

T. C. Harbaugh

*The Yellow Hunter;
or, The Winding
Trail of Death*

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CHAPTER I.

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BESIEGED.

Pontiac, the Ottawa, was dead!

Yes, the fearless originator of the greatest Indian conspiracy on record had received a death-blow at the hands of a fellow red-man, and the promise of a barrel of English rum had nerved the villain's arm.

The bloody deed was committed in the forest of the Illinois, not far from Cahokia, on the Mississippi, and when the base-hearted Kaskaskia fled to his clansmen, with reeking hatchet, they sided with him, and, without a word in palliation of the crime, drove Pontiac's followers from the hamlet.

The great Ottawa's sachems spread over all the country, crying "blood for blood." They fired many a savage heart with the torch of vengeance, and inaugurated a war whose horrors stand without a parallel on the pages of American history.

From the bays and rivers that relieve the vast dreary western shore of Lake Michigan, rushed the Sacs, Foxes and Menomonies, to assist in the extirpation of the Illinois and the hated English who dwelt in the neighborhood where the conspirator was assassinated. Out from among the stately pines that cover that mighty peninsula between Huron and her western sister, came the intractable Ojibwa, the giant Ottawa, and the proverbially treacherous but brave Pottawatomie; and being joined on the Wabash by the Wyandots, the Miamies, and other more eastern tribes, they

swooped down upon the Eden land that bordered the Father of Waters.

Their motto was, 'Death to the unprotected English and the Illinois Indians, but life to every Frenchman!'

Before the war that followed, all other Indian conflicts sink into utter insignificance, and over the grave of Pontiac more blood was poured out in atonement than flowed from the hecatombs of slaughtered heroes on the corpse of Patroclus:

And through the dark and bloody labyrinths of that era of death, the reader is about to follow the fortunes of red and white—fortunes which pale the cheek and almost turn the blood to ice.

"Father should have been here ere this. He said he would return at sunset. I wonder what keeps him. Surely no danger has befallen him. No, I know he can not be far away, and I will run toward the creek and meet him."

The speaker was a beautiful girl about eighteen years of age, and, as she uttered the last word, she bounded across the threshold of a low-browed cottage, and hurried toward the south.

She trailed a light rifle at her side, which, with her long, dark hair, and demi-Indian habiliments, gave her a decidedly romantic appearance. A few moments served to bring her to the stream, the Cahokia creek, which debouches into the lordly Mississippi a few miles above the ancient hamlet of like name. Pausing at the water's edge, she gazed far beyond the ford with anxious eyes.

The evening was a balmy one, in the early part of May, 1769, and the country of the Illinois wore robes of surpassing beauty. While not insensible to the delights of the landscape spread about her, Kate Blount continued to look for her father, who had taken a large bundle of furs to Cahokia, and had promised to return that evening.

Kate was not really fearful for her father's personal safety, but she knew his failing, and feared that an indulgence might detain him at the frontier station, and compel her to remain in their solitary cabin through a long night alone.

Of late, rumors of an approaching Indian war had reached the settlers in the Illinois, and many had already sought shelter in Cahokia and Fort Chartres. But, Oliver Blount had derided the stories of conflict, and declared that the avenging Indians would strike no one save the Illinois, and their fellow clansmen.

"They're going to extirpate the Illinois, root and branch," he would say, "but what have they to do with us? *We* didn't kill Pontiac!"

"But, father, English rum drove the tomahawk to the chief's brain," Kate had often replied, "and I tell you that more than one British scalp will hang at an Indian's belt when the carnage begins."

"Pooh! girl, that's all talk. You ain't as old as your father, who has no wish to show the white feather and hide behind Fort Chartres. No! we'll meet the war here!"

Poor, deluded Oliver Blount! He soon paid dearly for his stubbornness.

Kate felt that the war of extermination was near at hand, and, like a brave woman, prepared for it. During her father's journey to St. Louis and Cahokia, she molded a store of bullets, and cleaned the little rifle which, a few weeks before the opening of our story, she had accepted from the hands of a young fur-trader, of whom, dear reader, more anon.

"I'm going to stay with father," she often murmured with determination, "and when he is in danger there will be one hand to save. Oh, I fear he will repent of his rashness when it is too late!"

For many minutes she watched the path leading from the ford; but the well-known form of the loved parent did not greet her eye, and at last, the young girl turned toward her home again.

"Father is tarrying before Kildare's bottles, I fear," she muttered, "and I—Hark! he is coming through the wood! He has missed the path."

Again she turned toward the stream, and a moment later, not her father, but an Indian, burst upon her sight!

Despite the shades now vailing the forest in gloom, she recognized him, when his feet touched the water at the ford.

"Swamp Oak!" she ejaculated, "and he has been chased, too, for I distinctly hear his pantings. Swamp Oak!"

She spoke the Indian's name in a louder tone, when, with a light cry of recognition he plunged into the water.

A minute brought him to the girl's side, and he cast his eyes over his shoulder before he allowed her to address him. Then he turned to her with a significant look which told her that the danger was passed, and that he awaited her pleasure.

“Where did the Swamp Oak come from?” questioned Kate Blount, eagerly.

“From the stone-walled fort,” was the quick reply.

The young Peoria could speak good English.

“Did you see my father?”

“No; the white trader’s shadow fell not across Swamp Oak’s trail. He made many a leaf bleed, Lone Dove.”

A faint smile wreathed the boy’s lips as he spoke the last sentence.

“You’ve been tracked, then?” said Kate Blount.

“The Ojibwa wolves were on the Peoria’s trail,” answered the youth; “but he proved too swift for them, and in the great forest they lost him.”

“Then the hatchet has been unearthed?”

“Yes, yes,” cried the Indian. “Between Cahokia and the stone-walled fort the enemies of the Illinois outnumber the leaves of the trees. The Ojibwa has sunk his boat, and now seeks red and white scalps: the—”

“Not white scalps, Swamp Oak?”

“White scalps, Lone Dove! Swamp Oak run by a pale-face’s cabin, and he saw a white maiden dead by the well.”

Kate Blount shuddered and thought of her father.

“Swamp Oak’s people must die!” continued the young chief, sadly; “but they will die like their fathers died. But, Lone Dove, we must not stand here, and for three days Swamp Oak has lived on roots.”

With a last anxious look across the stream, the young woman turned toward her home again, the brave walking at her side.

“I saw him, White Flower,” he said, suddenly.

Kate Blount started at the announcement, and a crimson flush suffused her beautiful cheeks.

“And when is he coming?” she asked, when she regained her composure.

“Even now he is on the way,” was the reply. “He sent Swamp Oak before, and he and the Pale Giant will be here after another sleep.”

“Not before?” asked Kate, with a sigh.

“If they are chased—yes,” answered the Indian.

“Then may they be chased!” she ejaculated, inaudibly, and a moment later the barking of a dog told the twain that they were near the frontier cottage.

I have used the word cottage simply for the reason that the house of Oliver Blount was not a cabin, but in reality a cottage. It was the work of the hands of a former owner—a proud Frenchman, who left the Illinois paradise when the English flag supplanted the *fleur de lis*, after the peace of 1763; and for a nominal sum Oliver Blount purchased the building, when he reached Cahokia, in the rear of the British army of occupation. The cottage was quite small, but picturesque in the extreme. It contained three rooms, two on the ground floor, and one, a roomy attic, beneath the strong clapboard roof. It boasted of broad eaves, covered with climbers, and a pretty veranda, swarming with flowers, planted in deep wooden bowls.

The young Peoria was not a stranger at the Blounts' home, for when the giant bulldog saw him he ceased his barkings, and greeted the red-skin with a low, joyful whine. Kate entered the house and began to prepare an evening repast, while the Peoria leaned against the door and swept

the landscape before him with his eagle eye. Night had fairly veiled the earth now; but the Indian did not desert his position. His eyes seemed to penetrate the gloom far beyond the threshold, and when he uttered an expressive "ugh," Kate sprung to him and touched his arm.

"Father?"

"No!" exclaimed Swamp Oak, and the next moment he stepped back and gently closed the strong oaken door.

Then he calmly proceeded to barricade it, Kate watching his movements without a question.

When he deemed the portal proof against the foe, he turned to the windows and secured them in like manner.

"Lone Dove, the wolves prowl about your nest," he said at last, pausing directly before Kate, "and ere long their steps will greet your ears."

He had scarcely paused when a footfall approached the house, and fell heavily upon the ashen floor of the veranda. It was greeted by a growl from the dog, who approached the door with all his furious passions aroused, and with fire flashing from his great gray eyes.

The next moment Kate darted forward and quieted Pontiac with her hand, while the Peoria placed his ear at the foot of the portal to catch the import of the whispers on the porch.

All at once, while the Indian still remained crouched on the floor, a hand struck the door, and in a firm tone Kate Blount demanded to know who was there.

"Segowatha, the war-wolf of the Pottawatomies, knocks at the pale-face's lodge," was the reply, in a pompous tone. "He is not alone; his warriors are about him, and through

him they command the Englishman's daughter to deliver over to them the Peoria dog, who kennels beneath her roof. We have tracked the Swamp Oak hither, and we seek the scalp of the Peoria dog, and not the Lone Dove's. Let the pale child be swift to speak, for Segowatha's warriors are impatient, and soon he can not hold them back from the work of the evil spirit."

Silence followed the chief's words. While he spoke, the hunted Peoria had risen to his feet, and now he stood with bowed head before the girl who held his life in her hands. Kate Blount gazed upon the demanded sacrifice, and twice she essayed to speak, but in vain. In the form of the young Peoria she beheld the only true red friend she ever had, and now to deliver him up to the torture seemed to her simple mind the height of ingratitude.

"Speak, Lone Dove," suddenly cried Segowatha, and he supplemented the command with a blow from his hatchet. "My warriors are drawing their weapons!"

"Let them draw and use them if they wish," cried Kate Blount, starting toward the door. "I refuse to deliver the Peoria to his hunters, and more, I shall defend him with my own life."

A yell of rage burst from the Pottawatomie's throat, and he drove his tomahawk into the door.

That blow caused Swamp Oak to spring erect as an arrow, and he gripped the slender arm of the trader's daughter.

"Swamp Oak will die for the Lone Dove!" he said, with mingled determination and emotion. "Segowatha is full of lies. They seek the pale girl as well as Swamp Oak, for she is

English, and in this war they strike all save the French. A yellow-skinned dog is with Segowatha; he wants the dove with golden plumage; he—Ah! the dog is going to whine.”

The Peoria’s sentence was broken by a voice just beyond the threshold, and the twain grew silent to hear what it might say.

“White girl, you are rash,” said the invisible speaker, in French. “You are selling your life for a dog’s. The Indians don’t want you—only the Peoria lout.”

“No more, Jules Bardue!” cried Kate Blount, with flashing eyes. “I know you; you can’t disguise your hated voice. I know what brought you hither, and death is far preferable to the life you have marked out for me. Depart immediately, base creole dog, else, through this door, a bullet shall stop your whinings.”

A terrible anathema burst from the lips of the maddened creole, and there was a hasty flight from the porch.

“Ha, they run!” cried Kate, turning to the Peoria.

“But they will come again,” was the reply. “The Yellow Chief will have the Lone Dove or die!”

The lips of the trader’s daughter met in terrible determination, and a low whine from Pontiac announced the return of the savages.

A moment later a heavy blow fell upon the door; but the barricades resisted to good effect, and, throwing down the battering-ram, the savages poured a volley of musket-balls through the planks. Suspecting their design, our friends had taken shelter behind the heavy logs that nestled behind the plank weather-boarding, and thus escaped the leaden pellets. Scarcely had the balls perforated the door, when

Swamp Oak sprung to his feet and fired through the protection.

A death-yell, similar to the yelp of the wolf, announced the result of his shot, and a moment later Kate Blount's rifle sent an Ottawa to the hunting-grounds of his tribe.

The lucky shots drew a chorus of demoniac yells from the savages, and while the brave twain reloaded their weapons, those outside rushed in a body against the door.

The first blow with the sapling which they had deserted a moment before, sent a shiver over the structure, and the second stroke drove the faithful door from its hinges!

The ram was handled by demons now, and nothing could resist their fury.

The broken barricades prevented the door from falling to the floor, but the moonlight streamed into the room, and revealed the defenders to the Indians. Simultaneously with their success, they essayed to enter over the stricken portals, but the rifles of the besieged cracked again, and two more Indians fell dead on the porch.

The death-work momentarily drove the foe from the door, and before they returned to their work, Swamp Oak had torn the useless barricades away, and supplied their places with new ones. A settler's cabin is always supplied with two sets of barricades, and in case of an attack the extra set is placed beside the door.

When the enemy returned to the attack, they greeted the new defense with wild yells, and the renewal of the attack was met with a volley from the besieged which sorely wounded no less a personage than Segowatha.