis Dornor learned, on the day that he encountered the emigrants, that he and Sego loved the same girl!

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