

PART ONE
PROMISED
LAND



1710-1712

Truly, here are real savages by our standards; for either they must be thoroughly so, or we must be. There is an amazing distance between their character and ours.

—Michel de Montaigne, “Of Cannibals”

Ordinary people who know how to dream have many times seen that the dead appeared to them, just as they were in life. Therefore we believe that life does not end here on earth.

—Nalungiak, a Netsilik Eskimo

No one ascends from the underworld unmarked.

—*The Descent of Inanna*

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1

The Four Kings

1.

THE MOHAWK SQUATTED on the padded seat of the open coach, his sinewy arms dangling between his knees, like a wolf, and waited for something to speak to him.

Hendrick, the English called him. To his own people he was Forked Paths, a war captain of the Wolf Clan who moved against his enemies in the way of the forest, where nothing is straight. But the crooked streets of London, still new to him, held traps and deceptions as deep as any Hendrick Forked Paths had laid.

He was not attending to the round, sucking mouth of the Englishman who sat facing him, with gold galloon on his courtier's coat and a great bush of powdered hair that was not his own, or the halting gutturals of the Dutch interpreter at his side, or the creak of the carriage wheels, or the squall of the lewd, strapping doxies who flounced about at the foot of the Haymarket, or the scrape of a busker's fiddle, or the scuttle of rats along the open sewers, or the screech of the gulls—salt birds, bitter birds—though the Mohawk could distinguish all these sounds, and a hundred more. To his wolf ears, the roar of the city was not a sea, or a wall; it was a forest where every bush had a name, every leaf stood apart, though in this cramped world of the Sunrise People so many were pressed together.

Hendrick was listening and looking for a guide, something that knew him, a cousin from the world of the *Onkwehonwe*, the Real People, on the farther shore of the ocean sea he had crossed in the white men's floating castle—for the raven that shows the path of the deer, for the wren that warns of witchcraft, for the hawk that sees beyond forests and mountains. Hendrick found only the gulls and the fat, waddling pigeons, tamer even than the flocks of passenger pigeons that came with the spring melt into the Real World, so many and so helpless that a child could bat them off the branches with a stick or catch them in her bare hands. London pigeons reminded the Mohawk of the swag-bellied Englishman

who sat opposite, his buttery face half choked by his neckcloth. Londoners smelled alike to Hendrick. They stank of meat that was born dead, of four-leggeds that lived to be butchered, not hunted, and therefore—alone among animals—had no home in the spirit world. Beneath clouds of claret and gin, civet and cologne, the courtier in the carriage reeked of dead meat and cow's milk, which was worse than poison to the Real People. Hendrick had once been persuaded to drink cow's milk in a Dutchman's house at Albany. It had made his ears ache and his nose bleed.

The war captain's clothes were new. He wore a flowing scarlet mantle trimmed with gold and a shirt of finest cambric over a long black waistcoat with matching breeches and stockings—black because the Court was still in mourning for the Prince of Denmark, the Queen's late husband. All four of the Indian ambassadors wore similar clothes. Their outfits were gifts of the Crown. Puzzled as to how Indian chiefs should be attired for a call upon Her Majesty, the Queen's advisers had sent them to a playhouse tailor who dressed the kings of the stage. The Indian ambassadors had improved the costumier's designs with touches of their own. Hendrick wore the *kahstowa*, the feathered headdress of his people, crowned with a shower of white feathers and bright turkey down. He carried a heavy, ball-headed war club weighted for his hand, carved and notched to recall the scalps he had taken from the French and the Bark Eaters, their native allies. He wore three pairs of earrings, posted in the holes drilled in his ears when he was still an infant on the cradleboard. His pipe-bag was slung from his broad shoulder, because man rides to the skies on a cloud of tobacco. Tied to his waist by a rattlesnake belt was the otterskin bundle that held the power to bind souls and to kill from afar, and the vocabulary of his dreams.



Londoners surged around the two coaches, goggling at the visitors from America. Some had seen Indians before—wild men exhibited in cages as circus novelties—or heard tales of Pocahontas. But London had never played host to Indian royalty until now. The fact that there were no titles of kingship in Mohawk country, and that the four Indians in the two coaches were not even traditional chiefs, was a detail omitted by the hack authors of broadsheets and ballads celebrating the visit. The illustrations that embellished these publications showed the Indian Kings in the raiment of medieval monarchs, with beards and crowns, or in the robes of the Magi, bearing gifts in gold coffer.

What most impressed the crowd was how *unlike* the pictures the Queen’s visitors had turned out to be. They were awed by Hendrick’s sheer physical presence. He was a giant by English standards, a tower of hard muscle rising nearly seven feet high. The Londoners were fascinated by the tattoos of his companions. Nicholas Etakoam, the Mahican, had a flight of thunderbirds engraved across his temple. John Laughing, a Mohawk from the Upper Castle at Canajoharie, was adorned with curving lines that resembled both the phases of the moon and the raking clawmarks of a bear. Brant Vanishing Smoke—who belonged to the Bear Clan—wore tattoos of huge, stylized claws on his wrists and forearms, as if the paws of his totem animal were resting over his own.

A wit in the street hailed Vanishing Smoke as the Illustrated Man. Prints copied from his official portrait by Verelst, the Court painter, would soon be used as advertisements for London tattoo parlors. The phases of the moon were incised in exquisite detail across his forehead. His features were fine and regular, but the dark bars across his lower face suggested the predator, as the wolf’s markings blacken its jaws and draw its prey to the terrible, steady eyes that read whether the quarry is ripe for the harvest. Lunar disks or gorgets were tattooed between Vanishing Smoke’s collarbones. His chest bristled with spearpoints and arrowheads. Strangest of all was the thing that seemed to be scaling his sternum. It looked like an armored aquatic bug, ancient and utterly alien.

The warriors of Kush had worn pendants carved in the shape of flies, modeling themselves on the kind of biting fly that would not leave off an attack until it was dead. What kind of warrior—what sort of King—sporting a tattoo of an insect from an ancient era?



The coachmen pulled on their reins and swore at their horses. Hendrick rose from his heels.

“This is the longhouse of the English Queen,” Abraham Schuyler informed the Mohawks in their own language.

Vanishing Smoke studied St. James’s Palace. The building was the color of black river mud. He saw horse warriors in breastplates of bright metal, and helmets plumed with horsehair, which made them one with their mounts. He recognized something he knew, and smiled on them.



The Indians were escorted by three white men who had sailed from the New World with them. They were Colonel Peter Schuyler, his

brother Captain Abraham Schuyler, and Colonel Sir Francis Nicholson. In an age of war—the current one sparked by a dispute over the Spanish succession—everyone wanted a military title; Nicholson liked to be addressed as general. Peter Schuyler, the first mayor of Albany, was the cleverest of the three. He had made a fortune in the fur trade and used his money to buy influence among the Indians. The Mohawks called him by his first name, but rendered it as Quider, because it was hard for them to get their tongues round the letter P. Abraham Schuyler had learned native languages the old-fashioned way, by sleeping with the women. As Albany Dutchmen, stirred by profit, not flags, the Schuylers were not automatic enthusiasts for the war policy that had brought the Indian Kings to London, but would move with the prevailing wind.

Colonel Nicholson and his Scottish associate Samuel Vetch (who had stayed behind in Boston) were the moving spirits behind this expedition. Nicholson was an empire-builder who planned to deliver a series of blows to the French that would knock them out of North America. He knew that no European army could win battles in the forests of North America without native allies. He hoped to achieve two objectives in London. First, to convince the League of Five Nations (to which the Mohawks belonged), via the stories the Four Kings would take home, that the might of Britain was invincible and that the Confederacy should scrap its official policy of neutrality in white men's wars and commit its warriors to Britain's cause. Second, he hoped to inspire Queen Anne and her ministers to stop dallying and despatch a fleet of warships and a redcoat army to expel the French from Canada. Francis Nicholson had brought the Four Kings to London to arrange a war.



His Grace the Duke of Shrewsbury, the Lord Chamberlain, hooked his richly upholstered arm over Peter Schuyler's.

"I trust you explained to them about the *chairs*."

For an instant, Schuyler appeared at a loss. His mouth opened and closed like a fish out of water.

"In case Her Majesty does the honor of asking them to *sit*," His Grace prodded the Dutchman.

"Ah, the *chairs*." Schuyler took it in. "They are perfect gentlemen, you know," he added evasively. "I have entertained them in my own house many times."

He did not comment on what much of London had observed: that the Four Kings from America shared a violent and inscrutable aversion to all modes of seating suited to an Englishman's rump.

Whether lolling at ease in their lodgings in Covent garden, or on public display with the Lord Mayor or the Astronomer Royal, they went to any lengths to avoid arranging their hindquarters in the prescribed style. They sat on their heels, hugged their haunches, or sprawled full-length on backs or bellies.



In the audience chamber, Hendrick took the plump hand Her Majesty extended to him, palm down, and squeezed it experimentally. He still found it strange that the English greeted each other by touching fingertips. Real People took you by the upper arm, closer to the heart.

The elderly Stuart sovereign was small, round and heavy, sheathed in black cloth. Hendrick smelled powder, musk and thick red wine, sluggish as congealing blood. And the stale, cold stench of meat buried the whole winter in a cache beneath the snow, stored against the Starving Time before the birds fly back from the south. Hendrick smelled her dead womb, that had delivered only stillbirths, and babies born to die.

The Queen's lips fluttered. It would please her for the Four Kings to be seated.

Hendrick watched his companions bend backwards and part their meat on the chairs that had been placed before the throne. This was necessary, Quider had explained to them; if they sat on the floor in the way warriors are meant to sit, Her Majesty would mistake this for an insult. Hendrick compromised by staying on his feet. He was the Word Carrier for this delegation, the one charged to speak for all. He could stand without giving offence.

He addressed the Queen, in his own language, as his elder sister. "*Aktsia*, what is now spoken by one mouth is shared by every heart. We are grateful we have come safely across the Great Water, which our grandfathers have never done. We have come to condole you for the loss of your husband, who walks the path of strawberries.

"With this belt—" he held up a string of wampum beads, which was accepted, on Quider's nod, by a Royal equerry "—we wipe the tears from your eyes, that you may see clearly.

"We remove the blockage from your ears, so you may hear clearly.

"We open your mouth, so you may speak clearly.

"And we open the passage from your heart to your mouth, so that henceforth you will speak only from the heart."

The Mohawk's cadences were waves, rolling one on top of the other, each extending the range of the one before. At his last words, Brant Vanishing Smoke and the other Indians gave a sharp,

sudden yelp of confirmation. When Abraham Schuyler translated the words of condolence, the Queen put a hand to her heart.

The Lord Chamberlain looked daggers at Schuyler. This episode was not on the program. The exchange with the Queen was supposed to be confined to the reading of an agreed text, drafted by Schuyler and Nicholson, and responses to any questions Her Majesty might be pleased to ask.

Now Hendrick held up a belt that reached from his shoulder to his waist: eleven rows of white and purple beads, strung on strips of rawhide. Without wampum—the sacred shells of life—a man’s speech is empty or (worse) a deception. The Lord Chamberlain intervened to claim possession of this curiosity. The Queen, motioning for him to give her a closer look, puzzled over the belt as if trying to determine where it might fit in her wardrobe.

The Lord Chamberlain scowled at Major Pigeon, the court soldier who had been charged with reading the prepared text of Hendrick’s speech.

“Great Queen!” Major Pigeon piped, the queue of his tie-wig bobbing behind him. “We have undertaken a long and tedious voyage, that we might see our Great Queen.”

“*Aktsia*,” Hendrick resumed. “Our path is thick with blood and betrayals.”

In his own tongue, Hendrick always referred to the Queen as his big sister. There was no servility in his speech, nothing of the subject. He spoke as a younger man to a slightly older female relative.

Hendrick made the promise Colonel Nicholson had schemed and dreamed for. He would recruit the Mohawks and their sister-nations to march with the English against the French. But he warned that there must be an honest exchange of services. The Queen must leash the sharpers who were thieving Indian land with fraudulent deeds, issued by cheating governors.

“Your traders are snakes who poison us with rum. If the beaver pelts we have brought them were piled one on top of the other they would touch the sky. Yet all we receive are a few rags that leave our backsides bare, and trinkets our women are ashamed to wear, and the hard water that drives the spirit out of the body.”

Peter Schuyler shifted uneasily. He remembered Indians sprawled insensate at the door of his trading house after swapping the peltries from a whole winter’s hunt for one night’s oblivion.

If the English wanted the Mohawks to fight for them, Hendrick pursued, they would have to show more resolution than the previous year, when a small army led by Nicholson sat in the woods at

the south end of Lake Champlain, chewed by horseflies and mosquitoes, waiting for a fleet and an army from England that had been promised but were never sent.

“Big Sister,” Hendrick told the Queen, “we are ashamed that your white children in the Real World loll about all loose and bare before our enemies, like trade women who put their legs in the air for any stranger. We ask now that you furnish them with a small prick, and insert it between their legs, so they may begin to stand like warriors.”

Abraham Schuyler was obliged to cover his mouth with his hand. His cousin Quider, who had many faces, matched the impassive expressions of the native ambassadors without difficulty.

When Hendrick paused, Major Pigeon eagerly lisped another section from his text, utterly oblivious to how widely the Mohawk orator had diverged from the authorized version.

Apart from food, Queen Anne’s ruling passion was the established Church. The crafters of the prepared speech had catered to this by inserting a passage in which the Mohawks made a prayerful request for an Anglican missionary to take up residence among them.

“Great Queen,” Major Pigeon read from his text, “we have some knowledge of the Saviour of the World.”

The Queen nodded her approval. She indicated that she would personally contribute to the costs of the mission. Her largesse would extend to the building of forts and chapels and the provision of two splendid sets of communion plate, one for the Mohawk mission, the other for a projected church at Onondaga, the capital of the League of Five Nations.

The Queen wished to know how the Mohawks—a people grievously exposed to the blandishments of French Jesuits, as well as the tricks and sorceries of pagan conjurers—had grown to such dutiful respect for the English Church.

“Big Sister,” Hendrick responded, “we have been told by priests that your grandfathers killed the son of your Creator, but that he permits you to eat his flesh. Your Great Spirit is strange to us. He drove your First Man and First Woman out of the Sky Garden for eating an apple. Yet he forgives you for killing his son. The priests say that everything is made clear in a holy book. We hope you will send us a priest who can speak the truth of this book, and lift the darkness from our minds. We know your Great Spirit is strong, because he speaks in the tongues of cannon and sends white death among us on the wings of evil spirits that were never in our dreaming.”

2.

Vanishing Smoke, Hendrick's friend and fellow ambassador, lay on his back on the bare floorboards, forsaking the alien softness of the bed, which was plumped up like a turkey's breast. The steady patter of rain on the slates outside the window of the tavern in Covent Garden matched the rhythm of waterdrums during the circle dances in his village. The beat was calling him home. Vanishing Smoke let his eyelids fall and woke into the dream.

I am lost in a thick wood. It is a forest of spars, not trees. I am flying low, so low my wings almost brush the men who are rowing a dinghy between the bigger ships.

Dead sailors twist in the wind, where gibbets crowd the edges of the docks. Crows are their visitors.

I beat my pinions, gaining height. Now I can see the fields and villages of the tame people laid out as a patchwork quilt, soft greens and yellows under the rain.

I taste the sting of salt water. I fly on with the sun behind me, into the night. The Thunderers are angry. I hear their deep-throated roar. It splits open the sky. Through the gaping rent they hurl hissing spears of white fire. As they plunge into the sea, the ocean boils and hisses; the waves crackle and burst into stabbing fingers of flame.

The heat parches my mouth and blurs my sight. I am dizzy. A savage wind knocks me off-course. I lose height and am nearly lost. Rallying, I catch an upward gust and ride it across a sky of burning sulfur.

At last the Thunderers slake their wrath and the light returns. I can see my shadow, an arrowhead skimming green water. The smell of the pines rises to welcome me back to the Real World.

It is a good time, in the Real World. I find my family gathered at the edge of the Floodwood River. Learning from the beavers, our boys have made a dam of dead branches to guide fish into their nets. Our women are gathering herbs and berries. I find my wife, Redhawk. She is ripe with a new baby. Our daughter Island Woman—the one who came to us from the north, and was born to us in the ritual of requickening—is laughing with pride and joy because she has discovered something rare and powerful among the bushes. She holds it up in her cupped palms, turning it gently so Redhawk can look. The flower is ononkwa. Medicine. Island Woman was born with the medicine gift. She knows the language of plants, and she knows we must ask permission from their leaders before we take anything from

them. She crouches now to return a pinch of tobacco to the earth and the plants in exchange for the medicine they have gifted her.

It is good to be home among my own people, with sunlight speckling the brown river. I rest on the bank, under a maple, and watch the little ones sport for prizes of maple candy. My sap runs strong. I throw back my head, and feel the weight and thrust of my horns. Redhawk lies with me, eager and lithe. I see the girlchild who is quickening inside her, and she tells me her name.

The scene flickers and reforms. I am shapeshifting into another form. I cannot breathe. The air is heavy with smoke. The fireholes in the longhouse have been covered with sheets of bark, because of the early snowstorm that is beating down on the roof. My people are cold and frightened. It shames me to see my children shivering without blankets, without even a bearskin to shelter their nakedness from this unnatural winter. They are scrapping in the dirt, fighting with dogs for a knucklebone.

There is worse. I rush from firepit to firepit, demanding "Who brought this upon you? Who is to blame?" My wife's clanmother, Fruitpicker, is the only one who will look at me, and she returns at once to her own business, shaking me off like a bad dream.

Then I know horror. As I move through the longhouse, I see that my people are vanishing from this world. I find my wife's sister mashing a handful of dried corn kernels in her wooden mortar. Then she is gone. She does not walk out the door, or fly up the smokehole. She is simply plucked out of her space. For a moment, there is a hole in the world where she sat. When it closes, it is as if she has never been.

I see this happen again and again. My friend Mad Owl is squatted down, restringing his snowshoes when he, too, is plucked out of his world.

My people are dying.

I snatch up my firelock from the space below my sleeping shelf. I must bring meat and warm furs.

Outside, in a howling white desert, I cannot see my hand in front of my face. I hear the snap of muskets, and look for an enemy. It comes too fast for me. I fall under its crushing weight.

We roll together in the snow. I lie, limp and broken, beneath the immense white pine, the grandfather of all the forests, the Peace Tree of our sacred stories.

I see a Face in the tree. The Face is contorted with pain, broken-nosed, the mouth distended. It is red like sunrise and black as the end of the world. I want to escape from the Face, the kakonsa, but the tree will not release me. The sticky mess that seeps from its skin, sliming my own, is not resin, but blood.

In the forest around us, all of the trees reveal Faces in pain. They lean against each other at crazy angles. Shattered by the storm, their broken limbs dangle from slivers of bark.

The high keening of the wounded trees is more than my heart can bear. I suffer their pain more deeply than my own. In this moment, I see the axmarks at the foot of the great pine, and know I have helped to kill it.

Vanishing Smoke sat up, his heart hammering, his skin clammy with cooling sweat. He squeezed his nose between thumb and forefinger. He blew vigorously, but without effect, until a sneezing fit began to clear the blocked passages. He wiped his nose with the back of his hand, which came away slimy with mucus and blood.

That's how it was: when you saw a Face, you got nose trouble.

Vanishing Smoke squatted in a corner of the room and buried his head in his folded arms. He had woken into the most difficult dream of his life.

He knew he must go back into this dream, to make sure that its message was clear. The dream world was the real world, and the meaning of a dream must be stalked in the night forest where it lives.

Vanishing Smoke lowered himself onto his back and lay like a corpse, with his mouth half-opened so his breath rasped lightly as it sawed between throat and palate.

He watched the light patterns form and reform behind closed eyelids, and willed himself back to the places of fear in the dream—to the longhouse of disappearing people, to the forest of wounded trees. He was looking for a dream guide who would answer the questions that were drumming in his head. *Who is to blame? Can this evil be averted? Can the dream be changed?*

Maybe Fruitpicker would talk to him. Perhaps an ally who had not shown himself in the original dream would now appear to help him. The dream spoke of medicine power, so maybe the Bear, his clan animal and the owner of many medicines, would come to guide him. Perhaps his dead grandmother, who sometimes advised him in dreams, would speak to him now.

As he slipped back inside the dreamscape, it was his adopted daughter, Island Woman—a strange, solitary girl, slender as an aspen—who came to meet him.

You are to blame, she told him. *You sold us to the newcomers. That is why the trees are dying.*

Could the dream be changed?

Instead of an answer, he was shown another scene. He was dreaming the dream onward. He saw himself running across a firepit, wearing the Face of the Divided One. He saw himself quarreling violently with Hendrick Forked Paths, his friend. He saw himself descending into a cave deep in the earth. He saw death by fire and sword.

Shadow men flay my skin and roast my flesh in a slow fire. Are they men or spirits? They become crows that pick my bones clean.

I am a sack of bones, rattling in a sack on a woman's back. I have died and come up through the ground. I am going to be buried again, in the Feast of Souls, so my spirit will be freed to walk the path of strawberries and dance with First Woman.

I am told, You must die the second death, but not until you have saved what can be saved.

Vanishing Smoke came back from this dream of a dream with new understanding. He belonged to a dreaming people. He had been taught since early childhood that it is natural to see the future in dreams. And that if it is possible to see the future, it may also be possible to change it.

He recognized that, in his dream, he had journeyed into a possible future. Some of the evils that lay along his path might be changed through his own actions—for example, if he chose to separate himself from Hendrick and the men who had brought them to London. Some of the fearful things in the dream might be modified by ritual and self-offering, to appease the spiritual powers he had angered. This would require consultation with a *ratetsheuts*, a strong dreamer, to confirm whether the dream was a calling to join the Society of Faces and to follow the lightning path of the shaman. Other elements in the dream seemed to carry a kind of fatality: they could not be altered, only *chosen*. He had seen his own death, and felt sure it would come in a way he could neither avoid nor would *wish* to avoid.

He did not fear the death of the body. He was ready to leave it behind like his borrowed clothes. He knew that there is life after life, because his grandmother had come back in sleeping and waking dreams to tell him about it, and because his dreamsoul had flown to the spirit world. What is required of a man is that he should *choose* his death, as the sick deer or the lame moose chooses death when it looks into the eye of the wolf, as a mother chooses death to save a child.

These were not things to be discussed with Hendrick Forked Paths or the other Indian ambassadors. They had turned their backs on the old ways, and drowned the dreaming, night after night, in a torrent of liquor. Vanishing Smoke had run with them, fought with them, drunk with them for many seasons. Now he would be different, because of the dream.



He took to spending long hours apart from the others. In the streets of London it was hard to be alone, even in a borrowed matchcoat that hid the extraordinary array of tattoos that covered his chest.

In his mind, he returned to the Greenwich observatory, and peered at the stars again through Flamsteed's telescope, whose angle was adjusted by raising or lowering the barrel on the rungs of a tall wooden ladder placed next to a window in the octagonal room. He wondered where, among the distant fires, was the Sky World from which First Woman had fallen, to be caught on the wings of blue herons, before she danced the earth into being on the Turtle's back. Flamsteed, always indulgent with those who sought God among the stars, had told him of a Greek philosopher who taught that the immortal spirit in each human being comes from a star and returns to that star after physical extinction.

Vanishing Smoke remembered the counting sticks the clanmothers had given him to take on this journey. They had asked him to number the English, so the Real People would know exactly how many of the Sunrise People they had to contend with. Vanishing Smoke had broken the counting sticks, during the ride from Portsmouth to London. What could he tell his people? *That the Sunrise People are as many as the stars.* Even now, the Mohawks had learned, ten shiploads of newcomers from another country in Europe—relatives of the gaunt army of tent people the Indians had observed on Blackheath—were sailing to the Real World. If the English treated their own people like this, how would they deal with the Real People if they became masters of the world across the water? Would they kill the trees? Would the bear and the wolf still have room to live?

Vanishing Smoke passed his days alone, thinking and dreaming, in the upstairs room of the tavern on King Street. The upholsterer-proprietor, Mr. Arne (whose infant son would one day write "Rule Britannia") was troubled by the reclusive behavior of his guest, and informed the Palace that the Mohawk must be gravely ill, since he refused all nourishment except water and tobacco.

3.

The Palace decided that the three available Kings should be taken to see *Macbeth*, on the reasoning that one savage tribe can make sense of another.

A huge crowd had been gathering since noon outside the Queen's Theatre, in the Haymarket, because word had spread that the Indian Kings were coming. Watchmen cursed and sweated, beating a path through the mob with their long staves. Street women blew kisses and darted quick fingers in hopes of a souvenir—an earring, a feather, even a quick feel of one of the wild men from America. Hendrick Forked Paths (promoted to Emperor of the Indians in one of the latest broadsides) favored his audience with a wave that made his scarlet cloak swirl.

The scene inside the playhouse was dark and smoky as a Mohawk longhouse in winter. Tallow candles sputtered in sconces and ring-shaped chandeliers, hollowing the faces of patrons lucky enough to have secured front row seats on the spikes. These iron teeth projected from the lip of the stage, inserted by a thoughtful management to deter critical playgoers from attacking the actors. To Londoners, a night at the theater was still participatory sport. They wrestled to get in—more ribs than usual had been broken that Monday evening—and then they wrestled the players.

The mood of the audience was touchy. The fiddlers employed to soothe the crowd could sense it, and were scraping off-key. The program had been switched at the last moment (Shakespeare in place of Congreve, Mr. Wilks in place of Mr. Betterton because the popular Mr. Betterton was down with the gravel or the gout). The performance was late, and so were the guests of honor. To top it all, one of the Four Kings was missing. The handbills had announced, quite definitely, that the evening's entertainment would be graced by *four* woodland kings. Their dusky faces beamed from the woodcut under exotic turbans, tastefully framed by palm trees. The theater manager, Mr. Spate, had one of these flyers in his damp fist as he conducted three live Indians and their escorts through the stamping, shouting throng to the box he had reserved for them above the stage apron.

A piercing whistle was followed by a screech. "Oy! Where's the Illustrated Man then?"

"We paid for Four Kings!" someone else complained.

"Give us our money back!"

Mr. Spate's real troubles began when he had ushered the Indians into their box.

“Can’t see ’em!” came a roar from the upper gallery, where people were clambering up onto the benches. “Put ’em up where we can see ’em!”

The patrons were shoving and jostling, trying to get a better view. One man tried to climb up on another’s shoulders, and was angrily rebuffed. A fistfight broke out.

“Ladies and gentlemen!” Mr. Spate protested, teetering over the edge of the box. The manager’s voice was no match for the hubbub. A missile whizzed past his ear and splattered against the wall, emitting a gaseous stink. Ominous points of color appeared in his pale, moist cheeks.

The manager flailed his arms at the orchestra, which chopped off the *Lillibullero* in mid-bar, and at his stagehands, who wrenched up the curtain to unveil a ghastly scene. Against a painted backcloth of a blasted heath, three crones reveled by a bubbling cauldron.

“When shall we three meet again,
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?”

The Indians inspected the stage witches with keen interest; these were familiar figures. Hendrick had once thrown the broken body of a hostile sorcerer down a ravine.

But the witches’ incantations were swallowed by the uproar, which had spread from the gallery to the pit.

“Put the Kings up where we can see ’em, or there’ll be no play!”

The curtain came down again.

“Your Mightiness—your Royal Arboreum,” Mr. Spate fumbled, uncertain how to address a seven-foot king of the forest. “Would Your Grace deign to favor our patrons with a few words? It might steady them, so to speak.”

A timely diversion made it unnecessary for Hendrick to respond to this petition. A brisk figure, strangely attired, bounded onstage and declaimed:

“Oh Princes who have with Amazement seen
So Good, so Gracious and so Great a Queen;
Who from the Royal Mouth have heard your Doom
Secur’d against the Threats of France and Rome
A while some Moments on our Scenes bestow.”

Hendrick’s first impression of the speaker was of short, thick, hairy legs protruding from under a checked skirt. The feet were

splayed ducklike, which was the way with white men who did not know how to walk in the forest. The overall effect, nonetheless, was of a warrior tribesman readied for battle. The actor wore a long feather in his cap, and carried a killing iron half as long as his body and a round shield. Black eyes glinted above a curling black beard. The actor's ferocious appearance, and the force of his delivery, quelled the audience. The threatened *Doom* burst with the thump of a coehorn mortar.

"That's Wilks," an equerry whispered. "He has the title role."

"The world's a stage!" Wilks rolled his baritone at the box. "Their Majesties willing, let them be seated here, with us poor players, for all the world to see."

The audience cheered this suggestion.

Chairs were provided—to Hendrick's mild disgust—and the Indians were redeployed on stage, in full view of the audience.

The curtain went up, and Hendrick found himself inside a world he knew: a world of ghosts and witches, of unrelenting women who drove their men to killing, of flying heads and trees that walk. Hendrick shut out the low mumble of the interpreter. Though the name of this grim winter's tale of a mountain people was hard for him to pronounce, he knew Macbeth and his enemies. They could have been Mohawks.

A resinous fog obscured the stage, the witches disappeared through a trapdoor, a vengeful spirit haunted the Scottish king's banquet. At last the actor playing Macduff marched across the stage in savage triumph, holding up the plaster head of Macbeth.

Hendrick dug his elbow into Nicholas Etakoam's ribs.

"You see? The Sunrise People call us savages. But we take only a small piece of skin and hair. This tribe takes the whole head."

4.

The Groom Porter was the member of the Royal household who was charged with supervising all that pertained to one of the ruling addictions of Queen Anne's Court: gaming. It fell to the Groom Porter to ensure that the playing cards imported in vast quantities from the enemy, France, were not marked, to regulate the stakes for a game of picquet among the higher nobility, and to supply dice for the sovereign's own table. This indispensable man was called on to devise fresh entertainments for the Indian Kings and, in particular, to revive the low spirits of Vanishing Smoke, who continued to sulk in his room and would not allow the finest doctors in the country to bleed him or administer enemias.

The Groom Porter prescribed an evening of sport at a superior establishment whose proprietor was well known to him. Though Vanishing Smoke looked halfway to the grave—the whites of his eyes yellowed, his tongue furred, perhaps by constant infusions of tobacco juice—Hendrick persuaded him to come. The evening began well enough, with a few bumpers in honor of the Queen, her Church Established, and the Indian Kings. Though Vanishing Smoke would not touch ale or claret, he weakened when the landlord began pouring brandy, which the Mohawks much preferred.

There were ladies in lipping abundance, all paint, powder and softness lapping over their low-cut crinolines. The Groom Porter knew how to show a gentleman a night on the town. Vanishing Smoke took no interest in the women, to the point where the Groom Porter wondered if the tattooed man might be another way inclined. But when steady drinking had reduced him to a semistupor, he allowed a dark-eyed slattern to perch in his lap.

The Groom Porter played marriage broker. Silver changed hands. The knob-nosed landlord, all smiles and scraping, supported Vanishing Smoke's slack body by the armpit and helped him to a room up under the eaves.

Before Vanishing Smoke's clouded eyes, the room rolled and tossed like a ship's cabin in a storm. The woman twittered and squalled like a thieving bluejay, pecking his clothes from his body. Blue veins showed against her buttermilk skin.

"Let's 'ave a look at it then."

He gasped as she pulled his breeches away and gave his member a hearty tweak.

"Oh, Lord, such a homunculus! Black as sin, aren't we?"

Vanishing Smoke tried to shake her loose, but she got a tighter grip and rubbed until he stiffened against his will. Then she opened her jaws and slipped his organ inside, like an eel she intended to swallow whole. The tingling sensations were new to him and not unpleasant, but they warred with his nature, and he rebelled.

"You're a plain dealer, are you, golliwog?" she said, rubbing her gums. "Well, I give a gent just what he wants. You'll see why they call me Rattlesnake Bess."

She hoisted her petticoats and pulled him into her. "That's it! Oh, you're a goer, you is!"

If only she would stop the noise. Soon she was panting and moaning in a parody of passion. Her joints were well-oiled. She pumped him as if she had a fist inside, as if she were milking a cow. The sensations, as before, were pleasurable, but everything tasted sour. This was not how man and woman should lie together.

With his wife Redhawk, and with hospitable girls in distant villages, at the time when the fires were rekindled or the green corn stood tall, the act of mating took the partners beyond themselves, in the return of life to the earth. In these mechanical grindings, on this hired bed, he was less than himself. Despite the fog of drink and the penumbra of the room, he could see the whole scene clearly, as if he were floating under the ceiling in his dreambody, and disgust curdled inside him. To sustain his waning appetite, he tried to picture himself in woods scented with sweetgrass, making love to the music of the deerhoof rattles on Redhawk's leggings. The image only added to his disgust and homesickness. He broke free from the whore. A low wail escaped from his lips, rising quickly in pitch, lingering in a sad, pulsing tremolo.

"Blimey, you're a queer one. Is it a full moon tonight, then?"

Vanishing Smoke was at the window, craning out, seeking the Dog Star that escorts the evening star across the night sky.

"Must be the drink." Bess salved her professional honor as she adjusted her clothes. "You boozers are all the same. Can't keep it up long enough to do a lady a favor."

Vanishing Smoke could not find the Dog Star. He had never felt more alone.

5.

The following night the Groom Porter offered the Four Kings a different kind of entertainment, to show them the stuff fighting Britons were made of. He escorted them to the bear garden at Hockley-in-the-Hole, to watch what was advertised as a Tryal of Skill. The Indians watched a Coventry man and a Berkshire man go at each other with backswords, falchions and quarterstaves. The Mohawks enjoyed the display, but were restless at not being able to enter the fight. One of the oddities of the English (they had observed) was that they paid to witness what any warrior does for his own pleasure. So, instead of running the deer or hurling a hard ball at each other's heads, the Sunrise People crowded onto narrow benches to bet on fighting cocks and hired gladiators who were careful not to draw too much blood.

The Berkshire man was declared the winner and Hendrick, seated in a place of honor beside the ring, consented to present the purse. There were shouts of delight from the audience as the next attraction was led in. Vanishing Smoke had drifted away, breathing noisily through his mouth. Now he revived with a start, rubbed his eyes, and stared.