

THE WIFE-SHIP WOMAN

CHAPTER XI—Continued

His outburst broke the spell. With insane howls the humans crowded in from all sides. I leaped toward the point I had selected when the circle first formed, and bowled over two men and was running toward my cabin where I had left my musket. With the squeal of a cornered rat the murderer attempted to follow me; and he must have used his knife to some profit, for I heard a death howl. Damoan was yelling for his Choctaws to chase me, but the bulk of them were back at the exit and the others were tardy in taking up the pursuit.

As for the Hansas, they rushed to the Six Fingers' hands behind his back. By the time they were pounding after me I had secured my musket and was at the hatch of vines behind the girl's cabin. While the entire mass of infuriated savages were sweeping down on my cabin I risked calling the girl's name. The silence and the failure of Labrador to make an appearance satisfied me they were well on their way to the river. I cautiously worked in behind the vines and found the hole scarcely large enough for my bulk to pass through.

Thrusting my feet through I was clear except my shoulders when the wild mob tumbled the cabin and surrounded the one I had occupied. The women had snatched burning brands from the fire, and these illuminated the scene. Through the mesh of vines I saw Six Fingers being dragged between two warriors; and as the savages came to a halt I heard him scream:

"Good luck! This will be death!" Pirate and murderer that he was I could not help the wish that he might find a quick death, rather than to roam slowly on the bed of torture. Utterly had as he was born an Englishman, and if it had not been for narrowing the girl's chances of escape I should have been tempted to shoot him because once he had been an English lad.

The chief's grandson, bolder than the others, ran forward with ax and torch and thrust his head inside the cabin. Turning back he shouted that I was gone. Almost the same moment Damoan ran into the cabin in front of me and yelled to the red men that Labrador and the woman were gone. When he appeared in the torchlight he was insane with rage, and catching a glimpse of Six Fingers' writhing figure he screamed like a panther and fell upon him as if intending to tear him to pieces with his bare hands.

"I can tell their plans!" screamed Six Fingers in English as Damoan's fingers began ripping his face. "Tell them! Tell them! Or I'll pick you joint from joint!" howled Damoan, bending over the craven, his outstretched hands hooked like claws. "Save me! Save me!" gasped Six Fingers. "Take me with you, I'll lead you to them!" "Speak!" yelled Damoan, hunching his shoulders and wriggling his long fingers before the murderer's bleeding face.

"They planned for Labrador and the woman to get away while we were eating!" painted Six Fingers. "They planned—" But now it was purely a question of the girl's safety and not of this snake's suffering; and I fired an ounce ball through his wicked skull, and slipped through the hole and away into the black forest.

CHAPTER XII

The Proud One's Sister Dies. I led the chase that night toward the east; and so long as I traveled in that direction I took pains occasionally to betray my position. This procedure gave the girl and Labrador more time to escape, for I knew Damoan would bend every endeavor to overtake me. Toward morning I swung back in a wide circle, planning to strike the Mississippi near the Tunica village at the upper end of the Portage of the Cross. There I was sure to find a canoe in which to push on after my friends.

That night I skirted the Tunica village and stole some corn from an outlying village and was fortunate enough to find a small canoe containing a fish net made of Linden-bark fiber and some lines equipped with hooks and fishbones. I made excellent progress that night, nor did I observe anything to indicate my foes had discovered my return to the river.

It was not until I reached the cliffs of Natchez and was reconnoitering the mouth of Little river that I made two important discoveries—one brought great joy, the other impelled me, paddle with desperate haste into the tributary. Ahead of me, some distance up Little river, was a pirogue containing two persons. One of the couple looked like a boy and was not using a paddle. In the next moment I had glimpsed a long pirogue turning a bend of the big river below me. It held at least a dozen Indians and their six-foot paddles were flashing rapidly. I do not believe I had been seen as I was disappearing into the tributary when this strange craft showed its nose around the bend.

The canoe ahead now discovered me and the slim figure vanished by dropping flat, and the other abandoned the paddle to pick up a musket. I waved my cap and Labrador turned about and began paddling to meet me. I violently gestured for him to go back, and in pantomime announced the peril behind me. As he swung his pirogue

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about to head up-stream again he must have told the girl, for she reappeared and stretched out both hands to me.

We were within three miles of White Apple, the capital town of the Natchez, which in turn was within three miles of Fort Rosalie. Let us but get inside the village and I would have no fear of either the French at the fort, or of Damoan and the Choctaws pursuing me. The Natchez were on the eve of war with the French. They were a very haughty people; and there would be no subtle evasion of the laws to please Bienville even if the red warrior's post did not stand between them. The three of us would have full measure of protection from the Great Sun and his brother and war chief, Tattooed Serpent. So my heart was light when I drew up alongside Labrador's pirogue and was greeted by his amiable grin and a tremendous handshake from the girl.

They noticed the absence of Six Fingers, and both began asking questions.

"He was shot and killed while escaping from the village," I said. "If I



As He Swung His Pirogue About to Head Upstream Again He Must Have Told the Girl, for She Reappeared and Stretched Out Her Hands to Me.

he had obeyed orders he could have escaped with me."

The girl's face was sober at hearing such violent news, and yet I fancied there was relief in her bearing. We dragged the canoes under some bushes, and, being in familiar country, took the shortest cut to White Apple—sometimes called White Earth.

When we had all but come to the village we heard a peculiar howl, which startled Labrador and me because we knew what it meant, and which frightened the girl because she could imagine it to mean almost anything unwelcome. I motioned for Labrador to make a detour, but before we knew it we were through the bushes and in an opening close to the village, and the girl was staring with wide eyes at the strange scene. Some of the Natchez were rehearsing for a funeral ceremony. I whispered as much to her, and she became quiet and curiously watched the peculiar proceedings.

There were five victims, three women and two men, and forty executioners, the grim office being eagerly sought because it enabled all the executioners had their hands painted red and had red feathers thrust through the long braids of hair hanging down the left side of the head. The five victims had their hair painted red. The girl saw no significance in the red hands, the red hair, the

ropes and red wax, but the gestures of the man with the weapon frightened her.

"It is all make-believe," I whispered, trying to lull her. "We will go to the village. If Damoan did not see me enter the river he will learn from the fort that some of us have passed."

So we walked toward the village, and the rehearsal being finished, the Natchez came after us. But such was their courtesy that they would not pass us; and those who desired to reach the village quickly swung far to one side as if taking an entirely different course.

Labrador was frowning heavily and in Choctaw said:

"Friend; there was no word-bearer, nor any medicine man among those to be sacrificed. The dead must be a woman. The three old women were our kinswomen. The two men were servants. If it was La Glorieuse she would be many more servants."

He named a woman of noble rank; called "Proud" by the French because of her aristocratic bearing, her contempt for commoners, and her ignorance of any Frenchman unless he possessed rank. It was known that Tattooed Serpent was enamored of her, but both being nobles marriage between them was impossible. No; the funeral procession was scarcely worthy of a woman who enjoyed the favor of Obabalcheche, head war chief, as well as a brother of the Great Sun.

"It is not La Glorieuse," I said. Labrador sighed.

"Ah, that grande dame! Why couldn't it be her?" "That is queer talk," I rebuked. "How has the Proud One ever harmed you?"

"It is I who harmed her—as she thinks. I married her sister. She never forgave her sister for marrying beneath her. Never forgave me for looking so high!"

We entered the village, a collection of square huts made of timbers plastered with mud, moss and sand, with the roofs of reed and grass, wove so as to be weather-proof.

The Natchez were much different from any Indian tribe I ever encountered, or heard of. The practice of human sacrifices on the death of the elect smacked of ancient Eastern civilizations; and the worship of the sun reminded one of the stories brought back from Central and South America. And yet their language was linked up with the dialects of the Choctaws, Chickasaws and Creeks.

Delicious Humor of Nye Fooled English

On the seventy-fifth anniversary of Bill Nye's birth, a tablet, a memorial window and a granite monument were unveiled at Fletcher, near Asheville, showing his quaint humor and lovable personality have not been forgotten.

At one time he served as postmaster at Laramie, Wyo., an appointment which incidentally brought forth his famous letter addressed to President Arthur and containing his resignation.

In the letter he directed the President where to find everything, explaining that the postal cards he had read were carefully pigeonholed apart from the unread ones. He continued: "If Deacon Hayford does not pay up his rent you might as well put his letters in the general delivery, and when Bob Head gets drunk and insists on a letter from one of his wives every day in the week, you can saturate them through the box delivery window with an old Queen Anne tomahawk that you will find near the Etruscan water

fall."

So tickled were the officials at Washington with this letter that they published it far and wide. To Nye's huge delight an English paper editorially commented in shocked amazement on the ways of American postmasters.

Wouldn't Bear Out Theory Theoretically, a head-on collision between two freely moving bodies of the same weight and type would result in an equal shock to both, regardless of their speeds. The forces of impact act equally on both bodies, and in the case of two automobiles would tend to throw all occupants forward in their respective cars with equal violence. However, in an actual collision between autos involving speeds as high as 50 miles per hour, so many unevaluated factors would enter that it is probable that result would seldom, if ever, be exactly as expected from the ideal theoretical case.

And from the Pacific coast. Sardine fishing is a four month's industry in Atlantic waters, and lasts six months in the Pacific. It is rapidly growing to be one of the most sizable phases of the canning industry.

Hallelujah Victory The Hallelujah victory was that gained by the Britons over the combined Picts and Scots at Moid, in Fife-shire, England, March 30, 430. It is so named from the war cry adopted by the Britons.

Now They're American Sardines used to come from Sardinia. Some of them still do, others come from Brittany and from Norway, but the great majority of them now come from the coast of New England

Glorieuse, who had been demeaned when her sister had married a titleless Frenchman; and outside was simple Joe Labrador and the dainty French girl. What a clash of eyes there would be should they meet white, and the red behind her dead sister's careless spouse daring to return to White Apple in company with a white woman.

"It is many moons since the White Indian was here," the Serpent remarked, eyeing me sharply.

"Obabalcheche, I should have waited until I could bring gifts for the Great Sun and his brother, but Choctaw dogs have chased me up the river, and I come here to be among friends."

"The Choctaws hunt so far as this?" he cried, his hand closing on a big war-ax, a gift from the French.

"The man known as Damoan the Fox leads them," I replied. "He may come now."

"The whole Choctaw nation cannot harm you here. My white brother is safe."

"There is a white woman with me, neither English nor French, but kin to the English. I am taking her to the English town far in the east, beyond the country of the Choctaws."

"It is well," he said absently. "She will be safe here."

Now came the hardest portion of my task. I said:

"And there is a white man with me, a Frenchman, but my brother. He is Labrador."

"The Serpent's form elongated although he did not move from the bed, and his head swung back and forth nervously.

"Your friend took a Natchez woman as his wife," he softly informed me. "That woman is dead."

"He will be heavy of heart to learn it."

"He must prove himself worthy of mating with a noble, a sister of the Proud One."

"Undoubtedly," I promptly assured him, frantic to get outside and have a talk with Labrador and agree upon some plan for immediate flight.

I managed to close the interview without sacrificing ceremony and politeness and hastened to find my friends. When I came to the edge of the village my roving gaze halted on a dramatic scene. Labrador sat on a log tearing at his long hair while La Glorieuse and mademoiselle faced each other, both declaiming in French. I heard La Glorieuse jeering:

"He was unworthy to marry a Natchez woman; yet you take him for a husband."

"He is not my husband!" cried mademoiselle. "Mon Dieu! What a terrible creature you are! Why do you talk to me? I would be alone. Have you no corn to pound; no man's work to do?"

"You will soon be alone so far as this French runaway is to be counted," hissed the Proud One, throwing up her head and stalking away.

I stepped forward. Labrador groaned.

"You know who the dead woman is?" I asked him in Choctaw.

"The furious one has told me. Mon Dieu! She says they wait for me to paint my hair and be strangled by four men at each end of the rope!"

"Speak in French, and be careful," I warned, observing that mademoiselle was about to break bounds, her taste for battle whetted by her talk with the Natchez woman. In French I remarked:

"There is to be a funeral tomorrow. I think we better start away before then. Let us go aside and talk it over."

We shifted our position to the shade of some trees. The Natchez were watching us furively. They had witnessed the scene between the two women, and they were curious, of course. They also knew that Labrador's return was likely to lend new interest to the funeral. I felt no concern for my personal safety; nor did the matter of the girl's escape press for my immediate attention. Labrador's predicament, however, demanded prompt action.

In Choctaw I told him:

"They do not intend that you shall escape."

"Before he could reply the girl passionately broke in with: "If I am to be treated as a child I will withdraw. I was taught it was not courteous to converse in an unknown tongue before a friend."

"Taking a sudden resolve, I told her: "You speak with much sense. You are not a child. I will not keep it from you. The ancient custom of the Natchez demands that when a noble dies the surviving husband or wife shall die during the funeral ceremony. Our friend was the husband of the woman who is to be buried tomorrow. The dead woman was the sister of La Glorieuse, the woman you had words with."

"Ciel! What a horrible people! I felt it in the air. That procession of painted men and women! Mon Dieu! Poor Monsieur Labrador! Behold the forest, monsieur. Fly! Hide yourself! Now! Volla tout!"

And she stamped a small moccasin impudently and gestured for him to run.

Mademoiselle forgets it would be hard for our friend to hide from the savages except in the night. We must plan cunningly and not be impatient," I told her. "There is plenty of time. Perhaps some time during the day. If not, then during the night. There is no danger for you, or me."

"I was thinking only of him," she duly replied. (TO BE CONTINUED)

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East India Widow Lives an Outcast

The lot of the widow in India is a difficult one, according to Rostia Forbes, famous woman world-traveler. By some tradition, the Hindu widow is held responsible for her husband's death, however much older she may be.

Now They're American

Sardines used to come from Sardinia. Some of them still do, others come from Brittany and from Norway, but the great majority of them now come from the coast of New England