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## **Family Plays**

# Indian Captive

Drama developed from history  
by  
Charlotte B. Chorpenning.

# Indian Captive

**Drama. Developed from history by Charlotte B. Chorpensing.** *Cast: 5m., 5w., with doubling, or up to 11 (3m., 3w., 2 boys, 3 girls).* **The Indian Captive** is a dramatic incident taken from the actual history of the Seneca Indians. A little pioneer girl is captured by Indians and taken to their camp by Chief Cornplanter. At the Indian camp she is regarded with distrust, and there is a gripping and dramatic scene where her courage is tested by fire. When her spirit proves firm, she is adopted with high ceremony into the Seneca tribe. The Senecas teach her their ways and customs and grow to love her—so much, that when Eleanor's mother comes to seek her, they disguise Eleanor and threaten to kill her mother if the child makes any sign of recognition. There is a tense scene where Eleanor keeps faith with the Indians while longing to make some sign of love to her mother. Chief Cornplanter finally realizes that her happiness lies with her own people, and with a heavy heart he lets her go. **Two sets. Pioneer and Indian costumes. Approximate running time: 45 minutes. Code: IB4**

*Cover design by Jeanette Alig-Sergel.*

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Indian Captive

# **The Indian Captive**

By

CHARLOTTE B. CHORPENNING

**Family Plays**

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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## PREMIERE PRODUCTION

*The Indian Captive* was given its premiere production in 1936 at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, under the direction of the author, Charlotte B. Chorpensing.

## BASED ON A TRUE STORY

It may be of interest to an audience to know that this play is based on the authentic story of the captivity among Senecas of Eleanor Lytell, who was later the wife of John Kenzie, of Chicago. Her friendship with the Indians saved her family in the great Chicago Massacre.

Much of the dialogue is taken from the records of her captivity. Cornplanter's closing speech, for example, is authentic. The Old Queen and the jealous Wife, with her attempt at poisoning Eleanor, are historically accurate. Seneca customs have been adhered to throughout the play. Eleanor's Indian name, Ship-under-full-sail, was given her on her adoption for the reason used in the play—"because her spirit is strong and swift."





# The Indian Captive

## CHARACTERS

THOMAS LYTELL, 8 or 9 years old.

ELEANOR LYTELL, 11 or 12.

MRS. LYTELL, their mother.

DEBORAH, about Eleanor's age. (Can be doubled with Shining Leaves).

THE OLD QUEEN, an old Indian woman; lean and dignified.

CORNPLANTER, a young Indian Chief.

FALLING LEAVES, an Indian warrior.

MANY BEARS, another Indian warrior.

EAGLE FEATHER, Cornplanter's wife, young, violent.

REDBILL, an Indian boy, about 12.

SHINING LEAVES, an Indian girl. (Can be doubled with Deborah).

## SCENES

ACT I:

A clearing in the forest, near Plum Creek, Pennsylvania, 1779.

ACT II:

Near the Lookout Rock, outside Cornplanter's village.

ACT III:

The same, eight months later.

## SETTINGS

The background of both the sets in this play is a set of balsam cutouts. There can be from six to 12 of these trees, of different sizes, and painted in varying values, according to the stage used. They can be arranged so differently as to indicate different localities. In Act I, for example, they can be placed with a clump back, pretty well center, and a row for wings on one side. In Act II, they can be massed diagonally across the back, with a scattered one or two, front, on the sides.

In addition, in Act I, it is well to have an indication of the log cabin. This can be a painted flat, or two sides of the building with the corner showing. If a door with steps can be added, it affords two levels, which is always an advantage, but not a necessity. For the second act, a large rock for the torture fire is added. A platform, seemingly made of dirt, in front of it, will again give a second level, but is not necessary. This rock can readily be painted on the back of one of the trees, the edges and the place where the support is fastened being covered with paper, and blacked as if by smoke. All this can be put together with pin hinges.

These plans are devised to reduce the bulk in scenery, and are made for the benefit of those who wish to transport the play to different theatres. The brewing tub can be made on a strong frame, and used to transport properties or costumes.

# The Indian Captive

## ACT I

*(The balsams are arranged back and at one side, so as to afford screens for the Indians. On the other side, somewhat back, is the indication of the house. The brewing tub is near it, more center and downstage. A gun target with holes, on one tree. ELEANOR LYTELL and THOMAS LYTELL are scrubbing out the tub, which stands on its side. They stand back and look at it proudly.)*

ELEANOR. There! Won't Mother be surprised when she finds the brewing tub all clean?

THOMAS. Let's turn it down, to dry.

*(They do so, laboriously, for it is heavy for them. Just as it is level and ready to be let down, a call like the whistle of a quail is heard. THOMAS drops his side of the tub so suddenly that they have to leap back to save their toes.)*

ELEANOR *(as they work)*. Hold hard, Thomas. Don't let it go down too fast, or it will pinch you. Here. Let me come around a little.

THOMAS *(dropping it at the bird call)*. Listen!

ELEANOR. Look out! You nearly smashed my foot!

THOMAS. I heard an Indian.

ELEANOR. Where?

THOMAS. In the woods. He whistled like a quail.

ELEANOR. That was just a bird.

THOMAS. Indians whistle like birds, to signal each other.

ELEANOR. There aren't any Indians around, now.

THOMAS. Don't you remember, Mother told us we mustn't follow a quail's call into the woods? She said it might be an Indian.

ELEANOR. That was last summer, when the Seneca Indians were picking berries upon Plum Creek. They went away long ago.

*(Another whistle, answered from a greater distance, by two more.)*

THOMAS. There's another!—Listen! They're answering each other!

*(ELEANOR starts toward the balsam clump to investigate. THOMAS runs to hold her back.)*

THOMAS *(cont'd)*. Don't go there! They might be hiding behind trees or bushes.

ELEANOR. I'm not afraid. *(Goes to the edge of the stage, looking off in various directions, and peering around the trees.)* There aren't any in sight, anyway.

THOMAS. I wish Mother would come.

ELEANOR *(looks up and off)*. It's way past noon by the sun. Mother promised to be home by noon.

THOMAS *(beginning to cry)*. What if the Indians have taken Mother?

ELEANOR. Don't cry, Thomas. Mother'll come. I know she will.

THOMAS. But why is she so late?

ELEANOR. I suppose the new settlers were in trouble. Mother would stay if they needed help. She always helps people when they are in trouble.

THOMAS. It's been so long!

ELEANOR. Mother wouldn't like to hear you cry, Thomas. Let's run down to the edge of the clearing and see if she's in sight.

THOMAS. I'm afraid.

ELEANOR. I'll get my gun. We'll go till we meet her. Maybe we can help the new settlers, too. There must be lots to do, or Mother would be home by now.

*(She goes into the house. THOMAS follows her to the door and stands waiting, back to the balsam clump. CORNPLANTER, an Indian chief, appears back, then hides again. A call from MRS. LYTELL, at some distance.)*

THOMAS *(jumping up and down)*. There she is! There she is!

ELEANOR. Mother!—I'll beat you to her, Thomas!

THOMAS. Wait! Wait!—

*(She comes back and takes his hand and they run off together. CORNPLANTER comes out from behind the tree. He looks after the children. He is pleased, and murmurs to himself.)*

CORNPLANTER. Hoah—

*(He peers through the window. He examines the gun, sets it down again, and whistles like a quail. He is answered twice from a distance. He answers in turn, and this keeps up until two other Indians come onto the*

*stage. All wear tunics and leggings and the Seneca head-dress, which is a broad band with a single feather. CORNPLANTER's eagle feather marks his rank. He points after the children.)*

CORNPLANTER (*cont'd*). A white woman. And a boy. And a girl.

FALLING LEAVES (*listening*). They come this way.

MANY BEARS. Shall we take them, Cornplanter?

CORNPLANTER. We will watch and see.

FALLING LEAVES. A white captive would not please the Old Queen, your mother.

MANY BEARS. It would please her more than returning to her with no captive at all.

FALLING LEAVES. The Old Queen sent us to capture a boy, full of courage. He must take the place in her lodge of the brother of Cornplanter, who was killed. He must be adopted into the Seneca tribe. The Old Queen will not adopt a white captive.

CORNPLANTER. Indian or white is all one. It is the spirit that looks out of the eyes that counts.

FALLING LEAVES. Has the white boy the spirit of your brother?

CORNPLANTER. The white boy is afraid. He shakes like a young aspen tree when the north wind blows. He makes the sound of a wood mouse when the owl brother has him in his beak.

MANY BEARS. We shall have to return without any captive.

CORNPLANTER. The white *girl* is not afraid.

FALLING LEAVES. What bird told you that?

CORNPLANTER. My eyes told me. She sped straight and free, like a ship under full sail.

MANY BEARS. A swift runner would please the Old Queen. But it was your brother who was killed, not a sister.

CORNPLANTER. Courage went out of our lodge when my brother was killed. If the white girl brings courage into it, she will make a good captive.

*(FALLING LEAVES suddenly lifts a warning finger: They all "freeze". The sound of MRS. LYTELL and the children laughing comes from off.)*

CORNPLANTER (*cont'd*). Take cover. I will watch. If I wish to take the white child, I will call as the quail calls.

*(They disappear swiftly and silently, CORNPLANTER behind a balsam on the stage, the others off. MRS. LYTELL enters, hand in hand with the children.)*

MRS. LYTELL (*stopping to look round*). Where is my surprise?

*(The children laugh with glee.)*

THOMAS. Find it, Mother! Find it!

ELEANOR. We'll say warmer when you go near it, and colder when you go away.

MRS. LYTELL. I wonder if Eleanor has made a cake for supper all by herself. (*Starts into the house, passing the tub on the way.*)

THOMAS (*as she draws near the tub*). You're getting warm—warmer—

ELEANOR (*as she passes the tub*). Colder—colder—

MRS. LYTELL (*stopping at the door*). Dear me—It can't be in the house at all. (*Takes a step away from the house.*)

CHILDREN. Warmer—(*She goes back.*) Colder! Colder!

MRS. LYTELL (*coming C a little*). Is it where I can see it?

*(The children shout with laughter.)*

ELEANOR. You could if you looked.

MRS. LYTELL. Oh! You've hidden it! Let me see. Is it behind a balsam tree, I wonder? (*Goes to the clump which conceals CORNPLANTER, passing the tub on the way.*)

ELEANOR. Very warm—

CHILDREN. Colder—colder—

*(As she starts around the clump they run to her, shouting.)*

ELEANOR. Colder!

*(CORNPLANTER slips around, keeping out of their sight. He is very still. He takes off his head dress that it may not protrude as he peers.)*

MRS. LYTELL. Colder?

*(She comes on around the clump, front, the children with her. CORNPLANTER slips back.)*

CHILDREN. Warmer—(*As she starts around on this second side.*) colder.

MRS. LYTELL. Dear me—

*(She comes front a few steps which is also toward the tub, CORNPLANTER slipping back.)*

CHILDREN. Warmer—

*(MRS. LYTELL starts back on that side, CORNPLANTER of course moving with her.)*

CHILDREN *(cont'd)*. Colder—

MRS. LYTELL *(on one side, CORNPLANTER on the other)*. Then it isn't back of the balsams. Is it under something?

ELEANOR *(giggling)*. Sort of.

MRS. LYTELL. It must be inside of something.

THOMAS. It's inside of itself!

*(She walks forward. CORNPLANTER disappears.)*

MRS. LYTELL *(cont'd)*. Let me see, now. Sort of under something—And inside of itself—

CHILDREN *(as she approaches the tub)*. Warmer—Very warm!—Hot!

*(She sits down on the tub. They double up with laughter.)*

ELEANOR. You're burning up!

THOMAS. Your feet will catch on fire!

MRS. LYTELL. My feet?—I know! It's under the tub.

*(She lifts the tub. The children spring to help her. They are very proud of their work. CORNPLANTER peers out, interested.)*

MRS. LYTELL *(cont'd)*. Well, well! The brewing tub is all clean and scrubbed! What fine workers I have in my home! What strong arms and backs! Did Thomas lift a side of this heavy tub?

ELEANOR. Yes!

THOMAS *(shamefaced)*. I—I dropped my side, Mother. I almost hurt Eleanor's toes.

ELEANOR *(defending him)*. It was only because you were afraid. We can put it down ourselves all right, Mother. Show her, Thomas. See?

*(They tip the tub down again.)*

MRS. LYTELL. Why were you afraid, son?

THOMAS. I heard quail calling in the woods. I thought it was Indians. I—I cried because you didn't come.

MRS. LYTELL. Cried? A boy who can lift that tub?



ELEANOR. Thomas is a fraid-cat.

MRS. LYTELL. Not a bit of it. Wait till he's a little older and he'll be the bravest boy in the wilderness. You were afraid a year ago, too.

THOMAS. You'd be afraid now, if the Indians came.

MRS. LYTELL. Sit down here by me, both of you. I have something important to tell you. (*The children crowd close.*) You are children of pioneers. Do you know what that means?

ELEANOR. I do. It means we have come to a new land.

MRS. LYTELL. That's right. And in a new land there are many things that are hard to do, and many things that are dangerous. That is why pioneers must stand by each other.

ELEANOR. You mean like staying to help, the way you did today?

MRS. LYTELL. Yes. If a neighbor needs help, a pioneer must leave his own home and go to help him. He must stay as long as he is needed. And nobody must cry about it.

THOMAS. I'm not crying!

MRS. LYTELL. Good! And pioneers must face dangers every day. And they must never be afraid.

THOMAS. Not of Indians, even?

MRS. LYTELL. Prick up your ears, now, for you must never forget this.

ELEANOR (*excited by her tone*). Go on!

MRS. LYTELL. Indians do not like cowards. If ever you see an Indian, you must not act afraid.

THOMAS. They steal people! They hit them with clubs. They tie them to trees and light fires under them.

MRS. LYTELL. Do you know why they do that?

THOMAS. They are bad.

MRS. LYTELL. They are giving their captives a chance to show how brave they are. A brave Indian sings when the fire is under him.

ELEANOR. Oh! What do they sing?

MRS. LYTELL. They sing songs like this: (*In a high monotonous chant like an Indian.*) "I am brave. I am not afraid. Life is nothing at all to one who is not afraid."

ELEANOR (*imitating her*). "I am brave. I am not afraid. Life is nothing at all to one who is not afraid." (*She claps her hands.*) I like it! I am never going to be afraid again!

MRS. LYTELL. When a captive sings, the Indian knows he is strong and has courage. Sometimes they put out the fire and adopt him into their tribe.

THOMAS. Would they do that to us, if they caught us?

MRS. LYTELL. If you did not act afraid, they would not have to put fire under you. They would know you were brave without it.

THOMAS. I don't want to be adopted by an Indian. I want to stay with you!

MRS. LYTELL. If ever an Indian captured you. I would come and find you. You could be sure of that.

THOMAS. How would you know where they took us?

MRS. LYTELL. I'd find out. It might take a long time, but I would.

ELEANOR. How could you talk to them? They don't talk like us.

MRS. LYTELL. When your father was alive, he learned the Seneca talk, so he could trade with them. I could learn it, too.

*(DEBORAH, off, is calling and crying. They all leap to their feet, listening.)*

THOMAS. Someone's crying!

ELEANOR. It sounds like a girl.

MRS. LYTELL. I believe it's the little girl from Plum Creek. The new settlers have a little girl about as old as you, Eleanor. Her name is Deborah. *(Goes to look off, down the trail, where she entered.)* Deborah!—Deborah—

DEBORAH *(off, approaching)*. Mrs. Lytell—Come, quick—quick—

ELEANOR. I'll go to meet her—

MRS. LYTELL. Do. Run—*(Calling, as ELEANOR runs off.)* What is it?

*(The crying grows louder, and the two enter. ELEANOR has her arms around DEBORAH, leading her. DEBORAH is stumbling with exhaustion and terror.)*

MRS. LYTELL *(cont'd)*. Thomas, bring a dipper of water. *(Takes DEBORAH in her arms.)* There now. There, there. What has happened?

DEBORAH. Father! Come quick or he'll die! *(Pulls at her hand.)* Come!

MRS. LYTELL. Tell me plainly, first. What is it?

DEBORAH. They were raising a log to the roof, and the rope broke. It fell on father. We can't lift it! He can hardly breathe! Mother says, Bring something to put on the hurt, and something to eat. All our tilings were broken and crushed by the log when it fell!

MRS. LYTELL. Here. Thomas has brought you some water. Drink it. Thomas, put the roll of linen strips and the medicine bottles in a little basket.

*(THOMAS runs off.)*

ELEANOR. What can I do, Mother?

MRS. LYTELL. Pack some deer's meat and meal and butter and salt and maple sugar in a basket.

*(ELEANOR runs off.)*

MRS. LYTELL *(cont'd)*. You must stop crying, Deborah, so you will be strong to hurry back. That's it. Father will be all right. I know how to lift a log by making a pulley for a rope. You will learn these things, too, when you have been long in the new country.

THOMAS *(comes running out with a small basket)*. I put in everything in the medicine box, Mother.

MRS. LYTELL. That's right. And here's Eleanor with the food.

ELEANOR. I put in the last of the pound cake, Mother. I thought maybe Deborah would like some.

MRS. LYTELL. Good. Now we're off, Deborah, to lift the log.

ELEANOR. Thomas and I are strong, Mother. Shan't we go too, to help lift it?

MRS. LYTELL. No, dear. There isn't food enough for all of us. And there would be no place for you to sleep.

THOMAS *(alarmed)*. Won't you be home when it is dark, Mother?

MRS. LYTELL. I'll be home as soon as I can, son. But it may not be tonight. Eleanor will take care of you. She knows how to make supper, and how to bar the door when it's dark. You will help her do that.

THOMAS. I'll take care of Eleanor, Mother.

ELEANOR. And I'll take care of Thomas.

MRS. LYTELL. Stand your gun near your bed tonight, Eleanor, the way I always do. Goodbye, my little pioneers. Mother will come back to you as soon as she can.

ELEANOR *(calling after them as they start)*. Goodbye, Deborah. Come and play with us when your father is well.

DEBORAH. I will.

THOMAS. Oh, Mother. You forgot to give us something to think of you by.

MRS. LYTELL. So I did. Wait, Deborah. Now let me see. I know. Look up. Both of you.

THOMAS. Way up in the sky?

MRS. LYTELL. There's something up there we can all of us see, no matter how far apart we are.

ELEANOR. The little daytime moon!

MRS. LYTELL. Yes. I'll give you a little daytime moon. And if you wake up in the night and I'm not home yet, you peek out of the window and see it shining in at you for me.

THOMAS. Oh, Mother, that's the nicest thing you ever gave us.

MRS. LYTELL. And now we're off. Goodbye, my little pioneers.

THOMAS (*calling*). Goodbye, Mother.

MRS. LYTELL (*off*). Goodbye, pioneer.

THOMAS (*fighting back tears*). I didn't cry.

ELEANOR (*still gazing up*). It makes me feel as if Mother were still here. Now I tell you what let's do.

THOMAS. What?

ELEANOR. Let's have a special feast for supper.

THOMAS. Oh, goody! What shall we have?

ELEANOR. I think Mother wouldn't mind if I made a cake. We could keep part of it for her, tomorrow.

THOMAS. Can you make one all by yourself?

ELEANOR. I made the last one. Mother was there, but I didn't have to ask a single question.

THOMAS. Can I help stir?

ELEANOR. Yes. You go and gather up some little twigs to make the fire start quick, and I'll be measuring out the flour and sugar and things.

THOMAS (*uneasy*). Where'll I find the twigs?

ELEANOR. Oh, around, under the balsam trees. Right in that clump will be enough.

THOMAS. All right.

*(ELEANOR goes into the house. THOMAS stands looking after her. CORNPLANTER leaves the balsam where he has been out of sight and moves back, his back to the audience, showing plainly. THOMAS speaks with bravado, not seeing CORNPLANTER.)*

THOMAS (*cont'd*). I'm not afraid.

*(He starts back to the balsam clump. He is startled by the quail call which CORNPLANTER gives. It is answered from a distance, twice. THOMAS sees CORNPLANTER, who moves back a step or two further without turning. He darts noiselessly to the door and whispers.)*

THOMAS (*cont'd*). Eleanor—

*(CORNPLANTER disappears behind a balsam tree. ELEANOR comes out and THOMAS points to where CORNPLANTER was. He whispers.)*

THOMAS *(cont'd)*. He's gone. I saw—

ELEANOR *(also in a whisper)*. Listen. Do you hear that?

THOMAS. I heard a rustling.

ELEANOR. Perhaps it was a squirrel.

*(CORNPLANTER's feather shows above a balsam branch.)*

THOMAS. Look. What is that? *(It disappears as they look.)*

ELEANOR. It looked like a fawn popping up its head.

*(Two whistles come from near, off. CORNPLANTER steals off, without looking around at the children.)*

THOMAS. They're coming here.

ELEANOR. He's gone to meet them.

THOMAS. Bar the doors.

ELEANOR. There's no use in that. They can break the doors if they want to. We must hide.

THOMAS. Where?

ELEANOR. They'll look in the house—There's no place there to hide. I know—Help me, Thomas! Quick! Get under the tub.

*(THOMAS helps her lift it, and starts to crawl under. He stops.)*

THOMAS. There isn't room for both of us.

ELEANOR. I have my gun. Quick! Quick!

*(A little whistle and answer, very soft, from CORNPLANTER.)*

ELEANOR *(cont'd)*. I promised Mother! Duck your head! I'm going to let it down!

*(She does. He tries to lift it. His fingers show.)*

THOMAS. Eleanor—

ELEANOR. Sh-h-h Don't be afraid—Keep still—Keep very still. I'll be all right.

*(She snatches up her gun and sits on the tub with it, ready, facing where the Indian was last seen. She is erect and mistress of herself. This should*

*be so arranged as to give a clear side view of her, gun in hand, chin lifted, waiting. After a pause FALLING LEAVES appears at the side front, behind ELEANOR, peering. He turns and beckons and the other two appear. CORNPLANTER steals up behind her. With one hand he covers her mouth, with the other he wrests the gun from her. The other two leap in front of her at the same instant and gesture for silence, finger on lips and tomahawks raised. ELEANOR, who has sat quiet after the first surprise, nods her head. CORNPLANTER slowly removes his hand, all three ready to attack if she makes a sound. She smiles at CORNPLANTER as he moves around front, his hand withdrawn; she puts her finger on her own lips and nods at him. He is delighted with this. He holds out his hand to her, pointing off, not the way MRS. LYTELL went. She rises and takes his hand. FALLING LEAVES and MANY BEARS have looked into and around the house with swift movements. It must be plain that ELEANOR does not understand their words.)*

FALLING LEAVES (*softly*). Where is the boy?

MANY BEARS. He has gone into the air, like smoke from a fire.

CORNPLANTER. Let him go. We have a good captive. I will take her to our village. I will give her to the Old Queen, my mother. She shall take the place of my brother in our lodge.

*(They go off swiftly, ELEANOR marching staunchly by the side of CORNPLANTER who still holds her hand. After an instant THOMAS lifts the tub a little.)*

THOMAS (*whispers*). Eleanor—Eleanor—(*Gets it up on its side with difficulty, and emerges.*) Eleanor—Eleanor! Eleanor!! (*Dashes to the house, to the edges of the stage, as he calls. Gets himself together, suddenly courageous, as he sees the Indian head dress under the balsam. Picks it up.*) This will show Mother what tribe they were—(*Puts it on the tub, cups his mouth with his hands, and calls with all his strength, turning this way and that.*) We'll find you—We-e-11 f-i-n-d you-u—We-11 f-i-n-d you-u—We-11 f-i-n-d you-u—

ELEANOR (*from a distance, faint and growing fainter; but joyous and strong in its quality*). I am brave. I am not afraid. Life is nothing at all to one who is not afraid—(*Curtain closes before the song is quite finished.*)

## CURTAIN