

# **When a witch is young**

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**WHEN A WITCH IS YOUNG.**

# **PART I.**

# CHAPTER I.

## LE ROI EST MORT.

THE first, the last—the only King the Americans ever had, was dead. It was the 13th day of August, in the year 1676. The human emotions of the Puritan people of Massachusetts tugged at the shackles of a long repression and broke them asunder, in the seemingly town of Plymouth. King Philip, the mighty Sachem of the Wampanoag Indians, had been slain. His warriors were scattered and slaughtered. His war was ended.

Through the streets of Plymouth poured a vast throng of people. Men, women and children, they ran and walked, surrounding a buff-colored army that filled the thoroughfares like a turgid flood. This was the regiment which Captain Benjamin Church had led to the final camp of King Philip, in the swamps at Mt. Hope and Pocasset, where the last scene in the sanguinary drama had been enacted.

Here was a troop of sixty horse, with officers. They were well mounted, caparisoned with glittering back, breast and headpiece, and armed with clanking sword, shouldered carbine, and great pistols, that flopped at the waist. Behind them were foot-soldiers, brown Puritans—stern, mirth-denying, lusty at fighting. Some of these bore no weapon other than a pike. Another frequently had upon him sword, pistol and carbine. Above the heads of these men on foot waved a thin forest of pike-staves, on the tips of which bright steel threw back the dazzling rays of the sun. There was clatter of scabbards on the pavement, thud and thud of hoofs and

feet in the roadway, and above all, shouts of men and gabble of children.

There were hordes on either side of this human flood, pushing and crowding to gain the front of the column, while a similar aggregation hung back upon the flank of the regiment, hooting, craning necks and racing to keep pace with the steady, long strides of the soldiers. This division of interest was caused by the two counter attractions of the pageant. Thus at the front, a red Indian was leading the march with a wild, half-dancing step, while he contorted his body weirdly for the purpose of displaying to all beholders the ghastly proof of victory—the head of the great King Philip. This Indian ally might have stood for the mockery of a drum-major, heading a march of doom.

The spectators, racing, crowding, following, took a crazed delight in beholding this gory head. Love, anger, joy, the daily emotions of man, were habitually so repressed by these serious people that now it seemed as if they reveled as in an orgie of shuddering and gasping, to give vent to their pent-up natures. They laughed, they skipped on nimble feet, they sang praises. The young men and women snatched the occasion, with its looseness of deportment, to look unbridled feelings into one another's eyes.

The other attraction, in the rear, was a captive, a mere boy, as white as any in the multitude, and paler than the palest. Tall and lithe as he was, his age was scarcely a whit above fourteen. He was dressed as an Indian; he bore himself like a sullen brave. At his side was old Annawon, the last of King Philip's councilors, who, having surrendered under a promise of "good quarter" was even now being led to his execution.



The interest centered, however, in the boy. Through the stoicism which he labored to hold as a mask upon his face, the signs of anguish played like an undercurrent. In all the throng he had but a single friend, the Red-man with whom he was marching. He looked about at the pitiless embankment of faces. Near him a score of nimble boys were running, a frantic desire to strike him depicted in their eyes. Further away a tall man was moving, perforce, with the tide. On his shoulder he bore a little Puritan maiden, who might have been crushed had he placed her on her feet. She was looking at the boy-captive with eyes that seemed a deeper brown for their very compassion. She clung to the man who held her, with a tense little fist. Her other tiny hand was pressed upon her cheek till all about each small finger was white, in the bonny apple-blush of her color. It seemed as if she must cry out to the young prisoner, in sympathy.

While the boy was gazing back his answer to the child—a quiver in consequence almost loosening his lip—an urchin near him abruptly cast a stone that struck him smartly in the side. With a panther-like motion the captive launched himself upon his assailant and bore him to earth in a second. The old councillor, Annawon, spoke some soft, quick word at which the lad in buckskin immediately abandoned his overthrown antagonist and regained his place in the march. His eyes blinked swiftly, but in vain, for tears, of anger and pain, forced their way between his lids and so to his cheeks, when he dashed them swiftly away on his sleeve.

The foot-soldiers scurried forward and closed in about their dangerous charge. The bawling youths of Plymouth seemed to multiply by magic. But their opportunities for committing further mischief were presently destroyed. The pageant was passing Plymouth jail. An officer hustled ten of his men about the boy-

prisoner and wedged them through the press of people toward this place of gloom. Above the clamor then rose a voice, and in the Indian tongue the boy-captive heard the words:

“Farewell, Little-Standing-Panther.”

It was old Annawon, who had divined that there would be no other parting with the lad, who was the only creature which the war had left on earth for him to love.

The boy cried: “Farewell,” and the passage through the people closed behind him.

Those who looked beheld old Annawon smile faintly and sadly. It was the only expression which had played across his face since his surrender, and there was never another.

Through nearly every street the glad procession wound. At length, the head of the butchered King Philip was thrust upon an iron stake, which was planted deeply in the ground. Governor Winslow then requested that the people disperse to their several homes.

The night at length came down—night the beneficent, that cloaks the tokens of men’s barbarisms. Then the moon arose, casting a pale, cold light, lest remorse lose her way. What a passionless calm settled upon the sleeping village!

At last, with a tread as silent as that of death itself, an active figure crept from shadow to shadow, in the streets which the moon had silver-plated. The lone human being came to the square wherein was planted the stake with the moon-softened head upon it. The visitor was the white boy-captive, dressed in his Indian toggery. He had escaped from the jail.

In the moonlight he came forward slowly. He halted and extended his arms toward the stake with its motionless burden. He approached in reverence, murmuring brokenly in the Indian tongue:

“Metacomet—Metacomet,——my foster-father,——I have come.”

He knelt upon the ground and clasping the cold iron stake in his arms, he sobbed and sobbed, as if his heart would break.

## CHAPTER II.

### A FRIENDSHIP OF CHANCE.

THROUGH the gray mist of Plymouth's dawn there came a sound of footsteps, and then a murmur of melodious humming, somewhat controlled and yet too sturdy and joyous to be readily accounted for in the strict Puritan village. Presently, looming out of the uncertain light, appeared the roughly-hewn figure of a young man of five and twenty. He was singing to himself, as he hastened with big strides through the deserted streets.

On the point of passing the place where the gibbeted head of King Philip made a rude exclamation point in the calm of gray Plymouth, the early riser suddenly noted the curled-up form of a human being on the ground, his arm loosely bent about the iron stake, his head resting loosely against it, his eyes fast closed in the sleep of exhaustion. The man started slightly, halted and ceased his singing.

He blinked his eyes for a moment, shifted his feet uneasily and rubbed stoutly at his jaw, as he gazed in perplexity at the picture before him. He then tip-toed as if to go on, quietly, about his own business. He glanced at the head, then back to the boy, from whose lips, in his sleep, a little moan escaped. The visitor noted the traces where tears had channeled down the lad's pale cheeks. There was something unescapable in the attitude of the bare golden head against the stake. The man stopped and laid his big hand gently on the half-curved locks.

Instantly the boy awoke, leaped to his feet and fell down again, from sheer stiffness, staring at the man with eyes somewhat wild.

He arose again at once, more steadily, overcoming the cramps in his muscles doggedly, never ceasing for a second to watch the man who had waked him.

“I give you good morrow,” said the man. “It seems to me you have need of a friend, since you have clearly lost one that you much esteemed.”

There was persuasion and honesty in the stranger’s warm-blue eyes, good nature in his broad, smooth face and a large capacity for affection denoted in his somewhat sensuous mouth. Such a look of friendship and utter sincerity as he bestowed on the startled and defiant boy before him could not have been easily counterfeited. The youthful know sincerity by intuition.

“Who are you?” said the boy, his voice hoarse and weakened. “What would anybody want with me?”

“My name is William Phipps,” said the stranger, simply. “I am a ship-builder of Boston. If you have no better friend, perhaps I would do till you can find one. I am on my way to Boston now. If you need a friend and would like to leave Plymouth, you may come with me, unless you feel you cannot trust any one about this village.” He paused a moment and then added, “I think you must be the boy I heard of, Adam Rust, brought in with the captured Indians.”

“My name is Adam Rust,” the boy admitted. “I have no friends left. If you have been helping to kill the Wampanoags I would rather not try to be your friend. But I know I would like you and I should be glad to go to Boston, or any place away from here.” In the daylight he could not bear to look up at the head above him.

“I have been too busy to fight,” said William Phipps, employing the same excuse he had used for friends with recruiting proclivities. “And I have been too happy,” he added, as if involuntarily. “So, you see, there is no reason why I should not be your friend. Have you had any breakfast?” He put out his hand to shake.

“No,” said Adam. He lost his hand in the big fist which Phipps presented, and restrained himself from crying by making a mighty effort. He had gone without eating for two days, but he said nothing about it.

“Then,” said Phipps heartily, “the sooner we start the better. We can get something hot on the brig.”

He began his long striding again. Adam hesitated a moment. He looked up at the features above him, his heart gushing full of emotion.

Some inarticulate farewell, in the Indian tongue, he breathed through his quivering lips. His eyes grew dimmed. He fancied he saw a smile of farewell and of encouragement play intangibly on those still, saddened lineaments, and so he held forth his arms for a second and then turned away to join his new-found protector.

William Phipps, having thought the boy to be following more closely than he was, stopped to let him catch up. Thus he noted the look of anguish with which the lad was leaving that grim remnant of King Philip behind. Phipps was one of Nature’s “motherly men”—hardly ever more numerous than roc’s eggs on the earth. He felt his heart go forth to Adam Rust. Therefore it was that he looked down in the boy’s face, time after time, as they walked along together. Thus they came to the water-front and wharves, at the end of one of which the brig “Captain Spencer” was swinging.

“This ship belongs to me and I made her,” said Phipps, with candid pride in his achievement. “You shall see that she sails right merrily.”

They went aboard. A few sailors scrubbing down the deck, barefooted and with sleeves at elbow, now abandoned their task temporarily, at the command of the mate, who had seen his captain coming, to hoist sail and let go the hawsers. The chuckle in the blocks, as the sailors heaved and hauled at the ropes, gave Adam Rust a pleasure he had never before experienced.

Breakfast being not yet prepared for service, Phipps conducted his foundling about the craft for a look at her beauties. When Adam had putted the muzzle of the brig’s gun and felt the weight of a naked sword in his fist, in the armory, the buoyancy of his youth put new color in his cheeks and a sparkle in his eyes. He was a bright-natural, companionable lad, who grew friendly and smiled his way into one’s affections rapidly, but naturally. When he and Phipps had come up again to the deck, after breakfast, they felt as if they had always been friends.

The brig was under way. Shorewards the gray old Atlantic was wrinkled under the fretful annoyance of a brisk, salty breeze. The ship was slipping prettily up the coast, with stately courtesies to the stern rocks that stood like guardians to the land.

“I think we shall find you were born for a sailor, Adam,” said the master of the craft. “I can give you my word it is more joy and life to sail a ship than to make one. And some day——” but he halted. The modest boasts, with which he warmed the heart of his well-beloved wife, were a bit too sacred for repetition, even to a boy so

winning. "But," he concluded, "perhaps you would like to tell me something of yourself."

Thus encouraged Adam related his story. He was the son of John Rust, a chivalrous gentleman, an affectionate husband and a serious man, with a light heart and a ready wit. John Rust had been the friend of the Indians and the mediator between them and the whites until the sheer perfidy of the Puritans had rendered him hopeless of retaining the confidence of the Red men, when he had abandoned the office. Adam's mother had been dead for something more than four years. Afflicted by his sense of loss, John Rust had become a strange man, a restless soul hopelessly searching for that other self, as knights of old once sought the holy grail.

He went forth alone into the trackless wilderness that led endlessly into the west. Although the father and son had been knit together in their affections by long talks, long ranges together in the forests and by the lessons which the man had imparted, yet when John Rust had gone on his unearthly quest, he could not bear the thought of taking young Adam with him into the wilds.

He had therefore left the boy with his friends, the lad's natural guardians, the honorable nation of Wampanoags. "Keep him here, teach him of your wisdom, make him one of your young warriors," he had said when he went, "so that when I return I may know him for his worth."

King Philip, the mighty Sachem of the tribe, had thereafter been as a foster-father to the boy. For more than two years the Red-man had believed John Rust to have found his final lodge, and this was the truth. And perhaps he had also found his holy grail. He perished alone in the trackless forest. Adam had learned his wood-



lore of his red brothers. He was stout, lithe, wiry and nimble. He rode a horse like the torso of a centaur. He was a bit of a boaster, in a frank and healthy way.

King Philip's war, ascribed, as to causes, to "the passion of the English for territory; their confidence that God had opened up America for their exclusive occupancy; their contempt for the Indians and their utter disregard for their rights," had come inexorably upon the Wampanoags. In its vortex of action, movement, success and failure at last for the Indians, Adam Rust had been whirled along with Metacomet. He had never been permitted by King Philip to fight against his "white brothers," but he had assisted to plan for the safety of the old men, women and children, in procuring game and in constructing shelters. He had learned to love these silently suffering people with all his heart. The fights, the hardships, the doom, coming inevitably upon the hopeless Wampanoags, had made the boy a man, in some of the innermost recesses of a heart's suffering. He had seen the last sad remnants of the Wampanoags, the Pocassetts and the Narragansetts scatter, to perish in the dismal swamps. He had witnessed the death of King Philip, brought upon him by a treacherous fellow Red-man. And then he had marched in that grim procession.

Adam made no attempt to convey an idea of the magnitude of his loss. It would not have been possible. There is something in human nature which can never be convinced that death has utterly stilled a beloved voice and quenched the fire of the soul showing through a pair of eyes endeared by companionship. This in Adam made him feel, even as he told his tale to William Phipps, that he was somehow deserting his faithful friends.

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