

Strange STORIES

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FOR LOVE OF A

By **MANLY WADE
WELLMAN**

*Author of "Half Bull," "For Fear of
Little Men," etc.*



A Lovely Seeress Conjures Up Magic

WITCH

*A Complete Novelet
of Weird Prophecy*

CHAPTER I

Under a Curse

HOBdene was only a hard-held fort against the uncut American wilderness. A double row of log cabins, each cabin set chuck-a-block to its neighbor, all doors facing to the court between the rows, and only loop-holes instead of windows turning to the forest. The two ends of the court were shut off by upright palisades, one pierced with a great gate that looked upon the long, uneven trail to the shore settlements far in the east. The other set with a smaller gate, little more than a wicket, toward the bright, clear stream called Nhamawusk—spear-mint—by the Indians, because of its bracing chill.

There were clearings for the corn patches, and where the few cattle and sheep could graze. Beyond these, the forest stood defiant, seeming to threaten these audacious invaders, to promise them pain, death—and worse.

And danger was real in those shadowed thickets. Every male over the age of fourteen was fighter as well as farmer, ever ready to beat back a savage foray. Every woman was, by necessity, an expert bullet-molder and wound-dresser.

As dire as Indian warfare, was the chance of starvation. The scanty harvests, the deer and bears and turkeys shot by the hunters were all community property, every soul sharing them. Nor did the settlement have parasites. That was the care of Captain Nele Foraker.

Foraker was the best shot, the wisest hunter, the coolest head in a land where all men had to be excellent in such respect. Therefore he was, by vote of his forty fellow-settlers, "Captain" Nele Foraker—which meant



Huge demons, awakened by her trance, dispersed the savages

to Further the Conquest of Wilderness!

that he led the people of Hobdene in necessary battle against the Indians. He settled all disputes and interpreted all laws, read from the prayer-book when they judged a Sunday was due, said last rites over the frequent victims of fever, savage arrows, or other frontier mishaps. He set hours and conditions of labor, leading the toilers himself with mattock or scythe or axe, and adopted the policy which another captain, John Smith, had decreed at Jamestown in Virginia some sixty years before: "He who does not work shall not eat."

It was softly said that Captain Foraker was a gentleman of blood and coat-armor, who had turned his back on the silken court of England's second Charles. Whatever his reasons, they must have been good ones. He was the sort of man who never had a poor reason for anything.

On an evening in bright May, after a bachelor-cooked supper of venison and hoe-cake, Captain Foraker ventured outside the stockade to taste the spring air.

THE setting sun poured rosy light upon an active figure in buckskin shirt, leggings and moccasins, and wide, unplumed hat. The waist was girt with a long rapier and a well kept flintlock pistol. Captain Foraker's curly black hair was long, and so were his tanned face and his proud, lean nose. He shaved his chin, and so looked less than his thirty-six years, but his mustaches showed as sharp as his sword, his wits, or his black eyes.

He hummed to himself a song by John Wilmot, whom he had known in England when both were lads:

All my past life is mine no more,
The flying hours are gone
Like transitory dreams giv'n o'er,
Whose images are kept in store
By memory alone.

Well, he reflected, John Wilmot was now Earl of Rochester, and he, Nele Foraker, chief of a desperate and forgotten garrison in the wilderness. Nobody at home could say for sure where that garrison was—in southernmost New England, or northernmost Virginia, or neither.

But Foraker was not daunted or displeased. He had done wonders—a fair harvest last autumn, a good-spirited and healthy following and now, after a cold winter's skirmishing, honorable peace with Sangunga, chief of the Indian tribes about him.

And the air of the land was sweet, and a gentleman could take a stroll in finer woods than envired London, without hearing aught to vex his soul. . . .

But in the midst of Nele Foraker's reverie, that same sweet evening air was rent by a loud cry, the cry of a woman in mortal fear and pain.

He did not pause to listen or decide. His hand flew to his hilt, and his moccasined feet were speeding before the echo of the scream had died. Crashing through a scrub thicket, squeezing otterlike between close-set trees, he sprang across a dry brook course and came out upon a bend of the twilight trail, eyes glaring and rapier out, ready for use.

Four figures panted and struggled—three naked Indians, one white woman in dark kirtle and white cap. She was thrust down upon her knees by two assailants who held her by arms and throat, while the third lifted a war hatchet.

Before any of the group saw or knew he was near, Nele Foraker sprang in among them. With the rapier's heavy basket guard he uppercutted the Indian with the hatchet and knocked him spinning into a clump of early thistles. The others released their prey and shrank before the threatening point. Foraker knew them both.

"Dogs and liars!" he roared in their tongue. "Is this how you respect the pipe-smoking, the promises, that passed between your chief and me? Are you not bound to a truce with white men?"

The woman rose shakily to her feet, and the Indians fell back from her, sidling around Foraker as though to keep between them and her.

"*Jeebi!*" stammered another of the Indians, "*Jeebi!*"

"Do you call her evil spirit, you rank simple heathen?" Foraker roared. "She is but an English lass, and—" He

broke off, before he added that she was a young and lovely one to boot.

"We break no peace," the third Indian ventured to plead. "She is not of your people, though she seems so. Indeed, she was cast out by the English who dwell by the Great Water, and came to this country as a fugitive, with us hired to carry her possessions."

ABROWN hand pointed to where two canvas-bound packs had fallen at the trail's edge.

"You walked hither from the sea, without horse or cart?" Foraker asked the young woman in English. "Brave lass!" Then, to the red men: "Your offense is the sorer because you turned against one who paid for your good services."

"She is *jeebi*—a spirit, a demon," insisted one of the two standing Indians.

"We found her alone on the trail, walking this way, stooping beneath her bundles," the first spokesman hastily explained. "By signs she let us know that she was in danger from the English. She offered us things—a shiny glass that shows back the face like still water, a little knife with a blade that folds, and a string of red beads from her neck. We thought to bring her to you."

"Go on," prompted Foraker, without lowering his ready rapier.

The Indian continued:

"We started—three days ago. We were five then. After our first night's camp, we were four. The man left on guard sat dead by the fire, his face drawn with fear, no mark on his body. We wondered and grieved, but did not suspect. Burying our friend, we came another day's journey. That night, another sentry died. We kept up our march. Knowing we were but a few steps from your fort, we did not stop to camp this evening, and then we learned—"

The moon was rising to replace the sunken sun, and by its pale glow Foraker saw the fear on the dark face of the savage, as he hesitantly paused.

"She began to moan and breathe heavily, as if in pain," he went on in a low, hushed voice. "Then she trembled, and fell on her knees. And from

her body rose something misty, that began to take terrible shape—"

He broke off again, and quieted his shaking limbs. "Had one of us been alone with her, he would have died at its touch. But we took courage from one another, faced it boldly, and it vanished. Then we sought to kill her for a wicked sorceress."

The brave that Foraker had knocked down scrambled back to his feet. Yelling fiercely, he hurled his ax. Foraker dodged just in time, spun swiftly to meet a rush. His ready rapier stabbed through the biceps of one of the savage's arms. The warrior dropped a knife and drew away, the fight out of him.

"Begone!" Foraker ordered the Indians. "This is ill doing for those who call themselves my friends. Tell your chief that I require satisfaction at his hands."

He glared the Indians off the trail and watched them slink away among the trees.

"And now, mistress," he said to the young woman, "what have you to say to this talk of a monster rising from your body to slay savages?"

"'Tis true," she replied. Her words, the first he had heard from her lips, were soft and level, and he liked the sound of her voice. "I am—I suffer under a curse, good sir. Perhaps 'twould be better if yonder Indians had risen—"

Foraker thought her hysterical. He brushed aside what seemed the beginning of a strange, mad confession.

"Not so. Come to the fort." Then he remembered his manners, doffed his hat and bowed with all the grace of a courtier. "I am Captain Foraker, at your service, fair mistress."

"I am—Melison Hargrove."

She paused, as though she expected the name to tell him something. But though he seemed to have heard it long ago, he could not remember where.

"Captain," she went on at last, "do you truly offer me shelter?"

"Aye, do I, and comfort withal. Come, before those red fools have other nightmares and hold us to account."

He sheathed his rapier, hoisted her

two bundles, and so led her to the fortified settlement of Hobdene.

CHAPTER II

Night Attack

A NEW white face was novelty enough to set every Hobdenean staring, but Foraker had other things to do than make introductions. He issued crisp orders to the throng who loitered around the trail gate in the still evening.

"Inside, all! Fetch a supply of water, for siege. Drive the stock within the walls. Winford and Sallet, mount guard at the gates, and Figg to the lookout tower. The peace with the Indians is at an end, I fear, for that I stood by this damsel."

Men in leather jerkins, women in patched homespun, barelegged children, hurried to obey. But a few remained, a trio who looked on the newcomer as if they needed no introduction to her. A lank graybeard stepped close.

"Aye, 'tis Mel Hargrove, as I am a true man!" he cackled. "Mel, child, happy these eyes to see you. Remember you my good wife here? And my son Aran?" He gestured to a huge, vacant-faced lout of a man, who ogled and grinned. "You, too, were forced to quit England, is it? You shall make one of our family, Mel, and welcome—"

But Foraker saw that Melison Hargrove shrank from this greeting, even as the Indians had shrunk from her. He stopped the old fellow's chatter with a flourish of his hand.

"Enow, Goodman Greensheaf. You have work to do, I think, like all of us. To it, then." He turned and addressed the girl. "Mistress, I make you welcome to mine humble hut."

And he led her into the stockade, and to his quarters.

The three Greensheafs watched curiously, and somehow mockingly.

Foraker had a cabin midway of one of the rows, small but snug, built of notched logs with clay plaster chink-

ing. In one corner, on a shelflike bunk, an Indian bed of fir tips and blankets was made up. A table and two benches of split logs, a shelf with several well-thumbed old books, a fireplace, several bright cooking utensils—these completed the furnishings. On pegs in the walls hung two muskets, a spare sword, and some pieces of armor.

"I make you welcome," he said again, and drew a brand from the fire to kindle a tallow rushlight. "Now, before I go to mine employments for defense, had you not better tell me about yourself—coolly and truthfully?"

The young woman sat on the nearest bench. Her face was a pale ellipse, with a lovely trembling mouth and blue eyes as big as two-shilling pieces.

"I am Melison Hargrove, and I am three-and-twenty," she said. "More than that I—I know not how to tell."

"Nay, speak as to a brother, a father," he urged. His thirteen extra years seemed a great margin of age—too great. "I saved your life today, and I warrant you my friendship."

She sighed deeply, and her words were only a murmur. "If," she tried again, "if I said I was a—a witch—"

"Nay," he objected at once. Years ago he had read Reginald Scot's "Discoverie of Witchcraft," and shared that work's skepticism. "I am no school child, Mistress, to be frightened by old gaffers' tales of puckles and bogles. I pray you, deal honestly with me."

"So I strive to do!" she flashed back with considerable heat. "You do make me out a liar before I finish." Then, more calmly: "The name of Hargrove is known to many as that of witches. My grandmother, the wise woman of Devon—"

"Aye, so!" exclaimed the captain, for he remembered now.

THE creepy tale had been still fresh in his own childhood, of the woman who had done magic, plagued her enemies, and raised the foul fiend himself in an old Druid lair. Her name had been—Melison Hargrove. And this, her namesake, was a granddaughter.

"You know about her, I see," the young woman sighed. "My father, her son, was almost borne to the same scaffold with her, but since evidence was feeble against him, he was only imprisoned. Later, during Cromwell's wars, he was set free, and the charge forgotten until King Charles came back to his throne. Then it was given report that I—I had a familiar spirit. And that, Captain, is a hanging crime. Well"—and her voice as she finished was almost bright—"if you are master here, the law is in your hands. Having saved me, I give you leave to punish me."

"Soft," he made reply, filling his old stone pipe and lighting it to gain time.

He mused over the shaly talk of the Indians, their talk of how from Melison Hargrove's body had risen a spectery terror. He came to a decision.

"You speak freely, calmly, of these things," he said. "'Tis not the way of the guilty so to do. If they are truth, the truth is natural." He blew smoke. "I hold by Sir Francis Bacon, and before him with Thomas Aquinas, that all things are of Nature. Who speaks of the supernatural, speaks only of matters beyond his grasp and ken. I pray you, what befell when the report was made?"

"I fled in a ship to Holland, and thence to New Amsterdam, knowing that the Dutch settlers made no great matter of witches."

"New Amsterdam is fallen to the English, and is now named New York," reminded the captain.

"That happened while our ship was still at sea. I landed at the dock, and found myself suspected as a fugitive. My case was looked into. A letter was sent to England, and an answer came that a witch-finder was on the way." She shuddered.

"Hum!" said Captain Foraker.

He knew about witch-finders—strange officials, knowing or purporting to know all about magic, its discovery and destruction. Some were sincere, most were charlatans; all were paid according to their convictions and executions. Such a person, armed with a warrant and set on one's trail, was apt to be a sore trouble.

"I fled again," went on Melison

Hargrove. "I came here, hoping to hide."

"You did well," approved Foraker. "Hark you, I hold not by these witch tales. I do think that your neighbors at home might have shown you mercy, and made study of your case as a wondrous illness rather than crying out upon you. As to the Indian story, I count it not a fly. Bide safe here, Mistress Hargrove."

He bethought himself of the Greensheaf family, of their mocking words to the girl, and her patent dislike and fear of them.

"As to these Greensheafs," he quickly explained. "They are new among us, not over-pleasant or over-useful. If they molest you against your will, say but the word—"

But at that moment Melison Hargrove sprang to her feet. She lifted a hand, tilted her head as though to listen.

"Danger!" she gasped. "Danger!"

"Nay, I hear naught, and the sentinels—"

"The water gate!" cried the girl. "Your guard hath dozed, and is stricken down! Indians creep upon us! Hurry, fight, or the place is taken!"

She caught up his pistol from the table, and rushed out.

FORAKER came after, drawing his sword. Night had fallen, and shadows lay thick inside the palisade at the water gate. Half a dozen settlers glanced up in wonder from their stoops as the two ran past, then all sprang erect to the roar of an explosion.

Melison Hargrove had pistoled a big Indian, even as he tore the scalp from the dead sentry at the threshold.

There were others, and upon them Foraker fell with darting blade. One he spitted like a Christmas goose, then cleared his point and slashed open the scowling, paint-barred brow of a second. More of the garrison came at a run, firing into the thick of the assault with their muskets. The Indians gave back, dragging their fallen with them, and the little gate was closed and barred.

"A night attack, shrewdly planned!"

snorted Captain Foraker. "Man every loophole, and let the women load extra guns. Poor Sallet—he nodded, and 'twas his last nod. Mistress Hargrove, I do thank you for your quick ear and quicker hand. But for your warning, I fear that Hobdene would have fallen."

"Sir," she replied, "do you doubt my witch power now?"

But he had turned from her, marshaling his forces. Three watches he set, so that no man got more than six hours of sleep. He himself paused only to don breastplate and steel cap, and did not even wink the night long. At dawn the Indians howled from the encircling trees, and rained arrows upon the walls and into the enclosed grounds. The settler in the watch tower was taken through the neck with a shaft, and the man who climbed up to replace him was wounded a moment later.

"Stand to your arms," cried Captain Foraker, first to one musketeer, then to another. "They will seek to carry us by storm!"

"'Tis all because of me," said Melison Hargrove at his elbow. "You had peace with these savages until I came. Better had I died, and found peace myself. Even now, if 'twould please you I will leave."

He turned and smiled. "Nay," he told her gently, "'twould please me no whit."

And then came the attack, and he had no more time for words.

The Indians simulated a second attack on the water gate, but when most of the white men turned that way, then came the real smashing charge against the trail gate—a yelling cloud of painted, feathered braves, over whose heads flew a new blizzard of arrows. Among the foremost stormers was carried a great pine trunk, and this they dashed butt-first into the gate. It splintered the cross-spiked timbers, and as Foraker hurriedly formed a party to meet the new menace, a second ramming swing of the trunk cleared the way for the Indians to enter.

As at the water gate the night before, the captain flung himself into the midst of the first attackers to gain en-

trance. Again his sword-point found a fierce enemy heart, and his left hand fired a pistol into a yelling face that forthwith exploded into a gush of gore.

A tomahawk came down on his steel cap, staggering him, but he wrenched his sword from the dead warrior's breast and fell upon the ax-wielder. Friends came to his side, defending, but this time the Indians did not flee. They battled, sturdily and frantically to hold their footing inside the gate, and others pushed in to help them.

Foraker's men were being beaten. Winford was down, dying, and so was poor young Figg. Foraker himself received a slash on the jaw that laid it open. Yet he stood his ground, engaging three Indians at once. He could not give back, like the others. He was captain. If his stronghold was taken, the best—the only thing—he could do would be to die fighting.

THE Indians yelled in triumph—then in dismay. And they recoiled before him, staring past him in un-Indian horror and crowding back, back, all struggling to be first through the gate again. Foraker set his feet wide for support, for he was swaying with weariness, and panted, open-mouthed.

Someone moved to his side, and past—Melison Hargrove, in her dark gown and white cap. She held up her hands, chanting words that were neither English nor French nor any Indian dialect Foraker had ever heard.

"*Jeebi!*" wailed a brave, one of those Foraker had encountered in rescuing Melison. And he added something else: "*Kenibec!*"

That meant snake. Other Indians shouted of bears, catamounts, bull bison.

They ran, as from a horde of such fearsome beasts. Survivors of the fort hurried to repair the broken gate.

And then there was a rush and a gathering around the slender, dark-gowned figure who had changed disaster into victory. Men, women and children chorused their hubbub of amazed thanks, some of them on their knees before Melison Hargrove, and all trembling in fearful joy.

"'Twas magic, blessed magic," chanted one deep-voiced musketeer.

"Aye!" chimed in his good wife. "The beasts were there, charging at her behest one moment—then gone!"

"Happy mine eyes to behold a miracle," moaned an old woman.

CHAPTER III

Pipe of Peace

ONLY four of the whole garrison stood aloof. To one side stood the three Greensheafs, father, mother and son. They gazed at the pale face of Melison Hargrove with a cheerful triumph, as though they alone shared her secret.

The fourth who kept apart and watched with stern wonder, hand to bleeding cheek, was Captain Nele Foraker.

Suddenly he raised his voice in a parade-ground bark that silenced all others and captured complete attention.

"Have I relieved any man of duty?" he demanded. "Even as you vapor, the Indians may be on us again! Back to your posts!"

They sprang to obey, and he strode forward to confront Melison Hargrove.

"I will speak of this matter anon," he assured her gravely. "You have saved us once more, but this time I do not know whether or not to thank you."

She bowed her head, and her hands came together on her bosom in a submissive gesture. Foraker plastered rags on his wound and got back to his work, but the Indians seemed to have had enough. They howled no more from the thickets, sent not an arrow.

"Guard the gates, and keep a man in the tower," the captain ordered. "When you go to planting, let each man take his gun." He beckoned to Melison Hargrove. "Come to my house. I would question you."

At his door a figure moved as if to block them—Aran Greensheaf, huge and stupid-eyed. Clubbed musket in

hand, he had sought the thickest of the fight, yet was not wounded, not even weary.

"If't please you, Mel," he said, "I shall serve you in any manner. 'Tis right that such as we help each other."

"Out of the way," Foraker bade him.

The big man met his captain's gaze defiantly.

"Out of the way," the young woman repeated, and Aran Greensheaf stepped glumly aside.

Once within, Foraker fastened his door with its big wooden latch. He sat down at his table, but did not bid the girl sit. His black eyes were puzzled above his patched cheek and haggard face.

"I would I knew what to think," he said at last, heavily. "You spoke first of a curse, an evil that came upon you against your will. You said that you would die to be quit of it. For a moment I thought—" He paused. "Then you showed terror to the Indians. They spoke of bears, snakes, other beasts, and fled as from Satan."

"I launched a glamour upon them," she replied. "They saw, and feared." She gazed at him incredulously. "Captain Foraker, worthy sir! Did you—not see—the animals?"

"I saw nothing save a posturing lass and a cozened hobble of silly heathen. Yet, 'tis true. The others of this fort must have seen. They praised and adored you like an idol. Was I alone blind?"

"Oh, 'twas heaven brought me to you!" she quavered, and fell to her knees on the puncheon floor, humbling herself to Foraker even as the others had humbled themselves to her. "You saw no vision, were not bemused or affected by the glamour! You are not blind, Captain. No, rather are your eyes open because of your bravery and goodness!"

"I pray that it be so," he agreed heartily. "Get up, and truckle not. We spoke briefly of your case before the first fight. Let you speak of it more fully now. Sit, madam."

She obeyed, and he heard her story at length—the tales her father had told of the sorceress-grandmother. She spoke of her own wonderings, half

fearful and half fascinated, about those dread powers beyond the knowledge of ordinary folk, of her own awful adventure when, at twelve, she first drifted into a half-trance and was aware that from her proceeded a great and grotesque shape that frightened all who saw it.

"I KNEW, from the first, that I could order the spirit to do mighty things," she finished. "I never tried—not until this night. The death of the Indians on the trail was not my doing, but their own mortal fear. Also, I can sometimes know things that are out of sight and hearing, even in the future."

Foraker shook his head. "I do think that this shadowy shape which comes forth to vex you is but a delusion; that your second sight is coincidence, and that no mortal person ever read the future aright. As to the Indians, it was surely their own poor spirit that slew them. Remember that, when several stood against it, they saw it withdraw and vanish. Belike those who just now dreamed they saw wild beasts could have made a stand and brought the vision to nothing."

"And so had we all died," she rejoined. "Captain Foraker, I swear that for the first time today I voluntarily evoked my power. Hitherto it came upon me, like a fit of illness. This day I did what I did because you, sir, stood in dire peril and I could not let you bide unhelped. But I had not hoped"—her voice rose exultantly—"that there would be one to whom the vision would not come, who could see naught but empty air where others saw ravening monsters. Captain Foraker, you will be my salvation."

"That I hope to be," he said. "Now, list to my plan. I am a bachelor, with employments enow beside keeping house. Can you cook and sweep? . . . Good. I take you into my service. A blanket slung midway on this room will divide it into two. We shall get along famously."

"I do thank you, brave sir," said Melison Hargrove.

She caught and kissed his big brown sword-hand before he could know her intention, or prevent her act.

At noon Melison prepared his dinner for him, and it was most savory, though simple. Even as he finished, the sentries called aloud that Indians came, and he hurried out, tightening the straps of his corselet.

But there were only three principal chiefs—stalwart, blanketed men of bronze, with heads shaven bare save for scalp-locks in which were thrust eagle feathers. Sangunga himself walked foremost, holding up his right hand for a truce, while his left bore a ceremonial pipe of red stone. Standing at the gate, Foraker gestured for the trio to approach.

"White chief," said Sangunga deeply, "we poor warriors cannot fight against the *jeebi*, who commands the mad beasts of the forest. Let us have peace again."

"Gladly," replied Foraker, who accepted the pipe and drew a puff of smoke from it. Then he turned.

"Melison," he called, naming her informally for the first time, "hither, child."

She came into view, and the three chiefs made as if to run, but Foraker held out his hand appealingly.

"Because of this white woman was our truce broken," he reminded. "The pipe of peace must be smoked with her, too, in token of good faith and friendship."

"Not with the *jeebi*," muttered one of the chiefs.

But Foraker insisted, and Melison took the pipe, puffing smoke and fighting to keep from making a wry face. Hesitantly Sangunga smoked after her, as though expecting to drop dead. Then he stretched out a dark hand and touched, first the steel-clad shoulder of Foraker, then the dark wool of Melison's sleeve.

"White chief, white squaw," he said, "let your children be the friends of mine."

Captain Foraker, at Melison's query, said shyly that the chieftain had wished them well and hoped that the peace would last until another generation.

"Tell him that it shall be so," she said, "and that we and ours will not only keep peace, but will help him and his in time of need."

When Foraker had translated, Sangunga and his two companions signified acceptance with a grunted "Ugh!" as with one booming voice.

Then they turned and stalked away among the trees.

The whites were able to turn again to corn planting and hunting and fishing in the creek Nhamawusk. At nightfall, Foraker and his new housekeeper had their evening meal together. When they made an end, she brought him his pipe and kindled it at the rushlight, and they smiled at one another. But the next moment Melison's face went blank and wan, and she appeared to listen.

"Tell me not that the Indians break peace again," growled Foraker.

But then he, too, could hear—a song by several muffled voices, outside the stockade.

Cummer, go ye before, cummer, go ye—
Gif ye will not go before, cummer, let me.

Innocent enough to hear—but it was not a song of innocence. Three quarters of a century before, at North Berwick Church in Scotland, that song had been chanted by the demoniac followers of odious John Fian, as they made enchantments to overthrow King James.

Who sang the song of witches here? Now the melody took form of an invitation:

Mel Hargrove, my love, come out beneath
the sky,
And ye shall get a black fruit baked in a
pie.
Baked in a pie, love, and bowls of black
wine—
Come out beneath the sky, love, and so we
shall dine.

Foraker was gentleman enough not to swear in Melison's presence, but he sniffed like an angry boar, sprang up and went to the loophole that served for outer window. He twitched aside the pivoted wooden screen that covered it.

There they danced and postured in the moonlight, clumsily nimble, which made them look all the stranger in the pale corpse-tinted rays. Old Greensheaf, his wife, and his loutish son Aran.

They saw the glow from Foraker's unscreened loophole, and scampered away toward the woods, snickering like children caught in a prank. When the captain turned back toward his own room, the door was open and Melison Hargrove was nowhere to be seen.

He dashed out.

"Have you seen my housekeeper?" he asked the first settler in sight.

But the settler had not, nor had any others been aware of her. Foraker returned to his quarters, buckled on his rapier and thrust a pistol in his belt. He took, too, a stout staff of hickory in his hand, and strode out of the stockade while all his fellows wondered.

In the clearing at the side just without his cabin, the earth had been recently loosened for cultivation, and easily Foraker sorted the tramlings. Moonlight was enough for any seasoned huntsman to see by. Here were the marks of Greensheaf's feet, toed in like an Indian's. There were the smaller flat ones of his wife. And there were the deep moccasin-prints of Aran, whose foot was the largest in all Hobdene.

SO THEY had danced in a ring, and beyond the dancing spot went the triple trail of their retreat. No, the trail was quadruple! A fourth line of tracks came from the direction of the stockade, and these were small, slim feet, wearing shoes instead of moccasins. Melison! She had joined the Greensheafs!

Foraker did not like it. He tramped rapidly away, on the trace of the quartet. When he came to the forest's edge, the light was gone, but he bent and saw how the four had come into single file, making a lane through the undergrowth that he could follow even in the dark. He made slow progress for awhile and then, up ahead, caught the glint of a fire. He headed for it, as swiftly and silently as he could, and came up behind a tussock of scrubby willow.

Just beyond blazed the fire, not large but intensely bright. It strengthened as he watched, for Greensheaf's old hand was throwing in powder—per-

haps lime, or a lime mixture. And Aran had gathered great thick branches for fuel, breaking them in his powerful fists like straws. To one side stood Melison Hargrove, with Goodwife Greensheaf at her elbow, the old woman's skinny hand clutching the girl's neck from behind. Foraker thought that the grip was not to hold, but to caress, and the fancy was horrible.

"We will not be spied on here," said the graybeard at last. "Mel, the fortune of our cult brought you to us. The three of us make four now, and others will come among us, others."

"The little children of Hobdene can be won to us," croaked his wife.

"Perhaps the Indians," muttered Aran, stoking the fire.

CHAPTER IV

The Witch-Finder

MELISON'S face was rapt and pale, like that of a dreamer's. She did not move or speak. Foraker knew that her trance was upon her, brought on, perhaps, by the activity of these three grisly companions.

"Nay, not savages," Greensheaf said to his son. "They must be slain, driven out to make room for us. In this wild land we will thrive, we children of the Old One."

Foraker pricked up his ears. The Old One—Old Scratch, Old Nick, Satan, master of witches. Were these folk serious in calling themselves his children?

"Mel," Greensheaf went on, "I knew your grandmother. Foul fare those who slew her! But we fled to this wilderness where, though the way be hard, there are no gibbets or courts. Captain Foraker, the only law, is a fool, who dreams not of our knowledge and worship. We can do what we list under his long nose, until the day comes when he, like all other enemies, is overthrown and we rule."

"And bring others to our circle," elaborated the wife. "There will be food enow, land enow, for every sor-

ceress unchanged in Europe—wilderness enow for every Sabbat—all can fatten here, and we be kings among them."

Melison plainly heard, but still was silent and immovable. Foraker scowled. Here was the will, if not the power, for evil anarchy. Could the New World be given over indeed to a devil's rule? How would this unsavory knot manage it? What did they expect to get from Melison? Even as he wondered, he heard the question answered.

"'Tis your place, Mel, to befool that captain," urged Greensheaf. "He loves you even now. Speak him fair, sweeten him—"

"Nay," growled Aran. "Mel is for me. You promised, Father."

"Silence," snapped the old man. "Your time will come. Meanwhile—"

He nodded to Goodwife Greensheaf, who thrust Melison forward. The girl gazed into the hottest and whitest of the fire.

"You are one of us now, Mel," intoned the old man. "Prophecy for us."

"Aye, prophecy," echoed big Aran.

He tried to seize one of Melison's hands, but his father pushed him away. For Melison was about to speak.

She lifted her face, so bloodless that her blue eyes seemed dark by contrast. Her lips stirred slowly, as though throwing off bonds.

"Discovery is near," she intoned then.

"Discovery?" repeated Greensheaf. "Triumph?"

Her head shook. "Nay, destruction. We are watched. An enemy—"

"Aye, by the black dog!" snarled Aran, and sprang to his feet. "'Tis Captain Foraker. He shall suffer, shall die, if he spies upon us. Speak, Mel, is it Foraker?"

His vehemence caught her attention. She met his eyes, as though at last she awakened.

"Foraker?" she said after him, mechanically and breathlessly. "He spies? No, no!" Her voice rose wildly. "Not Foraker! Harm not Nele Foraker!"

The watcher felt that he had waited long enough. As though summoned by the sound of his name, he thrust himself forward into the light of the

fire. His left hand raised the staff, his right drew the sword.

"Is it true that witches fear swords?" he cried. "I heard one of you call me the only law here. Well, then, I sentence you all to—"

THERE was a rush upon him from all sides. Ceasing to speak, he fought for his life.

Goodwife Greensheaf impaled herself on his blade, and her shriek of agony was also of amazement. She had thought she was impervious, that she could bring his weapon to naught. Whatever the value of her witchcraft, it had failed her. Even so, her skewered body weighted down Foraker's sword-arm, while the two men closed in from either side.

He smote with the stick in his left hand, and the elder fell with split skull. Aran, bereft of father and mother in two seconds, grappled with the captain.

They strained and swayed, and Captain Foraker knew that this hobbled-hoy was stronger, far stronger, than he. Aran Greensheaf had no science or grace, but by sheer weight and sinew he foiled a leg thrust out to trip him, broke a clutch on his arm, would not be turned or toppled. He stood like a rooted tree, a tree come to evil life, with arms for branches and clutching fingers for twigs. Despite his struggles Foraker was borne back, fell heavily.

The weight of Aran held him down. The immense hands groped upon his face, a thick thumb hooked into the corner of his mouth. Foraker bit that thumb, but Aran did not wince. His other hand sought to gouge an eye.

"Yield!" thundered Aran.

Foraker bucked and wriggled, but he could not throw off the adversary.

"Confess yourself vanquished," growled Aran. "I will spare you—but swear on your soul to take my instruction—"

Something fumbled at Foraker's waist, where his pistol hung. He tried to snatch at the fumbler, but too late. The gun was gone. There was a thunderous detonation, a fire-flash in his very eyes. And the hands quitted his face. The hulk of Aran tumbled side-

ward, and the prone captain was able to get up.

A second time Melison Hargrove had killed for Nele Foraker with his own pistol.

She looked up into his eyes, and she was not a dreamer now.

"Thank heaven you are safe," she breathed. "For a time they took advantage of my trance, but I cast it off."

"Melison," he said earnestly, "by throwing it off, you have conquered. 'Twas when they sought to make you betray me."

"That I shall never do," she promised.

The fire burned an honest red by now, and they stood a little apart from the three corpses, but close to each other. Foraker took the girl in his arms and kissed her.

"These stark-mad fools spoke one truth," he whispered. "I do love you, and was fool not to know it. You love me, too. You lied for me, even in the midst of your trance, saying that 'twas not I who spied. And you killed for me!"

"I dread to think it," she quavered, her voice muffled against his buckskin bosom.

"And I glory to think it. But promise me one thing. Abjure forever these strange fits, whether they be witchcraft or magic or simple doting sickness."

"They are involuntary."

"Fight against them. Forbid them your heart and soul."

"That I will do, I swear."

He kissed her again. "Now go you back to the fort. I will bury these three, in yonder swamp. And tomorrow we will journey together along the road you came. Another fort lies a day from here, and in it dwells an ordained minister. He will marry us. . . ."

AND so it fell out. When the bride and groom returned, they began their honeymoon with work. Foraker, though captain, was prone to work as hard and long as any cornplanter in Hobdene. With a hoe he gashed the earth, and Melison would drop in four seed kernels, laughing and singing the ancient jingle:

One for the blackbird, and one for the crow,
One for the cutworm, and one to grow.

As he labored, Foraker looked at his wife and saw that her cheeks had color, that the tight lines had vanished from brow and mouth. He congratulated himself, because whatever witchcraft was, it was banished, or nearly. Love made Melison happy and normal. The black mystery would shed from her like an old garment and be forgotten. He, too, sang, and the words were Thomas Campion's:

There is a garden in her face,
Where roses and white lilies blow;
A heavenly paradise is that place—

"Look, Nele," said Melison suddenly. "A troop of horsemen have come from the trail, and they head thither."

It was early afternoon, and the sun made metal glint among the riders who, in double column like soldiers, came toward the fields. Here and there planters stopped work to gaze. Foraker, too, glanced up.

There were ten hard-faced men, clad in mail-coats and helmets, and at their head rode a figure unarmed and elegant, with plumed beaver and beribboned doublet—a courtierlike spark, with pink cheeks, curved lips, tiny, foppish mustaches and an abundant, full-bottomed wig. But his eyes were as black, as piercing, as Captain Foraker's own.

This leader swung down from his caparisoned gray and tossed the reins to an armored attendant. He advanced, toying with his gilded riding switch. "By heaven's grace," he lisped, "my surmise was right. Here she is—Melison Hargrove, the witch!"

"You have—found me!" she stammered.

"Aye, the trail was broad enow," the stranger nodded. "Not far along your line of retreat was a fresh Indian grave. We delved, and found a poor savage—without a wound, but with a famously frightened face. What weapon save yours visits such a death? Then another grave, farther along. And last night we lay at a fort where, said the folk, a lass of your description visited the preacher."

Foraker had ceased his hoeing and now confronted the springald.

"Sir," he said, "this is my lady wife, Mistress Foraker. Ere you make free to accuse her, name yourself and your business. I am captain of this fort, and have right to know."

"You are Captain Foraker?" The cupid's-bow mouth twitched into a smile. "Meseems I have heard of you, as one who turned his back on the royal court to seek his fortune in this desert. And hath this damsel cast her enchantments upon you?"

Melison was trembling like a leaf. Foraker shifted his hoe to the ready, like a quarter-staff.

"Sir," he said again, "I demand that you state your name and business, and afterward apply yourself to the business, leaving us to ours. Know, too, that I like you not nor your face."

THE mailed horsemen muttered, and two of them swung down, as if to protest violently. But the exquisite appeared to take no offense. He tapped a yawn with the butt of his riding switch.

"Ah, Captain Foraker," he sighed. "many dislike me. If you will have my name, 'tis Pancras Shawkin. My business is that of witch-finder."

"Witch-finder!" growled Foraker.

"And, as you bid me, I shall apply myself to that business, for under warrant of Sir Francis Lovelace, His Majesty's governor of these colonies, I have followed this enchantress hither. I shall now try, sentence and punish her."

With a growl and a bound, Foraker was at him. But the beribboned body was tensed knowingly for just such an attempt. The switch butt, lifted to Shawkin's face in such languid wise, drove out like a cudgel, striking and numbing Foraker's fist upon the hoe-handle. The tool fell to earth, and a moment later the switch—it must have been loaded with lead—smote him on the temple.

Foraker staggered, recovered, and shakily drew his hunting knife, the only weapon he wore.

Melison cried out, and sprang to steady him upon his shifting feet. Two of the guardsmen also ran in.

They seized Foraker by the elbows and wrested the knife from him.

"Well done, lads," praised Shawkin languidly. "Bring him to yonder stockade—the woman, too. There is still much daylight, and we will complete the affair before this night falls."

CHAPTER V

"Pain Strong and Lasting"

THEY set up court with the knowing ease of old hands. Some of the retainers gathered up all firearms, lest Foraker's friends give trouble, and themselves mounted ready guard with drawn swords and loaded guns. Others dragged Foraker's table into the open, also a bench for Shawkin to sit upon in his role of prosecutor and judge.

Before him were set the silent Melison, pale as death again, and the darkly scowling Foraker. The other settlers crowded to gaze curiously and suspiciously.

The witch-finder opened a large portfolio, filled with official-looking papers. From the top one he read a formal indictment, charging that Melison, "forsaking the true laws of Heaven and the realm, and hearkening to the temptations of Satan," had dealt with a familiar spirit. That through the spirit's means she had caused illness and distress in England, and that she had fled from the legal consequences of that action, thereby making the seriousness of the matter the greater.

"To which the prisoner's plea is—" Shawkin broke off expectantly, but when Melison kept silent, he prompted her: "Guilty, or not guilty?"

She closed her eyes, and when she spoke, her voice was low but steady. "Guilty."

The silence that fell was broken by a roar of protest from Melison's husband.

"Sir, sir!" cried Foraker. "Look upon her—she knows not what she says! She hath dreams, yes—trances, yes. There is mystery here, perhaps evil mystery, but none of this is her

fault, nor comes of her malice or ill will!"

Shawkin was writing notes of the proceedings, and from them he smiled up, like a sophisticated schoolmaster upon a dull youth.

"Handsomely defended, my brave captain. Yet I dare think that you are yourself deceived. This woman is a notorious enchantress, as was her grandmother, from whom she does inherit her familiar spirit and its magic."

"That does not obtain," flung back Foraker. "As well prosecute the child of a cross-eyed murderer because he has inherited the parent's affliction."

"I make no doubt that somewhere upon her body is a mark," continued Shawkin. "A mole, belike, or a tag or scar. A needle would draw no blood or cause pain. Such is the devil's mark. Search her, guards."

A man-at-arms stepped forward, his hand outstretched as though to seize and tear Melison's clothing. Foraker stood in his way, ready to fight unarmed, but Melison, herself, stopped the indignity.

"I have pleaded guilty," she said calmly. "What needs examination?"

"Such a mark, or such absence of pain, proves naught," Foraker snapped. From his own shirt-front he drew a steel pin and stripped up his sleeve. "Look! I will show that in every person's flesh are senseless places."

He chose a spot and drove the pin deep into it. All gazed at him, and he did not quiver. When he withdrew the point, no blood came.

"**I** HAVE proved—" he began.

"Aye," broke in Shawkin, with his languid mockery of tone, "you have proved what I already suspected when you so warmly defended this wench. You, too, are witch and warlock."

"Let him charge that who dares!" growled Foraker.

He took a step toward the table, but guards at either side moved to forestall him, swords ready. Others faced down the knot of settlers who were stirring and muttering. Shawkin made more notes on his paper, then laid down his quill-pen.

"So we can deal with two cases instead of one," he announced. "Nele Foraker, do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

Foraker's face writhed with anger, his muscles swelled, but he did not speak.

"Guilty or not guilty?" repeated Shawkin, then pushed back his bench and rose. "The law provides inducements whereby a stiff-necked prisoner may be brought to make reply."

"Why should I speak?" Foraker flung out contemptuously. "You will conduct the case to suit yourself, condemn me foully. Kill me what way you will, without any help from my lips."

"As you plead not, my way is plain," the witch-finder told him. Then, to the guards: "Unship the door from this man's cabin yonder, and gather heavy stones. We must press him."

"Nay, is not my confession enough?" pleaded Melison tremulously.

"My hand is forced, and the case does not concern your plea," Shawkin told her glibly. "This, your husband, stands suspect, and rudely refuses to plead. What if I should release him unadmonished?"

"I shall answer that," Foraker raged. "Once free, I would to my sword, and prove upon your knave body that you are a walking parcel of lies, prettied by ribbons and curls—"

"Lead him out," Shawkin ordered. "Give him the *peine fort et dure*—pain strong and lasting—as by ancient statute governing those who flout the authority of courts and plead not."

Two guards drew Melison away, but full four were needed to subdue the sudden mad strugglings of Foraker. They dragged him through the water gate and to the side of the creek Nhamawusk.

In the calm evening they stripped him to the waist, flung him down upon his broad back, and bound him cruciform to four stakes driven into the ground for the lashing of his wrists and ankles. The door of rough-hewn planking was placed upon him, and held steady there by more cords strung across it. Finally, at Shawkin's command, stones were heaped upon it; a hundredweight or more.

"All this I do by process and de-

mand of the King's law," said Shawkin once more. "Prisoner, you will lie here the night, to meditate upon your rebellion. Without a plea, we cannot try or sentence you."

"So shall I go without trial or sentence," snapped Foraker, tensing his muscles against the weight.

"Men have died ere this under the *peine fort et dure*," replied the witch-finder, one hand gracefully on hip, while he twirled his mustache with the other. "You, however, will last some time. Tomorrow we will bring bread and water—and more stones. The same each day, until your will is broken, or your heart, or your back and ribs." He addressed the staring knot of onlookers. "Back, all of you, to your cabins! Let one man keep guard here, and another over the witch, Melison Hargrove."

ALL departed save the sentry posted, and Foraker, prone and crushingly rock-weighted, could not lift his head high enough to see them go.

This was the end, Foraker decided. He had always thought that his death would be violent, but he had hoped that it would be quick and easy and of value to others. Now his hopes perished. He would linger for days, under increasing weight and pain, to a miserable end—unless he pleaded to the charge.

But that he could not bring himself to do, for honor's sake. And he had read in the delicate, cruel face of Shawkin, the witch-finder, that whether he called himself guilty or no, he would be brought in the end to a shameful noose.

Foraker set his teeth. He would keep silence, though they stacked all the boulders of America upon his stubborn limbs.

But what of Melison, who had already confessed? In the morning they would surely hang her, perhaps within his own sight and hearing. Of that Foraker could not think. He moaned despite himself, and the sentry chuckled.

Silence for awhile. Foraker thought that the blood beat strongly in his ears—or was it footsteps, echoing through

the earth so close to his head? The armed man beside him brought his musket to the slope.

"Who goes?" he challenged sharply at the intruder.

"Friend," replied a voice strangely accented.

An Indian, Foraker decided at once. They had learned to respond with that word of English, often the only word they knew. He twisted his eyes side-long and upward, and saw that through the moonlight stalked a tall figure, its shaven crown garnished with a single feather, its body wrapped in a blanket.

"Friend," the Indian said to the sentry once more.

Foraker recognized the voice of Sangunga, the chief with whom he had so lately fought, then smoked the pipe to restore peace and friendship.

"'Tis all right," panted Foraker to the sentry, though he suffered doubly with the weight upon his chest as he spent breath in speaking. "We here are at truce with the Indians."

"Pass, then," the sentry granted, stepping aside.

Sangunga lingered for a moment, towering above Foraker's prone figure and gazing down.

"The white chief lies on a strange bed," he pronounced from the depths of his chest.

"I am chief no more," Foraker replied, "but the truce we made holds, Sangunga. Even when I am dead—"

"The white chief expects to die? And his white squaw, what of her?" Sangunga asked.

"She will die, too," Foraker told him, and felt like weeping to say it. "You will see us no more. But keep the truce, Sangunga."

"Ugh! I keep the truce," the Indian chief vowed.

The Indian strode away toward the stockade, and through the water gate.

"You have done well," the sentry growled. "Even at New York and Boston, we have war with the redskins."

"I have tried to speak them fair," answered Foraker. "Sangunga has sense and honor. And now let me save my breath, friend. I need it sorely."

"Faith, so you do," agreed the other.

And once more there was silence.

CHAPTER VI

Last Prophecy

SLOWLY an hour passed; or more. The moon crawled slowly across a segment of sky, the black shadows of the trees and the stockade lengthened. Foraker's head ached, his straining muscles and lungs cried out in agony as they braced themselves against the load they must bear up. And his ears were telling him stories again of approaching feet, more than one pair this time.

The sentry did not challenge, so it must be an illusion. Then he could see a figure approaching from the stockade—a figure slender and elegant in plumed hat and jaunty doublet. Shawkin, the foppish witch-finder, who was his downfall.

"Good-even', Master Shawkin," spoke the guardsman, and brought his piece smartly to the salute. "Would you question this fellow? He is a stubborn one, hard to bend or soften."

"Shawkin," managed Foraker thickly, "I knew you at sight for a scab-hearted popinjay, who pretends to knowledge of evil and so fattens on blood, be it guilty or innocent. Now do I know you for a fiend and coward, come to exult over a helpless man. If I were but free, and within clutch of your dainty throat among those ribbons—"

Shawkin's face was not visible under the wide, modish hat-brim, and Foraker could not know whether he smiled or scowled. But the slender figure bent, and laid inquiring fingertips upon Foraker's sweat-beaded brow.

"Hands off," choked out the weight-oppressed man.

"Hark you, prisoner," put in the sentry officiously, "'twould benefit you if you showed proper respect to . . . Aaaaah!"

He broke off in a strangled gurgle. Foraker, lifting his head as far as his bonds and weighted planks would let him, saw a flurried merging of two figures—a blanket-wrapped thing had

stolen up behind the guard and seized him. In the scuffle, the blanket fell away, and Foraker saw the great naked bronze of Sangunga's torso.

The chief's huge hands made a clamping circle on his victim's throat, his arms knotted like constricting snakes. So sudden had it been that the musket fell from the hands that had held it.

"Take care!" wheezed Foraker to Sangunga. "This other will fall upon you!" For he remembered the shrewd, smashing blows that Shawkin could deal.

But Sangunga neither spoke nor ceased to strangle his prey. The body of the sentry slackened, and Shawkin, far from aiding his man, was tugging the great stones away from the plank that half crushed Foraker. After a moment, Sangunga let the sentry drop limply from his clutch, and came to help.

The planking was lightened and lifted away, the Indians' knife severed Foraker's bonds. The freed captain got upon his shaky legs, breathing deeply and gratefully, and rubbing his numbed wrists and forearms.

"Master Shawkin," he said at length, "in whatever way you came to see my innocence and freed me, I do thank you for it. I would be ungrateful now to pick quarrel; yet I say that unless you set free also my wife—"

"Nele, do you not know me yet?" spoke a soft voice he knew and loved.

A slim hand tore Shawkin's hat away, showing him the oval face, the blue eyes and trembling mouth of Melison.

"Silence," grunted Sangunga, from where he stooped to plunder the unconscious guard of his weapons. "This is no time to hug and mash your faces together. Come away into the forest, before other enemies learn of this work and follow . . ."

AS DAWN came up in bands of rose and gold, the three paused to rest on the mossy roots of a big tree, many hours' journey into the pathless depths of the wilderness. And Foraker heard at length the reason and strategy of his rescue.

"I was held in our cabin," Melison

told him, "and when all others were gone to bed, Shawkin came to talk. He insisted that I aid him in forcing you to confess."

"The devil!" growled Foraker. "For the sake of his reputation, his fees, he would hound innocent folk to a miserable end!"

"Speak not ill of the dead," Melison cautioned. "'Twas then, dear Nele, that I strove once more to summon that evil power, to pass into a trance, confront him with a dread shape in seeming—"

"Did you kill him so?" demanded her husband. "Nay, you should not have done that. You vowed to me—"

"I say I strove. But, Nele, the power did not come upon me. 'Twas as though my swearing of it away had indeed vanished it. I was like any mortal, free from magic and its help—or harm. And then I remembered what I had vowed, and whispered, 'Thank heaven.' Then"—her voice rose in her gladness—"then, like a player entering to his proper cue, in stole this good savage."

She paused, and thanked Sangunga with her eyes.

"Nele, bid him tell on," she begged Foraker.

Urged in his own language, the chief complied.

"Hunters brought me news of strange violence to you and your squaw," he told Foraker. "Remembering the truce and its terms, that you and I were to help each other, I came. You, too, reminded me of that truce—"

"Nay, friend, I spoke in hope that you would keep peace with my people after I died. I did not dream that you would help me against other white men."

"A truce is a truce, and friendship is friendship," rejoined Sangunga, in a tone of lofty reproof. "If you forgot, I remembered. When I saw you bound and oppressed, I paused to speak a little and then I saw the whole matter. Entering the stockade, I was met by no one."

"That is true," nodded Foraker. "My captor told the people to remain in their cabins."

"I went to your place of dwelling,

and listened outside the blanket hung over the doorway. Though I do not understand the speech of the whites, I could recognize that your squaw was being tormented by a certain strange man."

"Shawkin," said Foraker. "Go on."

"I crept in, and a thrust of my knife drank the soul from him before he knew. Then, by signs, I set a plan with your squaw, whose heart is that of a warrior. While I guarded outside, she put on the clothes of that strange white enemy of yours. The rest you know."

"Was it not wonderful?" asked Melison. "We are free!"

"That is true," Foraker agreed.

HE TURNED and spoke solemnly to Sangunga.

"I trust, my friend, that this will not hurt you, or bring war back upon your tribe."

"It cannot do that," pronounced the chief. "None saw me except the man you name Shawkin whom I slew, the guard who lost his senses without looking upon my face, and you two who are running away. The others will think that it was enchantment. If you go farther away to the west,

where they will not follow, I myself will give you food and blankets for the journey. Your squaw has brought your sword, and a pouchful of the things you call books. I have this musket I took from the man who guarded you, and his powder-horn." He passed them over.

"It can be done," agreed Foraker stoutly. "Melison, do you fear living in the unknown forests to the west?"

She shook her head. "I will love them." Her eyes took on a rapt light, as though she saw glories far away. "I gaze down the years, Nele. I see a time when poor folk are no longer wrongly tortured as witches—when these settlements are grown and spread and made a true home of freedom—when the wilderness blossoms into great gardens and cities—"

She broke off in mid-phrase, and her eyes turned to Foraker, full of trouble and repentance.

"Alack, what have I done, prophesying thus? I swore to do no more witchcraft!"

He laughed and hugged her close to him.

"'Twas no witchcraft. Any wise and true person can see those same good things in the time to come."