

Off to Fort William Henry

It was 1757, the third year of the French and Indian War in America. England and France were fighting for possession of a country that neither one was destined to have. Some Indians were helping the English. Other Indians were helping the French.

A wide, thick forest separated the American settlements of France and England. Both armies had built forts at different points in the forest. As the war went on, these forts were taken and retaken, torn down, and built up again. Colonel Munro commanded the soldiers at Fort William Henry, the largest of the English forts. His young daughters, Cora and Alice, lived with him in one of the houses there.

Both girls were beautiful, but in different ways. Cora, the older one, had shining black hair and dark eyes. Alice had blond hair and blue eyes. They were both as nice to be with as they were beautiful.

As our story opens, Cora and Alice were on their way back to Fort William Henry after visiting friends many miles away. They were being escorted by Major Duncan Heyward, a soldier under Colonel Munro's command. Major Heyward liked both girls—but he was secretly in love with Alice. He had found two good horses for Cora and Alice to ride. And he had brought along his Indian scout, Magua, to show them the way. Alice did not like Magua, but Duncan had insisted that he was a good scout and could be trusted.

Just as the four riders were about to start off, a man rode up. He was tall, thin, and very strange looking. It appeared that his horse was not big enough for him, and even his clothes were too small. He looked as if he didn't know how to ride a horse—and the horse looked just as confused!

The girls, who were very kind, tried hard not to laugh. Duncan asked, "Who are you, sir?"

The thin stranger smiled. "I am a singing teacher," he answered.

"A singing teacher!" Major Heyward could not believe his ears. "But my good man—every one knows how to sing! What is your *work*?"



“Why, I teach people how to sing,” the thin man repeated. “Surely that is enough to do.”

Major Heyward didn’t like that answer. He thought that with a war going on a man should do something more important than teach singing.

“May I ride with you to Fort William Henry?” the singing teacher asked timidly. He sounded afraid. “The woods are full of Indians, you know, and I don’t know how to fight.”

Major Heyward sighed. He didn’t want to take care of the singing teacher. It was enough to watch out for Cora and Alice. But Alice said,

“Let him come, Duncan.” And he could never say no to Alice.

They hadn’t gone far when Major Heyward thought he saw a faint gleam in the trees. Could it be a reflection off the glistening eyes of a prowling Indian? He nervously looked over at Magua, who seemed very calm. So Heyward relaxed and smiled to himself. “It must have only been some shiny berries,” he thought. “Otherwise Magua would have noticed it, too.”

After Major Heyward’s party rode on, however, an Indian stepped out from the bushes. He was a Huron, and he was painted for war. The Huron stood silently and looked down the trail, watching his intended victims.

Magua knew the Hurons were watching them. But he did not know that the dense woods held three other men as well.

One of the three was a most unusual white man named Hawkeye. He was a scout for the English. Hawkeye was tall and muscular, made strong by many hardships and long years of hard work. His simple clothes were made from the skins of deer. The sun had browned his face, and time had put a little gray in his hair. The most

remarkable thing about Hawkeye, however, was that he had always lived in the woods. For this reason, he knew the woods every bit as well as any Indian did.

The other two men were Indians—but they were not Hurons. They were the only remaining members of a different tribe. Chingachgook and his son, Uncas, were the last of the great Mohicans.

The Mohicans did not wear many clothes. Their bodies were painted all over in shades of white and black. They wore just one long band of hair on their closely shaved heads. Decorated with feathers, this band was left there for their enemies to scalp—if they could.

This day in the woods Chingachgook was sitting on a mossy log. Near him was a deer that Uncas had killed with an arrow. Hawkeye was standing by, filling his powder horn.

As the men talked, Uncas put his ear to the ground. “The horses of white men are coming!” he warned. “Hawkeye, they are your brothers! You must speak to them.”