

When Wilderness Was King



Randall Parrish

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A Novel on Fort Dearborn Massacre

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CHAPTER I

A MESSAGE FROM THE WEST

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SURELY it was no longer ago than yesterday. I had left the scythe lying at the edge of the long grass, and gone up through the rows of nodding Indian corn to the house, seeking a draught of cool water from the spring. It was hot in the July sunshine; the thick forest on every side intercepted the breeze, and I had been at work for some hours. How pleasant and inviting the little river looked in the shade of the great trees, while, as I paused a moment bending over the high bank, I could see a lazy pike nosing about among the twisted roots below.

My mother, her sleeves rolled high over her round white arms, was in the dark interior of the milk-house as I passed, and spoke to me laughingly; and I could perceive my father sitting in his great splint-bottomed chair just within the front doorway, and I marked how the slight current of air toyed with his long gray beard. The old Bible lay wide open upon his knee; yet his eyes were resting upon the dark green of the woods that skirted our clearing. I wondered, as I quaffed the cool sweet water at the spring, if he was dreaming again of those old days when he had been a man among men. How distinct in each detail the memory of it remains! The blue sky held but one fleecy white cloud in all its wide arch; it seemed as if the curling film of smoke rising from our chimney had but gathered there and hung suspended to

render the azure more pronounced. A robin peeked impudently at me from an oak limb, and a roguish gray squirrel chattered along the low ridge-pole, with seeming willingness to make friends, until Rover, suddenly spying me, sprang hastily around the corner of the house to lick my hand, with glad barkings and a frantic effort to wave the stub of his poor old tail. It was such a homely, quiet scene, there in the heart of the backwoods, one I had known unchanged so long, that I little dreamed it was soon to witness the turning over of a page of destiny in my life, that almost from that hour I was to sever every relation of the past, and be sent forth to buffet with the rough world alone.

There were no roads, in those days, along that valley of the upper Maumee—merely faint bridle-paths, following ancient Indian trails through dense woods or across narrow strips of prairie-land; yet as I hung the gourd back on its wooden peg, and lifted my eyes carelessly to the northward, I saw a horseman riding slowly toward the house along the river bank. There were flying rumors of coming Indian outbreaks along the fringe of border settlements; but my young eyes were keen, and after the first quick thrill of suspicion I knew the approaching stranger to be of white blood, although his apparel was scarcely less uncivilized than that of the savage. Yet so unusual were visitors, that I grasped a gun from its pegs in the kitchen, and called warningly to my mother as I passed on to meet the newcomer.

He was a very large and powerful man, with a matted black beard and an extremely prominent nose. A long rifle was slung at his back, and the heavy bay horse he bestrode

bore unmistakable signs of hard travelling. As he approached, Rover, spying him, sprang out savagely; but I caught and held him with firm grip, for to strangers he was ever a surly brute.

"Is this yere Major Wayland's place?" the man questioned, in a deep, gruff voice, reining in his tired horse, and carelessly flinging one booted foot across the animal's neck as he faced me.

"Yes," I responded with caution, for we were somewhat suspicious of stray travellers in those days, and the man's features were not pleasing. "The Major lives here, and I am his son."

He looked at me intently, some curiosity apparent in his eyes, as he deliberately drew a folded paper from his belt.

"No? Be ye the lad what downed Bud Eberly at the meetin' over on the Cow-skin las' spring?" he questioned, with faintly aroused interest.

I blushed like a school-girl, for this unexpected reference was not wholly to my liking, though the man's intentions were evidently most kind.

"He bullied me until I could take no more," I answered, doubtfully; "yet I hurt him more seriously than I meant."

He laughed at the trace of apology in my words.

"Lord!" he ejaculated, "don't ever let that worry ye, boy. The hull settlement is mighty glad 'twas done. Old Hawkins bin on the p'int o' doin' it himself a dozen o' times. Told me so. Ye're quite a lad, ain't ye? Weigh all o' hundred an' seventy, I'll bet; an' strong as an ox. How old be ye, anyhow?"

"Twenty," I answered, not a little mollified by his manner. "You must live near here, then?"

"Wal, no, but been sorter neighbor o' yourn fer a month er so back; stoppin' up at Hawkins's shebang, at the ford, on the Military Road, visitin'; but guess I never met up with none o' your folks afore. My name's Burns, Ol' Tom Burns, late o' Connecticut. A sojer from out West left this yere letter fer yer father at Hawkins's place more nor a week ago. Said as how it was mighty important; but blamed if this wasn't the fust chance he's hed to git it over yere sence. I told him I'd fetch it, as it wasn't more nor a dozen miles er so outer my way."

He held out a square paper packet; and while I turned it over curiously in my hand—the first letter I had ever seen—he took some loose tobacco from an outside pocket and proceeded leisurely to fill his pipe.

My mother rolled my father's chair forward into the open doorway, and stood close behind him, as was her custom, one arm resting lightly upon the quaintly carved chair-back.

"What is it, John?" she questioned gently. Instantly aroused by her voice, I crossed quickly over and placed the packet in my father's thin hands. He turned it over twice before he opened it, looking at the odd seal, and reading the superscription carefully aloud, as if fearful there might be some mistake:

"Major David Wayland,
Along the Upper Maumee.
Leave at Hawkins Ford
"Important.on Military Road."

I can see him yet as he read it, slowly feeling his way through the rude, uneven writing, with my mother leaning over his shoulder and helping him, her rosy cheeks and dark tresses making strange contrast beside his pain-racked features and iron-gray hair.

"Read it aloud, Mary," he said at last. "I shall understand it better. 'Tis from Roger Matherson, of whom you have heard me speak."

My mother was a good scholar, and she read clearly, only hesitating now and then over some ill-written or misspelled word.

At FORT DEARBORN, near the head of the
Great Lake. Twelfth June, 1812.

MY DEAR OLD FRIEND:

I have come to the end of life; they tell me it will be all over by the morrow, and there remains but one thing that greatly troubles me—my little girl, my Elsa. You know I have never much feared death, nor do I in this hour when I face it once more; for I have ever tried to honor God and do my duty as both man and soldier. David, I can scarcely write, for my mind wanders strangely, and my fingers will but barely grasp the pen. 'Tis not the grip of the old sword-hand you knew so well, for I am already very weak, and dying. But do you yet remember the day I drew you out of the rout at Saratoga, and bore you away safely, though the Hessians shot me twice? God knows, old friend, I never thought to remind you of the act—'twas

no more than any comrade would have done—yet I am here among strangers, and there is no one else living to whom I may turn in my need. David, in memory of it, will you not give my little orphan child a home? Your old comrade, upon his death-bed, begs this of you with his final breath. She is all alone here, save for me, and there is no blood kin in all the world to whom I may appeal. I shall leave some property, but not much. As you love your own, I pray you be merciful in this hour to my little girl.

Your old comrade,

ROGER MATHERSON.

This had been endorsed by another and bolder hand:

Captain Roger Matherson, late of the Massachusetts Continental Line, died at this fort, of fever, fourteenth June, 1812. His daughter is being cared for by the ladies of the garrison.

NATHAN HEALD,
Capt. First Regt. Inf., Commanding.

The tears were clinging to my mother's long lashes as she finished the reading; she was ever tender of heart and sympathetic with sorrow. My father sat in silence, looking far off at the green woods. Presently he took the paper again into his hands, folded it carefully in the old creases, and placed it safely away between the Bible leaves. I saw my

mother's fingers steal along the arm of the chair until they closed softly over his.

"The poor little lamb!" she said gently.

My father's old sword hung over the fireplace, and I saw his glance wander toward it, as something seemed to rise choking in his throat. He was always a man who felt deeply, yet said but little; and we both knew he was thinking about the old days and the strong ties of comradeship.

The stranger struck flint and steel to light his pipe; the act instantly recalled my father to the demands of hospitality.

"Friend," he said, speaking firmly, "hitch to the stump yonder, and come in. You have brought me sad news enough, yet are no less welcome, and must break bread at our board. John," and he turned toward me, "see to friend Burns's horse, and help your mother to prepare the dinner."

Out in the rude shed, which answered as a kitchen during summer weather, I ventured to ask:

"Mother, do you suppose he will take the little girl?"

"I hope so, John," she answered, soberly; "but your father must decide himself. He will not tell us until he has thought it all out alone."

CHAPTER II

THE CALL OF DUTY

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IT was upon my mind all through that long afternoon, as I swung the scythe in the meadow grass. I saw Burns ride away up the river trail soon after I returned to work, and wondered if he bore with him any message from my father. It was like a romance to me, to whom so few important things had ever happened. In some way, the coming of this letter out of the great unknown had lifted me above the narrow life of the clearing. My world had always been so small, such a petty and restricted circle, that this new interest coming within its horizon had widened it wonderfully.

I had grown up on the border, isolated from what men term civilization; and I could justly claim to know chiefly those secrets which the frontier teaches its children. My only remembrance of a different mode of life centred about the ragged streets of a small New England village, where I had lived in earlier childhood. Ever since, we had been in the depths of the backwoods; and after my father's accident I became the one upon whom the heavier part of the work fell. I had truly thrived upon it. In my hunting-trips, during the dull seasons, I learned many a trick of the forest, and had already borne rifle twice when the widely scattered settlements were called to arms by Indian forays. There were no schools in that country; indeed, our nearest

neighbor was ten miles distant as the crow flies. But my mother had taught me, with much love and patience, from her old treasured school-books; and this, with other lore from the few choice volumes my father clung to through his wanderings, gave me much to ponder over. I still remember the evenings when he read to us gravely out of his old Shakespeare, dwelling tenderly upon passages he loved. And he instructed me in other things—in honor and manliness, in woodcraft, and many a pretty thing at arms, until no lad in the settlements around could outdo me in rough border sport. I loved to hear him, of a boisterous winter night—he spoke of such matters but seldom—tell about his army life, the men he had fought beside and loved, the daring deeds born of his younger blood. In that way he had sometimes mentioned this Roger Matherson; and it was like a blow to me now to hear of his death. I wondered what the little girl would be like; and my heart went out to her in her loneliness. Scarcely realizing it, I was lonely also.

"Has he spoken yet?" I questioned anxiously of my mother, as I came up to the open kitchen door when the evening chores were done.

"No, John," she answered, "he has been sitting there silently looking out at the woods ever since the man left. He is thinking, dear, and we must not worry him."

The supper-table had been cleared away, and Seth, the hired man, had crept up the creaking ladder to his bed under the eaves, before my father spoke. We were all three together in the room, and I had drawn his chair forward, as was my custom, where the candle-light flickered upon his

face. I knew by the look of calm resolve in his gray eyes that a decision had been reached.

"Mary," he began gravely, "and you, John, we must talk together of this new duty which has just come to us. I hardly know what to decide, for we are so poor and I am now so helpless; yet I have prayed earnestly for guidance, and can but think it must be God's will that we care for this poor orphan child of my old friend."

My mother crossed the room to him, and bent down until her soft cheek touched his lips.

"I knew you would, David," she whispered, in the tender way she had, her hand pressing back his short gray hair. "She shall ever be unto us as our own little girl—the one we lost come back to us again."

My father bent his head wearily upon one hand, his eyes upon the candle flame, his other hand patting her fingers.

"It must be all of ten years," he said slowly, "since last I had word of Roger Matherson. He was in Canada then, yet has never since been long out of my mind. He saved my life, not once alone, as he would seem to remember, but three separate times in battle. We were children together in the blue Berkshire hills, and during all our younger manhood were more than brothers. His little one shall henceforth be as my own child. God hath given her unto us, Mary, as truly as if she had been born of our love. I knew that Roger had married, yet heard nothing of the birth of the child or the loss of his wife. However, from this hour the orphan is to be our own; and we must now decide upon some safe means of bringing her here without delay."

He paused. No one of us spoke. His glance slowly wandered from the candle flame, until it settled gravely upon my face as I sat resting on a rude bench fitted into the chimney corner. He looked so intently at me that my mother seemed instantly to interpret his thought.

"Oh, surely not that, David?" she exclaimed, pleadingly. "Not John?"

"I know of no other fit messenger, little woman," he answered soberly. "It has indeed troubled me far more than all the rest, to decide on this; yet there is no one else whom I think equal to the task. John is a good boy, mother, and has sufficient experience in woodcraft to make the journey."

"But the savages!" she insisted. "'Tis said we are upon the verge of a fresh outbreak, stirred up by this new war with England, that may involve the settlements at any time. You know Burns told you just now—and he is an old scout, familiar with the West—that British agents were active along the whole border, and there was great uneasiness among the Indian tribes."

"There is serious promise of danger, 'tis true," he admitted, a flash of the old fire in his eyes. "Yet that is scarce likely to halt David Wayland's son. Indeed, it is the greater reason why this helpless orphan child should be early brought to our protection. Think of the defenceless little girl exposed alone to such danger! Nor have we means of judging, Mary, of the real seriousness of the situation to the north and west. War between the nations may very likely arouse the spirit of the savages, yet rumors of Indian outbreak are always on the lips of the settlers. Burns himself was upon his return westward, and did not seem greatly

troubled lest he fail to get through. He claimed to live at Chicagou Portage, wherever that may be. I only know it is the extreme frontier."

My mother did not answer; and now I spoke, my cheeks aflame with eagerness.

"Do you truly mean, sir, that I am to go in search of the little girl?" I asked, barely trusting my own ears.

"Yes, John," my father replied gravely, motioning me to draw closer to his chair. "This is a duty which has fallen to you as well as to your mother and me. We can, indeed, but poorly spare you from the work at this season; yet Seth will be able to look after the more urgent needs of the farm while you are absent, while he would prove quite useless on such a mission as this. Do not worry, Mary. Friend Burns is well acquainted with all that western country, and he tells me there is scarcely a week that parties of soldiers, or friendly Indians, do not pass along the trail, and that by waiting at Hawkins's place for a few days John will be sure to find some one with whom he may companion on the long journey westward. He would himself have accompanied him, but must first bear a message to friends at Vincennes. It is now some weeks since Roger Matherson died, and we shall prove unworthy of our trust if we delay longer in sending for his daughter."

Though my mother was a western woman, patient and long habituated to sacrifice and peril, still her eyes, fixed upon my face, were filled with tears, and the color had deserted her cheeks.

"I know not why it should be so, David," she urged softly; "but in my heart I greatly fear this trip for John. Yet you have

ever found me ready to yield wherever it seemed best, and I doubt not you are right in your decision."

At any other time I should have gone to her with words of comfort and good cheer; but now my ambition was so aroused by this impending adventure as to permit me to think of nothing else.

"Is it so very far, father, to where I must go?" I questioned, eagerly. "Where is this Fort Dearborn, and how am I to journey in reaching there? 'Tis no garrison of which I have ever heard."

"Bring me the map your mother made of this country, and the regions to the westward," he said. "I am not over clear in regard to the matter myself, although friend Burns, who claims to know all that country, gave me some brief description; but I found him most chary of speech."

I got the map out of the great square cupboard in the corner, and spread the paper flat upon the table, placing knives at each corner to hold it open. I rolled his chair up before it, and the three of us bent our heads over the map together, our faces glowing in the candle flame. It was a copy made by a quill from a great government map my mother had seen somewhere in her journeying westward; and, though only a rude design, it was not badly done, and was sufficiently accurate for our purpose. Much of it was still blank; yet the main open trails had been traced with care, the principal fords over the larger streams were marked, and the various government posts and trading settlements distinctly located and named. Searching for the head of the Great Lake, we were not long in discovering the position of the fort called Dearborn, which seemingly was posted upon

the western shore, nearly opposite another garrison point at the mouth of the St. Joseph river. We were able to trace with clearness the military road that had been constructed northward from Fort Wayne, our nearest government post; but the map failed to exhibit evidence of any beaten track, or used trail, leading westward and around the head of the lake. There were numerous irregular lines which denoted unnamed streams, but by far the larger portion of the territory extending to the west beyond Fort Wayne had been simply designated as "forest land" and "unexplored." "Friend Burns tells me there is a trail used by both troops and savages, which he has traversed several times," my father explained, as he lifted his eyes from the map; "but it is not over plain, nor easily followed, as communication with the Fort is mostly maintained by means of the waterways to the northward. The overland journey, however, will prove speedier, besides being less liable to disaster for one unaccustomed to boats. How soon can John be ready, mother?"

Her voice trembled, and I felt the pressure of her hand upon my sleeve.

"It will take all of the morrow, David, to prepare his clothing properly," she replied, with the patient resignation of the frontier. "There is much that will need seeing after."

"Then John will start the next dawn. You had best ride the brown colt, my son; he is of good breed, and speedy. Seth shall accompany you until you find suitable companionship at Hawkins's. He will bring back word of how you started, and that knowledge will greatly comfort your mother."

He paused, and held out his thin hands.

"You go upon this strange journey willingly, my son?"

"Yes, father."

"You will be both kind and thoughtful with Roger Matherson's little girl?"

"She shall be to me as my own sister."

I felt the confiding clasp of his fingers, and realized how much to him would be a successful termination of my journey.

"Kiss your mother, John," he said, a trustful look coming into his kindly eyes. "We must all be astir early on the morrow."

Beneath the rived shingles of my little room, under the sloping roof, how I turned and tossed through those long night hours! What visions, both asleep and awake, came to me, thronging fast upon my heated brain, each more marvellous than its fellow, and all alike pointing toward that strange country which I was now destined by fate to travel! Vague tales of wonder and mystery had come floating to me out of that unknown West, and now I was to behold it all with my own eyes. But marvellous as were my dreams, the reality was to be even more amazing than these pictures of boyish imagination. Had I known the truth that night, I doubt greatly whether I should have had the courage to face it.

At last the gray dawn came, stealing in at the only window, and found me eager for the trial.

CHAPTER III

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE

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DREW rein upon the upper river bank, before we finally plunged into the dark woods beyond, and glanced back. I had to brush the gathering tears from my eyes before I could see clearly; and when I finally rode away, the picture of that dear old home was fixed in my memory forever. Our house stood near the centre of an oak opening—a little patch of native prairie-land, with a narrow stream skirting it on one side, and a dense fringe of forest all about. The small story-and-a-half cabin of hewn logs, with its lean-to of rough hand-riven planks, fronted to the southward; and the northern expanse of roof was green with moss. My father sat in the open doorway, his uplifted hand shading his eyes as he gazed after us; while my mother stood by his side, one arm resting upon the back of his chair, the other extended, waving a white cloth in farewell. Rover was without, where I had bidden him remain, eagerly watching for some signal of relenting upon my part. Beyond stood the rude out-buildings, silhouetted against the deep green. It was a homely, simple scene—yet till now it had been all the world to me.

With a final wave of the hand, I moved forward, until the intervening trees, like the falling of a curtain, hid it all from view. Seth was astride the old mare, riding bareback, his white goat-like beard hanging down his breast until it

mingled with her mane, while his long thin legs were drawn up in the awkward way he had. He was a strange, silent, gloomy man, as austere as his native hills; and we rode on with no exchange of speech. Indeed, my thoughts were of a nature that I had no wish to share with another; so it was some time before the depth of loneliness which oppressed my spirits enabled me to feel even passing interest in the things at hand.

"I'd hate like thunder ter be a-goin' on your trip, Maester John," volunteered Seth at last, solemnly turning on the mare's broad back to face me.

"And why?" I asked, wonderingly; for the man's rare gift of silence had won him a certain reputation for deep, occult knowledge which I could not wholly ignore. "It will bring me the sight of some wonderful country, no doubt."

His shrewd gimlet eyes seemed fairly to pierce me, as he deliberately helped himself to tobacco from a pouch at his waist.

"Wal, that may all be, Maester John; but I've heerd tell ther is some most awful things goes on out yonder," and he swung his long arm meaningly toward the west. "Animyles sich as don't prowl raound yere, man-yeatin' snakes as big as thet tree, an' the blood-thirstiest salvages as ever was. An' arter a while ther ain't no more trees grows, ther lan' is thet poor, by gosh! jist a plumb dead level er' short grass, an' no show ter hide ner nuthin'."

"Were you ever there, Seth?" I questioned with growing anxiety, for I had heard some such vague rumors as these before.

"Me? Not by a dinged sight!" he replied, emphatically. "This yere is a long way further west thin I keer 'bout bein'. Ol' Vermont is plenty good 'nough fer this chicken, an' many's ther day I wish I was back ther. But I hed a cousin onct who tuk ter sojerin' 'long with General Clarke, an' went 'cross them ther prairies ter git Vincennes from the British. Lor'! it must a' bin more ner thirty year ago! He tol' me thet they jist hed ter wade up ter ther neck in water fer days an' days. I ain't so durn fond o' water as all thet. An' he said as how rattlesnakes was everywhere; an' ther Injuns was mos' twice es big es they be yere."

"But Clarke, and nearly all of his men, got back safely," I protested.

"Oh, I guess some on 'em got back, 'cause they was an awful lot in thet army, mighty nigh two thousand on 'em, Ephriam said; but, I tell ye, they hed a most terrible tough time afore they did git hum. I seed my cousin whin he kim back, an' he was jist a mere shadder; though he was bigger ner you whin he went 'way."

"But Fort Dearborn is much farther to the north. Perhaps it will be better up there."

"Wuss," he insisted, with a most mournful shake of the head, "a dinged sight wuss. Ephriam said es how the further north ye wint, the tougher it got. He saw an Injun from up near the big lake—a Pottamottamie, or somethin' like thet—what was nine fut high, an' he told him es how the rivers in his kinty was all full o' man-eatin' critters like snakes, an' some on 'em hed a hundred legs ter crawl with, an' cud travel a dinged sight faster ner a hoss. By gosh! but you bet I don't want none on it. Your father must 'a' been plum crazy

fer ter sind ye way out ther all 'lone—jist a green boy like you. What ye a-goin' fer, enyhow?"

I explained to him the occasion and necessity for my trip, but he shook his head dubiously, his long face so exceedingly mournful that I could not remain unaffected by it.

"Wal," he said at length, carefully weighing his words, "maybe it's all right 'nough, but I've got my doubts jist the same. I'll bet thet ther gal is jist one o' them will-o'-the-wisps we hear on, an' you never will find her. You'll jist wander 'round, huntin' an' huntin' her, till ye git old, or them monsters git ye. An' I'll be blamed if ever I heerd tell o' no sich fort as thet, nohow."

Seth was certainly proving a Job's comforter; and I was already sufficiently troubled about the final outcome of my adventure. Hence my only hope of retaining any measure of courage was to discountenance further conversation, and we continued to jog along in silence, although I caught him looking at me several times in a manner that expressed volumes.

We camped that night in the dense heart of some oak woods, beside a pleasant stream of clear, cool water. Late the following evening, just as the sun was disappearing behind the trees, our wearied horses emerged suddenly upon the bank of a broad river, and we could discern the dim outlines of Hawkins's buildings amid the deepening shadows of the opposite shore.

Upon one thing I was now fully determined. Seth should start back with the first streak of the next dawn. His long face and dismal croakings kept me constantly upon nettles,

and I felt that I should face the uncertain future with far stouter heart if he were out of my sight. Firm in this resolve, I urged my horse to splash his reluctant way through the shallows of the ford; and as our animals rose on the steep bank of the western shore, we found ourselves at once in the midst of a group of scattered buildings. It seemed quite a settlement in that dim light, although the structures were all low and built of logs. The largest and most centrally located of these was evidently the homestead, as it had a rudely constructed porch in front, and a thin cloud of smoke was drifting from its chimney. As I drew nearer, I could perceive the reflection of a light streaming out through the open doorway.

No one appeared in answer to our shouting—not even a stray dog; and, in despair of thus arousing the inhabitants, I flung my rein to Seth, and, mounting the doorstep, peered within. As I did so, a shiny, round, black face, with whitened eyes and huge red lips, seemed to float directly toward me through the inner darkness. It was so startling an apparition that I sprang back in such haste as nearly to topple over backward from the steps. Heaven alone knows what I fancied it might be; indeed, I had little enough time in which to guess, for I had barely touched the ground—my mind still filled with memories of Seth's grotesque horrors—when the whole figure emerged into view, and I knew him instantly for a negro, though I had never before seen one of his race. He was a dandified-looking fellow, wearing a stiff white waistcoat fastened by gilded buttons, with a pair of short curly mustaches, waxed straight out at the ends; and he stood there grinning at me in a manner that showed all his

gleaming teeth. Before I could recover my wits enough to address him, I heard a voice from within the house—a soft, drawling voice, with a marked foreign accent clinging to it.

"Sam," it called, "have you found either of the scoundrelly rascals?"

The darkey started as if shot, and glanced nervously back over his shoulder.

"No, sah," he replied with vigor, "dat Mistah Hawkins am not yere, sah. An' dat Mistah Burns has gone 'way fer gud, sah. But dar am a gemman yere, sah—"

"What!" came a surprised ejaculation that caused the negro to jump, and I heard a chair overturned within. "A gentleman? Sam, don't deceive me! For the love of Heaven, let me see him. May I be bastinadoed if it hasn't been three months since my eyes beheld the last specimen! Sam, where was it I saw the last one?"

"Montreal, sah."

"By Saint Guise! 'tis gospel truth," and the speaker strode forward, candle in hand. "Here, now, you ace of spades," he cried impatiently, "hold the flame until I bid this paragon of the wilderness fit welcome in the name of Hawkins, who strangely seems to have vanished from the sylvan scene. Alas, poor Hawkins! two gentlemen at one time, I greatly fear, will be the death of him. Would that his good friend Burns might be with him on this festive occasion. Ye gods, what a time it would be!"

As the black hastily reached out for the candle-stick, his erratic master as quickly changed his mind.

"No," he muttered thoughtfully, drawing back within the hall; "'tis far more fit that such formal greeting should occur

within, where the essentials may be found with which to do full courtesy. I will instead retire. Sam, bid the gentleman meet me in the banquet hall, and then, mark you, thou archfiend of blackness, seek out at once that man Hawkins in his hidden lair, and bid him have ample repast spread instantly, on pain of my displeasure. By all the saints! if it be not at once forthcoming I will toast the scoundrel over his own slow fire."

"Seth," I said to my staring companion, as soon as I could recover from my own surprise, "find a place for the horses somewhere in the stables, and come in."

"Where is your master to be found?" I questioned of the black, whose air of self-importance had been resumed the moment he was left alone.

"Second door to de right, sah," he answered, gazing curiously at my deer-skin hunting-shirt as I pressed by.

I had little difficulty in finding it, for all that the way was totally dark, as the fellow within was lustily carolling a French love-song. I hung back for a moment, striving vainly to distinguish the words.

Without pausing to make my presence known, I opened the door quietly, and stepped within. The room was not a large one, though it occupied the full width of the house; and the two lighted candles that illumined it, one sitting upon a table otherwise bare, the other occupying the rude dresser in the far corner, revealed clearly the entire interior.

The sole occupant of the room sat upon a corner of the table, one foot resting on the floor, the other dangling carelessly. Hardly more than a year my elder, he bore in his face the indelible marks of a life vastly different. His

features were clear-cut, and undeniably handsome, with a curl of rare good-humor to his lips and an audacious sparkle within his dark eyes. His hat, cocked and ornamented in foreign fashion, lay beside him; and I could not help noting his long hair, carefully powdered and arranged with a nicety almost conspicuous, while his clothing was rich in both texture and coloring, and exhibited many traces of vanity in ribbon and ornament. Within his belt, fastened by a large metal clasp, he wore a pearl-handled pistol with long barrel; and a rapier, with richly jewelled hilt, dangled at his side. Altogether he made a fine figure of a man, and one of a sort I had never met before.

If he interested me, doubtless I was no less a study to him. I could see the astonishment in his eyes, after my first entrance, change to amusement as he gazed. Then he brought a white hand down, with a smart slap, upon the board beside him.

"By all the saints!" he exclaimed, "but I believe the black was right. 'Tis the face of a gentle, or I know naught of the breed, though the attire might fool the very elect. Yet, *parbleu!* if memory serves, 'tis scarcely worse than what I wore in Spain."

He swung down upon his feet and faced me, extending one hand with all cordiality, while lips and eyes smiled pleasantly.

"Monsieur," he said, bowing low, and with a grace of movement quite new to me, "I bid you hearty welcome to whatsoever of good cheer this desert may have to offer, and present to you the companionship of Villiers de Croix. It may

not seem much, yet I pledge you that kings have valued it ere now."

It was a form of introduction most unfamiliar to me, and seemed bristling with audacity and conceit; but I recognized the heartiness of his purpose, and hastened to make fit response.

"I meet you with much pleasure," I answered, accepting the proffered hand. "I am John Wayland."

The graceful recklessness of the fellow, so conspicuous in each word and action, strongly attracted me. I confess I liked him from his first utterance, although mentally, and perhaps morally as well, no two men of our age could possibly be more unlike.

"Wayland?" he mused, with a shrug, as if the sound of the word was unpleasant. "Wayland?—'tis a harsh name to my ears, yet I have heard it mentioned before in England as that of a great family. You are English, then?"

I shook my head emphatically; for the old wounds of controversy and battle were then being opened afresh, and the feeling of antagonism ran especially high along the border.

"I am of this country," I protested with earnestness, "and we call ourselves Americans."

He laughed easily, evidently no little amused at my retort, twisting his small mustache through his slender fingers as he eyed me.

"Ah! but that is all one to me; it is ever the blood and not the name that counts, my friend. Now I am French by many a generation, Gascon by birth, and bearing commission in the Guard of the Emperor; yet sooth, 'tis the single accursed

drop of Irish blood within my veins that brings me across the great seas and maroons me in this howling wilderness. But sit down, Monsieur. There will be both food and wine served presently, and I would speak with you more at ease."

As he spoke he flung himself upon a low settee, carelessly motioning me toward another.

"On my word," he said, eyeing me closely as I crossed over to the bench, "but you are a big fellow for your years, and 'tis strength, not flabby flesh, or I know not how to judge. You would make a fine figure of a soldier, John Wayland. Napoleon perchance might offer you a marshal's baton, just to see you in the uniform. *Parbleu!* I have seen stranger things happen."

"You are now connected with the French army?" I questioned, wondering what could have brought him to this remote spot.

"Ay, a Captain of the Guard, yet an exile, banished from the court on account of my sins. *Sacre!* but there are others, Monsieur. I have but one fault, my friend—grave enough, I admit, yet but one, upon my honor, and even that is largely caused by that drop of Irish blood. I love the ladies overwell, I sometimes fear; and once I dared to look too high for favor."

"And have you stopped here long?"

"Here—at Hawkins's, mean you? Ten days, as I live; would you believe I could ever have survived so grievous a siege?" and he looked appealingly about upon the bare apartment. "Ten days of Hawkins and of Sam, Monsieur; ay! and of Ol' Burns; of sky, and woods, and river, with never so much as a real white man even to drink liquor with. By Saint

Louis! but I shall be happy enough to face you across the board to-night. Yet surely it is not your purpose to halt here long?"

"Only until I succeed in joining some party travelling westward to the Illinois country."

"No! is that your aim? 'Tis my trip also, if Fate be ever kind enough to bring hither a guide. *Sacre!* there was one here but now, as odd a devil as ever bore rifle, and he hath taken the western trail alone, for he hated me from the start. That was Ol' Burns. Know you him?"

"'Twas he who brought the message that sent me here; yet he said little of his own journey. But you mention not where you are bound?"

"I seek Fort Dearborn, on the Great Lake."

"That likewise is to be the end of my journey. You go to explore?"

"Explore? Faith, no," and he patted his hand upon the bench most merrily. "There are but two reasons to my mind important enough to lure a French gentleman into such a hole as this, and send him wandering through your backwoods—either war or love, Monsieur; and I know of no war that calleth me."

Love, as he thus spoke of it, was almost an unknown term to me then; and, in truth, I scarcely grasped the full significance of his meaning.

"You seek some lady, then, at Fort Dearborn?" I asked, for his tone seemed to invite the inquiry.

"Ay!" with quickened enthusiasm; "'tis there Toinette has hidden herself for this year or more—Toinette, on my word as a French soldier, the fairest maid of Montreal. I have just