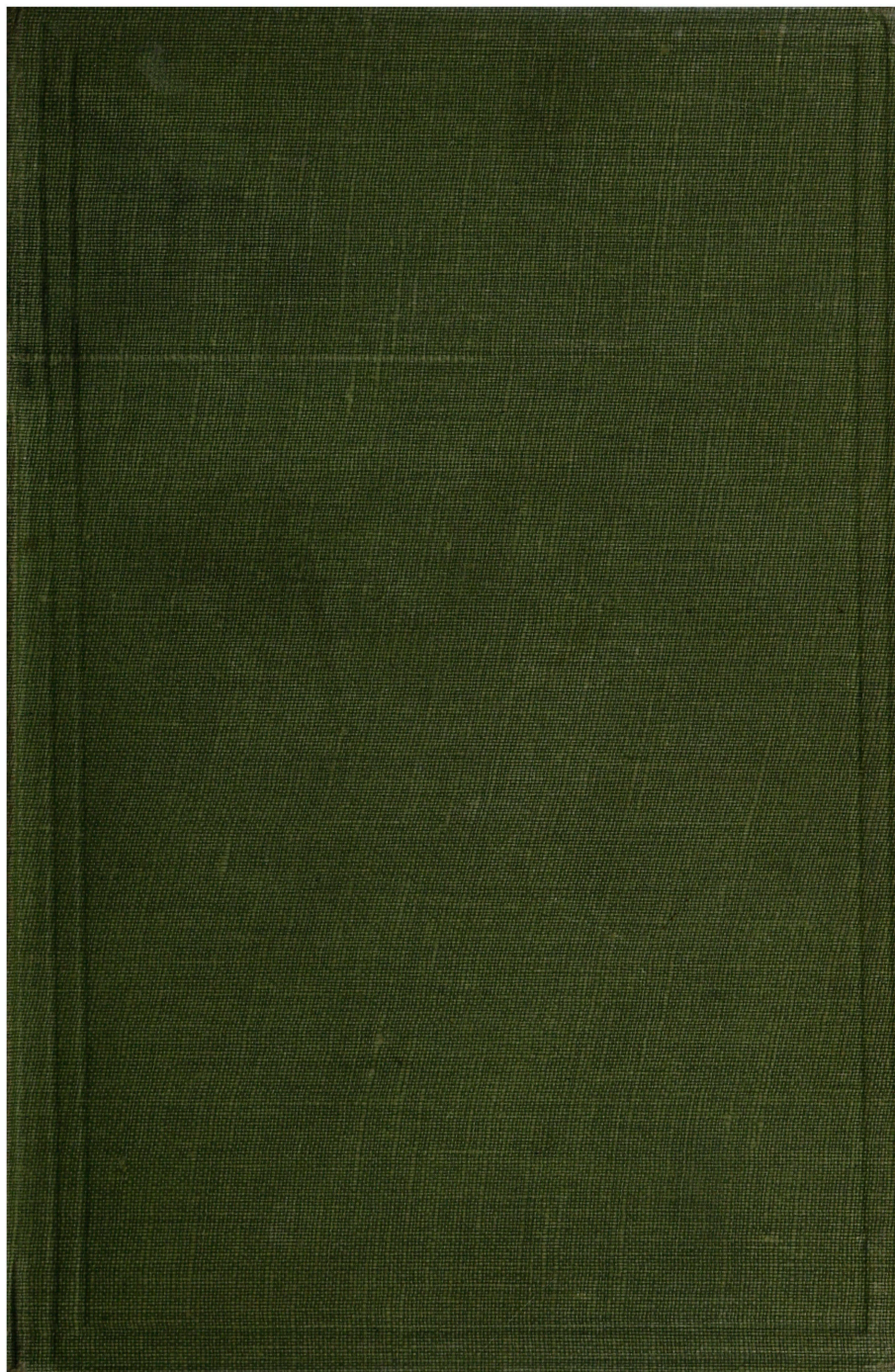




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The Herb of Healing

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PATERNOSTER ROW : : 1915

DEDICATION.

TO SILAS HOCKING, ESQ.

MY DEAR SILAS HOCKING,

There were two old ladies, deadly enemies, who lived in a little Canadian village. I met one of them, and she admitted that she was flustered. "What's the matter?" "She's asked me to tea," she explained. "Well, what of it? Did you go?" "I went, but I've *retaliated*." "How?" "I've asked her back again."

Similarly, you were kind enough to send me your last book, the one you wrote for your own pleasure—and mine. I *retaliate*!

Your friend,

THE AUTHOR.

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THE HERB OF HEALING

PROLOGUE

THE " HIDING " OF JAMES

THREE or four men sat round the stove in Millette's bar. The ease and precision with which they expectorated at favourite corners betokened that they were habitués of the cosy little room, with its rough chairs and settles, and walls whose gay almanacks set forth the virtues of certain goods. Here and there the portrait of a fiery stallion almost shrilled at them from the walls, as if indignant at his proximity to advertisements of " Pain Killer." The bar was bright with coloured bottles containing various deadly liquids calculated to destroy the stomachs of those who had not dwelt in Four Corners from infancy. Only the fittest survived in Four Corners—*i.e.*, the fittest physically. With regard to their moral qualities, the Four Cornerites, conscious that they paid Parson Black a good salary to look after " souls," generally declined to aid his efforts on

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their behalf. If, opined these village Solons, he "didn't know enough to pull them through at the Day of Judgment," they hoped still to have the felicity of meeting him elsewhere and forcibly showing him what they thought of his breach of trust.

Vicarious responsibility of this nature did not trouble them in the least. When a Four Cornerite is so busy all day doing nothing that he is tired out by nightfall, he is apt to become somewhat of a materialist, does not stop to analyse the sources of his sensations, and accepts them as a matter of course. But take him away from Four Corners, and he either dies or creeps back again. When this magical little Ottawa village once gets hold of a man, it never lets go. For good or evil, his destiny is inextricably mixed up with it. There are many beautiful places in many parts of Canada, but none with this mingling of mountain and river, of solemn Bush and smiling cedar-fenced fields, along the top rails of which scamper the chipmunk and the squirrel as the woodpecker taps the weather-beaten wood in search of his daily meal. The river, amber in spring, dark, torrential, tempestuous before the ice forms, has welcomed him to its breast since the day when he took his first header off the end of the wooden wharf which runs out half a mile into the flood. And beyond the river are the oldest mountains in the world—the sacred Laurentians—home of the primeval

THE "HIDING" OF JAMES

Indian, filled with his death-mounds and haunted by the Spirits of the Red Men, as they ride forth at night upon their phantom steeds and swoop down to ravage the dwellers on the plains.

"Yes, it's a great little place is Four Corners," said the Public Prosecutor, as he tossed off another three fingers of whisky. "A great little place. There's more for a Public Prosecutor to do here than in any other county in Ontario."

"Mebbe," said Jules Leblanc, the habitant, who was always inclined to be quarrelsome when drunk. "M'sieu ought to know. He mak' to shut up plenty of my pipples."

"It's because they need parental correction," hazily affirmed the Public Prosecutor, leaning back in a rocker and putting his feet on top of the stove. "Only the other day the Sheriff was complaining no one's been hung for two years. Seemed to think it my duty to find him a subject."

"You ask Old Man Evans and Ikey Marston who ought to mak' to be hung up on de gallows," hiccoughed Leblanc. "Dey know. Dey ought to mak' to hang each oder."

"They'll get you strung up some day with your whisky smuggling, if you don't look out," affirmed the Public Prosecutor. "And the people you sell the stuff to will also get into trouble if you're not more careful. I've been obliged to wink at a good many acts of yours, Leblanc, but the time's coming when I shan't be able to wink any more."

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"Eef you no get my wiskee, you all go to de devil straight in dis dam place," morosely declared Leblanc. "Four Corners ees hell wit wiskee, but eet ees more hell widout eet."

"There's no denying that the place has been dull lately," the Public Prosecutor agreed. "Infernally dull. One has to stimulate one's mental faculties with whisky in order to keep them up to the mark. I'd better be going. My son, James, will be waiting for me."

He rose a little irresolutely, staggered, and sat down again as Millette brought him more whisky. "De night heem young," affirmed that worthy. "You're not full up yet, M'sieu."

"No," said the other, dreamily drinking off the fiery poison. "I am not full up yet, Millette. Some day, if I get really full up, my cup of sorrow will also be full. When I think of the talents God has given me all wasted here, I am surprised that I do not blow my brains out. The only reason why I don't do so is because by this time in all probability there are no brains to blow out. Give me some more—more whisky."

The tempter at his elbow refilled the glass, and the Public Prosecutor again drank down the fiery draught.

"James will—will—will exposhtulate with me," he said thickly. "But I—I'm not goin' be dictated to—I shay, I'm not goin' be dictated to—by Jamesh."

THE "HIDING" OF JAMES

"That's right. You bet your boots you ain't," said another man in the corner. "James has got into a kind of way of lookin' down on his elders when they're full. A good larrupin' 'ud take some of the starch out of James."

"You think sho?" asked the Public Prosecutor, once more struggling to his feet.

"Course I think so," said the man. "Only t'other day he let on to me as I was a drunken swine who made you worse, Mr. Prosecutor. You did ought to take it out of James's hide for that. It's a public duty, so to speak, this larrupin' of James."

"Yes," said the Public Prosecutor thickly, although when sober he would not have touched a hair of James's head, "itsh a public duty. Pub-lic duty. Gimme a stick."

The drunken brute at his elbow put a thick switch into the Public Prosecutor's trembling hand. "Better go and git it over afore you forgit," he suggested with devilish malice. "You'll find James sittin' up waitin' to tell you what he thinks of you. Mebbe, when you've finished with him, he won't be so ready to give advice to his elders any more."

The Public Prosecutor swayed to and fro irresolutely, then vainly felt in his pockets for money wherewith to settle his score. "Chalk it up, Millette," he said thickly. "Chal-lik it up."

"*Mais, mon Dieu, M'sieu*, I have mak' to use

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up all my chalk for you," said Millette, vexed that his customer was going away so early.

"Challik it up," imperatively repeated the Public Prosecutor. "Challik it up. I'm goin' home—goin' home to make Jamesh shee the error of his waysh. I—I'll drop into Wilson's shed and think it over ash I go."

He staggered out into the night air, "weaving" along the uneven sidewalk until he came to Wilson's shed, where the buggy ponies were tied up when their owners came into the village to shop. The two men, watching him from the door of the little inn, hesitated as to whether they should set him on his way again.

Millette shook his head. "He mak' to go to sleep for a time. Bimeby, he wake up vaire cold, vaire uglee. Den he geev leetle Jamesh plentee steek. *Entrez, mes amis. Entrez,* and drink to de good hidin' of de leetle Jamesh."

The scoundrels went back into the inn, whilst the youthful James, his heart filled with terror and anguish, awaited the coming of the parent who loved him when sober, but was a devil incarnate when drunk.

CHAPTER I

THE QUEST

“ **O**LD MAN ” EVANS looked out of his little “ cabane ” on the Ottawa shore, and hazarded the opinion that it would be a “ durned cold night.” “ There’s old Fiske, the Public Persecutor, crawlin’ into Wilson’s shed,” he said contemptuously. “ Reckon it’s about time we had a live man in his place ; but, as Parson Black says, ‘ Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour’s landmark ’ ; and Fiske’s been a landmark here so long, no one thinks it worth while to git cursed on his account.”

“ ‘ Tain’t a mossle of use cursin’ a whisky vat like him,” agreed the red-haired Ikey Marston, thrusting out his head and also sniffing the keen, fresh air from the river. “ Not a mossle. Come to think of it, Old Man, we ain’t no total ‘stainers ourselves.”

“ Total ‘stainers ! ” Old Man made a disgusted pause on the threshold. “ Folks in Four Corners ‘ud lynch us if we took to givin’ ourselves airs like

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that. What's the Good Book say—' A little wine for the stomach's sake.' "

" Some folks here says, ' A big stummick for a little whisky's sake,' " retorted Ikey ; " and that's what Fiske's doin' all the time. Poor James has to help his mother run the hull show ; and he's that proud he won't come in here for a bite when he's hungry."

" There's the makin' of a fine man in James," said Old Man meditatively.

" He'll never git beyond the makins' if Fiske bashes his brains out when he comes home drunk some night. And yet, he'd kill anyone as laid a hand on James in the daytime."

" Parson Black's been on to me about him," said Old Man consciously.

" Who ? Fiske ? "

" No. James. He says I did orter act *in loco parentibus* to him."

Ikey was staggered. " What d'you want to loco him for ? He ain't done nothin' to you."

Old Man, from the height of his superior learning, explained. " I'm thinkin' it over," he added.

" Well, I'm goin' to turn in," grumbled Ikey. " I don't hold with thisyer takin' other folks' kids away from 'em. When I want a fam'ly, guess I'll raise one of my own."

" Heaven help us all, for nobody else will, if they take after their pyrogenitor. Crawl into your

THE QUEST

bunk," Old Man suggested, "and pray a little prayer to the A'mighty to knock some sense into your thick head. I've tried this many a year and I can't."

Ikey was too sleepy to argue the point, and, after throwing a fresh log into the stove, turned in "all standing," on the ground that if he did take his clothes off, he would be expected to put them on again in the morning.

Old Man waited until the pipe fell from Ikey's mouth and his loud snores re-echoed through the cabin. Twice, owing to this reprehensible habit on the part of his *fidus Achates*, they had been "burned out," and Old Man did not propose to allow it again. There were valuable bearskins in the hut, equally valuable weapons; and he was attached to his household gods. Picking up the pipe, therefore, he knocked out its ashes on the top of the stove, and, filled with an uneasy presentiment that he might be wanted before morning, followed Ikey's example and turned in "all standing."

Toward the coming of the sweet Canadian dawn, he was aroused from placid slumber by the rude banging of a rifle butt upon the cabin door—a banging which sounded to his confused senses as if the Laurentian Mountains had slipped into the Ottawa River and were grinding the rocks at the bottom. When a palæolithic fragment struck him in the process, he emerged from the land of dreams,

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thrust his head out of his bunk, and listened intently.

The hammering continued with a persistence worthy of a better cause.

Conscious that it would take an ordinary intruder at least a week to make any impression upon the seasoned timber, Old Man turned over with a yawn, and, like the sluggard, prepared to slumber again.

But he had reckoned without Ikey, who slept nearer the door than himself. "Old Man," cried that worthy, suddenly waking up with every sense on the alert, "some dum fool's tryin' to stave in the door—our door! Seems to think it's his door, and he can do what he likes with it."

"Does he?" Old Man yawned again.

"Course he does. I tell you he's tryin' to smash it in."

"Is he? Well, you knows that door. Hammerin' agin it don't hurt us and it don't hurt the door. If it kind of amuses someone and gives him wholesome exercise, let him go on hammerin' ;" and Old Man once more pulled the blanket over his head.

Ikey crawled out of his bunk and peremptorily "yanked" it off. "Seems 'sif he wanted suthin', Old Man," he said dubiously.

"Seems! Seems he'd find a fool 'ithout much trouble if he looked in your bunk. Gimme back my blanket, you—you red-headed tergiversator."

THE QUEST

With sudden heat, Old Man, annoyed by the determination of the Universe to break in upon his rest, invoked all the Powers of Brimstone and the nether world to make Ikey see the error of his ways. "Seems! For a neat way of puttin' things, you're hard to beat, Ikey. I ain't heard nuthin' prettier since you let fly when I used to duck you in the river."

Compliments were so rare from Old Man that Ikey snatched at even the ironical semblance of one. "Thankee, Old Man. Thankee. 'Tain't offen you speak truth like that. If the mule's browsin' round, she'll have thisyer hammerer by the slack of his britches in no time."

"Miss Wilks ain't such a dirty feeder as all that comes to, Ikey. Wonder what dum fool it is, any way. Why, it can't be more'n four o'clock. 'Tain't sun-up yet; and I don't hold with gittin' up afore sunrise."

"He's batterin' away close agin my head and his langwidge 'ud turn Parson Black white," Ikey complained. "Light a candle, Old Man, whiles I give him hell."

"Manners, Ikey, manners," said Old Man reprovingly. "Even at thisyer time of the mornin' you didn't orter make a present like that to a complete stranger. He mightn't know what to do with it."

"'Tain't no stranger, you bet, Old Man. More likely it's some fool who's been sleepin' off his jag

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in Wilson's buggy shed. Give me that stake from the corner, and I'll let the whisky out and the daylight into him."

"You'd be lettin' it into the hut as well, Ikey. Reckon if I was to git up, that dum fool outside 'ill soon wish he'd never been born. I'll just exposterlate with him and——"

But Ikey had already flung wide the door. He did it so swiftly that the intruder on their domestic peace lurched heavily forward. His rifle dropped at the same time and exploded with a bang. Fortunately, Old Man, with a shrewd prescience of what was coming, had thrown himself flat on the floor, and the bullet buried itself harmlessly in the opposite wall, making a hole in the best bear-skin as it did so.

Ikey, after one hurried glance to see that his friend and mentor was unhurt, slammed the intruder to the ground with a force which made his teeth rattle, then picked up the gun and hurled it outside, the stranger meanwhile regarding him with the vacant smile of a man who imagines that he sees a dog worrying someone else's hat. "Don' do that," he said thickly, as he vainly endeavoured to rise. "Don' do that, Ikey. Thash my gun, I tell you. Ish thish the way to treat Public Prosecutor?"

"Your gun, you whisky-swillin' blatherskite!" Ikey picked up a formidable pointed stake, as if he meant to run the intruder through the body.

THE QUEST

"What d'you want, Fiske, comin' here afore cock-crow and tryin' to put a bullet through Old Man? Think we're roosters goin' for a walk with another rooster's wives!"

The confused and red-nosed being on the floor gravely shook his head. "Shertainly not, Ikey. There wouldn't be room for all your wives to walk to-to-gerrer. Never said you was a chicken. You're no chicken. Shertainly not." He shed maudlin tears.

"Then what d'you want, Fiske? You've spoilt my best bearskin." Old Man measured with his eye the height at which the bullet had entered the wall, and calculated that had he not thrown himself on the ground, it would have taken him in the middle and ingloriously ended a life which was still dear to him. So many people regarded him as the uncrowned king of Four Corners that his untimely taking off would be a public calamity.

"Wha' I want, Old Man? You—you've the fashe to ask me that. My boysh run away from me—my lit-little—Jamesh. Wansh shympathy," said the drunken man on the floor, with owl-like gravity. "I'm down."

"There ain't no manner of doubt about that. Git up. Seem to think you're Dan'l takin' root in a den of lions." Old Man pulled the unwelcome visitor to his feet and carefully deposited him on the log which did duty for a chair. "B'lieve you've shook all the back teeth out of

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him, Ikey. You're uncommon strong in the arms when roused."

"I'd like to shake the liver out of him too," said the infuriated Ikey. "What's he want comin' here tryin' to blow our heads off with that durned old rifle of his?"

"Don't decompose him like that, Ikey. After all, he nearly got me, not you. Better give him a drink, and then maybe we'll find out what he does want."

"Find out what he wants, Old Man! He wants a hidin', I tell you."

"No, no, Ikey. Pick him up and give him a drink. That'll do him more good'n any hidin'. Give him a drink."

"Give him a drink! 'Sif we ever have left anything over for next mornin'! He's loaded up to the brim already. Put a match to his breath and he'd blow up."

"Well, then, don't put a match to his breath. Jus' let him flow over a bit to ease his anxious mind."

"Anxious stummick, I calls it, Old Man."

"Call it anything you like, Ikey. That's right. Pick him up agin. Seems to think that log's a chair with a back to it. Why, I'm durned if he ain't sayin' his prayers and goin' to sleep."

"Maybe if I leave the stove door open, he'll tumble in afore he wakes up," hopefully suggested Ikey. "If he does, it 'ill trim his hair a bit."

THE QUEST

"Ikey, I'm s'prised at you. Didn't you hear this unfortnit fellow-creature say as he'd come here for sympathy?"

"Course I did. What's that got to do with it, Old Man?"

"Fat lot of sympathy you're givin' him. I mind the time, Ikey, when you'd ha' bin darned glad of a little sympathy to keep your infant steps out of the river on a dark night. And it wasn't as late as this, neither. And you hadn't Fiske's trubbles. If Jim Fiske's come here for sympathy, let him have it—if he don't shoot us both afore we can ladle it out. Give him a drink and hear what he's got to say for himself."

"How can we, Old Man, when you know as well as I do the whisky jug's empty!"

"Well, you needn't ha' made such a hole in the floor with him. That ain't the kind of sympathy he wants, any way." Old Man shook his head, and half-dragged, half-led the intruder to his own bunk. "There, you tousley-headed limb of the law. Call yourself a Public Persecutor, indeed! Go to sleep agin and think over what you really do want, Fiske. If you'd ha' killed me, I'd ha' haunted you for evermore."

"Don't want to think. Wansh shympathy," once more murmured the Public Prosecutor, and fell on sleep.

"Well, I'm d——d, Old Man. A feller comes here with all the politeness of a wild Injun, nearly

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blows your head off, and then goes to sleep in your bunk 'ithout a word of thanks 'sif he lived there. And your best Mackinaws, too. I'll haul him out by the heels and——"

"No, no. Don't upset what Parson Black calls his

'Infant slumbers calm and sweet.'

Maybe he's got suthin' on his mind, Ikey."

"More likely he's got suthin' on his stummick. I'd like to bless his infant slumbers with thisyer stake."

Old Man, busily engaged in sluicing his head in a basin of water, looked up disapprovingly. "Where's my dressin'-case with the silver fittins' ? I want the fam'ly comb."

"Whaffor ? You know you ain't got no dressin'-case. You're gittin' at me. Never knew you do your hair on weekdays afore, Old Man, and only on Sundays since Parson Black made you git religion."

"Never mind whaffor, Ikey. You'll make yourself git suthin' as ain't religion in a minnit. Hand over the comb. Injuns allers does up their scalp locks and paints their faces afore goin' on the war-path. 'Sides, it helps me to think ;" and Old Man proceeded to comb out his hyacinthine locks. Suddenly he let the comb fall from his hand. "I've got it, Ikey."

"You ain't. Here 'tis." Ikey dexterously caught the comb as it fell. "Got what ?"

THE QUEST

"What this loony of a Fiske's arter. It's that boy of his. Fiske's bin on a jag—you remember we see him weavin' into Wilson's shed afore we turned in—and larrupped little James, and little James, who's had about enuff larrupin' to last him a lifetime, has put out through the Bush."

"That limb of a boy as is so fond of you! How d'you know he's put out, Old Man?"

"How do I know it? Why, James and the mule's thick as thieves. If he's anywhere round, she'll know it. I expect she's put out with him."

Old Man went to the door of the hut and whistled for the mule, once, twice, thrice, but there was no response.

"Told you so, Ikey. The lad's put out, and Miss Wilks has gone to look arter him. She's as bad as I am for takin' a hand in other folks' bus'ness as ain't no bus'ness of hers."

"She did orter know better at her time of life. And she's so dum partickler. I've even known her turn up her nose at me. 'Sides, I don't fancy her chummin' up with an ornary little limb like James."

"Oh, James is all right if his father 'ud give him a chance. Me and James is a-studyin' moral filoserfy together when we goes fishin' for pickerel. I gives him the filoserfy and he gives me the pickerel. Miss Wilks has took to him, too. You don't know what her time of life is any more'n I do, Ikey. And what's more, if you knew as

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much about wimmen as I do, you'd have the sense not to want to know Miss Wilks's age. You did orter remember she's a lady, and, like most ladies, has a moral right to keep her age to herself."

"I don't care a shingle what her age is, Old Man. If it comes to that, we don't really know ours, either."

"That's all right, then, and we can say anything we like if anyone's fool enuff to ask us. Just pour a pail of water over the fire for safety's sake—I can't afford to have the place burned down by you or that purple-nosed idgeot—and we'll trail James. Miss Wilks allers was a dum fool about children."

Ikey, who still resented having been awakened from the pleasantest of dreams, prudently suppressed the retort which sprang to his lips; for, fond as he was of Miss Wilks (the mule, by dint of sheer audacity and mother-wit, had extricated him from more than one unpleasant situation), he could not restrain his jealousy at the thought of the unique place which this three-cornered hybrid occupied in Old Man's affections. Dusky beauties might come and go, habitant belles seek to lure Old Man from the narrow path of righteousness; but Miss Wilks, simply assuming that she was the prevailing influence of his life, ruled her nominal master with a rod of iron whilst reserving to herself a ladylike freedom of action which made Old Man chuckle in his sleeve whenever he at-

THE QUEST

tempted to argue with her. Although professing a masculine readiness to be argued with, Miss Wilks invariably waited till he had finished what Old Man called his "exposterlations," and then went her own way, "same 'sif," to use her master's somewhat confused metaphor, "she was clothed in the fig-leaves of the righteous and allers kept her lantern burnin'."

On the previous evening Miss Wilks had shared Old Man's and Ikey's supper, with coy hesitation had accepted a "chaw" of the former's tobacco, and, after vainly hinting her desire to partake of Ikey's whisky, had withdrawn in great dudgeon to the outskirts of the Bush, there to correct the effects of her unnatural diet by cropping the sweet spring grass now greenly showing through the fast-disappearing patches of snow. Though the nights were still chilly, her manner plainly indicated that she preferred the pale light of the stars to the flamboyant hue of Ikey's red hair. At such times Old Man allowed the mule to depart with reluctance, knowing perfectly well that, with hybrid inconsistency, Miss Wilks would invariably endeavour to put him in the wrong when she coldly returned to the hut for breakfast. That she would return was as certain as "Death and Taxes," for she could no more exist without Old Man than he could without her. Indeed, the skin on his left shoulder was as hard as leather, owing to Miss Wilks's sentimental habit of resting her enormous

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head upon it in her more winning and contemplative moods.

The mule was feared and hated by the feminine inhabitants of Four Corners, for there was something uncanny in the penetrating regard of her one useful eye, an unholy intelligence which instantly detected, and as quickly frustrated, any matrimonial designs on Old Man, who, although having a nickname which was intended to convey an impression of hoary honour, was only twenty-four. Ikey, as nearly as could be guessed, was about four years younger. Spiteful feminine traditions in Four Corners averred that Miss Wilks, a contemporary of Methuselah's, tiring of that patriarch's gradually growing senility, had emigrated to Canada. Experts who, in order to settle this point, endeavoured to examine the mule's teeth, were of the opinion that she was a fiend incarnate, and, what was left of them after the interview, never cared to repeat the experiment. Unmoved alike by praise or blame, Miss Wilks majestically pervaded the highest and lowest society of Four Corners, each end of her, hoofs and teeth alike, enforcing a respect which the more thoughtful readily admitted to be due to a lady of her upbringing and wide knowledge of the world.

Old Man, after carefully tucking up the somnolent Mr. Fiske in an additional blanket, and bringing back the rifle which Ikey had thrown out

THE QUEST

of the hut, thrust a hunk of bread and meat into his pocket and motioned to Ikey to do the same.

Ikey, unconvinced, looked at his warm blankets. "Whaffor, Old Man? 'Tain't breakfast-time yet."

"James mayn't ha' had any supper while his Public Persecutin' pa was enjoyin' himself at Millette's. Git."

"But I don't want to git, Old Man. I wants to go back to my bunk and keep an eye on Lawyer Fiske. If I don't, he may burn down the cabin jus' to spite us when he finds out where he is."

"He wants to go back and waller in his dodgasted bunk, same 'sif he was a—a supernum'rary buff'lo," Old Man declared to the unconscious Mr. Fiske.

"What's a supernum'rary buff'lo? You let up on me with your buff'loes, Old Man. You knows very well there ain't many left nowadays. I ain't had my sleep out yet."

"Think of it!" Old Man communed with the rafters just above his head. "I've been nourishin' a groundhog as wants to go back to his bunk whiles James roams round the Bush with maybe a stray wolf or two as ain't yet got to the mountains markin' him down for breakfast."

"I ain't no groundhog, Old Man! Why don't you call me a boiled owl at once."

"I'll call you a fretful porkypine, if you prefers it. Don't make no diff'rence to me what I calls you, s'long as you lives down to it, Ikey."

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"Course I don't want James to be eat up by a wolf. Who ever heard of a wolf eatin' a lawyer? James has got to be a lawyer and keep Old Man Fiske and the rest of the fam'ly some day, when Fiske's drunk his stummick full of holes. Eat up by a wolf! No, no! I didn't think of that, Old Man. I thought they'd all paired off and gone back to the mountains."

Old Man reduced Ikey to a state of abject humiliation with one fiery glance. "The things you don't think of, Ikey, 'ud make a big book. Come on. 'Sides, if that fool mule's gone arter Jimmy Fiske, she may be gittin' into trubble too, and, fond as I am of James, I'd cheerfully see him offered up same as Isaac offered up Abraham ruther'n the mule come to any harm."

"She may git into trubble. I didn't think of that, neither." Ikey, his penitence quickly vanishing, chuckled. "But I'd like to see the wolf as could down her, Old Man."

"I wouldn't, not if I was one of his relations. The mule has a trick, as Parson Black says, of 'not lettin' one end of her know what the other end doeth.' Come along, Ikey. Maybe I was a bit hasty just now. At your time of life you don't know enuff to colluscitate everything all at once."

Harmony having been thus restored by this handsome apology from Old Man, the two friends, after taking further precautions to prevent the

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bibulous Mr. Fiske from burning down what in facetious moments they termed "the manshun," left the one-storied hut by the river-bank and plunged into the keen morning air. On the opposite side of the Ottawa River, now swollen by melted snow and turbid with the muddy contributions of a thousand tributary creeks, the pine-clad Laurentians loomed darkly. There was a dewy freshness in the air, the rejoicing twitter of half-awakened birds. One by one the stars twinkled, disappeared, and left a grey space in the eastern sky—a space which would shortly glow with crimson and saffron and gold.

Old Man turned from his absorbed contemplation of the grey void with a shiver and faced the Bush behind Four Corners. "Black as the devil and his angels in there," he said thoughtfully. "It 'ill take us all we know to catch up with 'em, and even then we mayn't be in time."

Ikey slung his rifle on his shoulder. "Don't you worry. We're bound to find 'em. Fire away, Old Man. There's only one way into the Bush, and sometimes 'tain't easy to git out agin. But if we've got to go, why——"

"If! Course we've got to go, if we don't want James to become wolf-meat." And Old Man, with an unerring instinct which was as infallible in its way as that possessed by Miss Wilks, broke into the tireless lope of an Indian runner, whilst Ikey blindly followed.

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After leaving the outskirts of the village behind them, they soon reached the edge of the Bush. Its massive cedars and pines greeted them with aromatic arms which brushed their faces, clung to them, and sought to bar this unauthorized invasion of their matutinal mysteries. But regardless alike of needled pine-branch and clinging briar, Old Man led the way through the fragrant gloom, only the heavy breathing of Ikey and the rustle of swinging boughs breaking the oppressive silence. Here and there a decayed tree crumbled to touchwood beneath their feet, its pungent particles floating up to their nostrils and making Ikey sneeze as he uttered a thousand maledictions on Miss Wilks and Lawyer Fiske for cutting short his slumbers. Though his breath came pantingly, he knew that the tireless combination of wire and whipcord in front of him was capable of continuing at the same pace for hours, and groaned in spirit, for when Ikey was not in hard training he was naturally lazy.

"Cheer up!" Old Man flung back over his shoulder. "'Tain't goin' on for ever. We'll strike Guardian Angel Crick in a minnit. Suthin' seems to whisper to me as our young friend ain't very far off, and I hope the Guardian Angels are guardin' him from those devils of wolves."

"Suthin' seems to whisper to me as I'll bust if I don't soon git my second wind. Gosh, Old Man, what's that? Don't you hear it?" And Ikey

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trembled as a low, fierce howl broke the silence of the coming dawn.

Old Man gently shook off Ikey's detaining hand. "Course I hear it. Ain't you ever heard the howl of a wounded wolf afore? The mule can't be far away. Just as likely as not, she's on the bank of the Crick, a-watchin' over James's infant slumbers and tryin' to humble herself to come back to breakfast. Thinks it 'ill ease her proud spirit if she flattens out a wolf or two. Not even Parson Black would call James's slumbers 'sweet' if he was to come along now."

"Wish he would come along, Old Man," vindictively said Ikey. "It's a long time since those poor half-starved devils of wolves has had a good square meal off a minister. They got the one at Point Fortune the year afore last when his sleigh upset; but I've bin told there wasn't enuff of him to go round, and they ain't had no luck since."

"Come to that, Parson Black don't egzackly waller in milk and honey, Ikey. He's allers travellin' round at such a rate he don't have no time to git fat—not real fat. I don't s'pose the wolves 'ud git as much off his bones as they did off the Point Fortune man's. The Parson told me t'other day he's a bit tired of S'prise Parties, when folks bring him all the things they can't eat themselves and expects him to be grateful for 'em. The s'prise comes in when they see his young friends tryin' to eat their leavin's. Black says

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as he'll stick their 'burnt offerings' of currant buns on the tops of his railin's, if they ain't more careful of his corruptible body. He's had enuff of being told to digest things as 'ud stick in the gizzard of a turkey buzzard."

"Mind the wolves don't git hold of you, Old Man."

Old Man, pushing through the thick Bush with the noiseless tread of an Indian, laughed silently. "There ain't a wolf in the hull Ottawa Valley hungry enuff to 'dessicate my sacred person,' as Parson Black said when Labelle threatened to knock him down for taking the drunks home from the ho-tel. S-s-sh! Here we are. Three or four young dog wolves as couldn't git mates has bin hangin' round Four Corners all the winter. Maybe they've hung round jus' a leetle too long for James's comfort. We may have to make a dash. Git ready, Ikey."

"All right, Old Man." Ikey's delighted grin almost dissipated the grey obscurity of the rapidly waning night. "I fires when you fires."

CHAPTER II

THE FINDING OF JAMES

THE first faint glimpses of coming dawn penetrated the gloomy branches of the firs and gradually dissipated the darkness. To the untrained eye, there was little to see in the dense undergrowth, nothing to account for the mournful howl which Old Man had attributed to the agency of the potent heels or equally powerful teeth of Miss Wilks. Early-rising bull-frogs croaked discordant greetings to one another, or plopped into the water with a sullen splash. Here and there a fish leaped upward to freshen its scales with silver light and shake off the clinging mud brought down in such overwhelming quantities by the spring freshets.

The air was full of a dripping moisture, which, as it fell from the funereal firs, insinuated itself into the back of Ikey's neck, trickled gently down his spine, and caused him acute discomfort—discomfort to which he gave vent by uttering strange oaths and unseemly ejaculations.

When the sunbeams filtered into the Bush and

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the shadows slowly faded away, Ikey could see that there was an open space on the bank of the Creek. Dew-laden branches of a tree upon the little island in its middle caught the light and gave back sparkling gems to the dawn. The Bush itself had been cleared away for some twenty yards by an enterprising habitant, who, shunning his fellows, had built himself a hut there. This hut was already falling into decay, and the little garden round it presented an unkempt, desolate appearance.

With an eye to the picturesque, the bold intruder upon the sacred solitude of the Bush had spared a lofty cedar in the very centre of the clearing. Unlike most cedars, its long, undulating, fanlike branches swept the ground. When cattle cannot get at the tender young branches, and they have room to spread, they present a very different appearance from the huddled-up trunks in the recesses of the Bush, where every rootlet has to make good its right to exist. The branches of this particular cedar, moreover, afforded an easy ladder by which anyone wishing to gain an uninterrupted survey of the neighbourhood could climb to the tree-top and gladden his heart with the amazing panorama of river, wood and mountain which lay before him.

"Holy Moses! but I've got a reg'lar puddle down the small of my back. Dunno what we're catchin' cold for in thisyer dum wilderness," Ikey petu-

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lantly began, when Old Man stayed him with a whispered "S-s-sh!"

"Ah, now we're gittin' at suthin'. Well, what is it?" Ikey steadied his rifle on a branch and prepared to do as he was told.

"S-s-s-sh!" Old Man again motioned him to be silent. "Wait till the light gits a bit clearer. There's nothin' so misleadin' as a half-light. Any fool whose nose hadn't been spoilt by the fleshspots of Four Corners 'ud ha' smelt wolf long ago, and a pretty considerable amount of wolf too."

"Oh-h-h!"

"Don't stand 'oh-in' there 'sif you was frightened out of your wits," angrily whispered Old Man. "I daren't fire till I knows where the mule is and what she's up to."

"What mule! I don't see no dum mule, Old Man. You're dreamin'."

"You mayn't be able to see a dum mule, but if you was lookin' at yourself in the glass you'd see a dum idgeot, Ikey. Can't you tell for yourself as that mass of black shadder over yonder ain't no tree?"

By dint of steadily gazing into the gloom, the two friends were able to separate the outlines of the cedar from its background. Almost immediately facing them stood an ungainly-looking, one-eyed mule, whose clay-coloured hide was a few shades lighter than the cedar trunk. At a respectful distance from this mule, and restlessly

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pacing round it, were three big, slinking, greyish shapes, whose erect ears, open mouths and slaver-ing jaws betokened that they were very much in earnest about something. A few yards from the furthestmost spread of the cedar sat another animal, disconsolately holding up a broken forepaw and uttering a low, melancholy whine.

"Told you so. Look at the one sittin' down there. That's her work." Old Man's voice was jubilant. "She's got her blow in first, and that dodgasted wolf ain't no good 'cept to umpire. Where the carcass is there shall the vulchers be gathered together."

"But there ain't no carcass and there ain't no vulchers neither, Old Man. They're wolves; that's what they are. Any fool can see that. And the one sittin' down's had his leg broke."

At any other time Old Man would have been in despair at the literalness of his simple-minded companion. For the moment, however, he was far too engrossed in the spectacle before him to do more than give Ikey a warning nudge to keep quiet.

"It's wolves sure enuff, Old Man. Let's blaze away at 'em and give 'em fits, or maybe they'll give 'em to us."

Again Old Man restrained him. "Not they; they're too busy already. D'you s'pose if we was to interfere prematoorly in thisyer little scrap we'd git any thanks from Miss Wilks? No, sir. She'd never speak to us agin, or, if she did let herself go,

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I reckon there wouldn't be enuff of us left to go home. Look at her play-actin' now and lurin' them unfortnit critters to an early grave."

He pointed to Miss Wilks, who affected to search the landscape with an indifferent air. A close observer would have noticed, however, that she was bunched up for a spring; that every muscle in her body strained itself to the utmost tension. Her one eye blazed like a carbuncle, and the drawn-back upper lip displayed a set of teeth which would have filled even a shark with envy.

The wolves rapidly lost their tempers, the more so as Miss Wilks kept command of hers. Besides, they were hungry and miserable, unmated, when every bird and animal around them, always excepting Miss Wilks, had already paired happily. Their attack upon the mule might have been taken as a sympathetic desire to offer her a way out from the misery of single-blessedness. While one of the three diverted Miss Wilks's attention in front, a rear movement might haply result in the hamstringing of their opponent, and an ample though somewhat stringy breakfast off the mule's lopsided carcass.

"That one with the white blaze is gittin' ready to down her. Why don't you fire, Old Man? If that's the way you help your friends, I'd a durned sight ruther be one of your en'mies. I ain't a-goin' to stay here and see the mule slaughtered."

"In course you ain't, sonny." Old Man permitted himself an almost noiseless chuckle. "Can't

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you see as I'm waitin' for what the Editor of *The Gazette* calls the 'daynooermong of the physiological moment.' "

"Dum the physical moment, or whatever you calls it, Old Man. I tells you I ain't goin' to stand by and—— Gosh! did you hear that? It's most broke me up to listen to it."

"That" was a dull, sickening thud occasioned by the impact of armed heels on wolf ribs. Two of the wolves, thinking to disable Miss Wilks by a concerted attack, had leaped at her from opposite sides, only to meet one another as the mule sprang forward between them. The next moment her heels played tattoo on their ribs; she kicked them into space, seized the front wolf by the throat, and proceeded to worry the life out of him. When she had done so she turned her attention to "the umpire."

"Guess he ain't takin' any in his," whispered the delighted Ikey, for "the umpire," seeing what was coming, slunk under the cedar boughs where Miss Wilks could not get at him, crept out on the other side and made a three-legged bolt for the innermost recesses of the Bush, raising his voice the while in a series of howls which Ikey described as "hair-liftin'."

"The umpire" was answered from a neighbouring swamp by his broken-ribbed companions. Their howls became fainter and fainter as the discomfited marauders slunk further away into the heart of the Bush.

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" Seems kind of rough on them poor bach'lors." Ikey was naturally sympathetic. " Kind of rough on them, Old Man, when all they wanted was a square meal."

" Kind of rough, Ikey!" Old Man lowered his rifle and relieved his cramped limbs with a comprehensive stretch. " Kind of rough, Ikey! Don't you know enuff to know as it's only Nature's plan for snuffin' of 'em out 'cause they don't know enuff to git married?"

" Maybe"—Ikey grinningly glanced at his companion—" Nature 'ill snuff us out too, if we don't git married either, Old Man. I've felt it comin' on for some time past."

In the rapidly strengthening light Ikey could see that Old Man was taken aback. " If you'd a little more commensuration for your immortal soul, Ikey, you'd know better'n to talk dum nonsense like that. What's right and fittin' for wolves mightn't suit us."

" You've experimented a good deal in Four Corners, Old Man. Seems to me if you ain't more careful you'll git your ribs broke too, and not by a wolf neither."

" Shut up, Ikey, and go to church offener."

" Whaffor? What's gittin' married got to do with goin' to church, Old Man?"

" Course it's got a good deal to do with it. ' Only,' says Parson Black—heard him myself o' Sunday—' Only by a process of painful, laborious

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nat'ral s'lection can we hope to climb upward to ultimate perfeckshun.'"

Ikey was bewildered. "Who wants to climb? Thank goodness, I ain't no dum squir'l."

"Well, next time you think I'm enjoyin' myself, p'r'aps you'll have the decency to stop and remember I'm painfully and laboriously s'lectin'. That's all."

"Last time I see you talkin' to Yellow Feather's pretty squaw there didn't seem much pain and labour about it, Old Man."

"That's only because you're a superfleuous observer, Ikey. If you'd looked more carefully, you'd known I was tryin' to find out where the chief got his bear pelts. What in the name of thunder's Miss Wilks doin' now?"

"Just a-dancin' on that dead wolf, Old Man. Just a-dancin' on him."

"'Sif she hadn't flattened him out enuff already! 'Sides, she'll spoil his skin. I'll call her off."

Old Man put his fingers to his mouth and emitted a shrill whistle.

The whistle had a magical effect upon Miss Wilks. A moment before she had been a flaming-eyed, rampaging, furious, bloodthirsty, wolf-flattening fiend, kicking, biting, leaping in mid-air from a wild delight and sheer lust for slaughter, every bristle on her lank hide standing erect while her yellow teeth snapped and clashed noisily together. But at the sound of Old Man's whistle,

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the ferocity of her flaming eye gave place to an expression of buttercup-gathering, lamb-like innocence; she ceased to bound up and down, and began to eat with a

"The grass may grow in winter weather
As soon as hate in me"

kind of look which would have deceived even that astute penetrator of men's motives, Parson Black himself. As for the trampled, crumpled, battered mass of dingy grey fur which had once been a wolf, she was utterly unaware of its proximity. Somebody had left something there. What that something might be was a matter of supreme indifference to a humble lover of nature intent upon the daily round, the common task of finding the wherewithal to allay a somewhat fastidious and ladylike appetite.

"The durned humbug! See the way she's showing off," delightedly whispered Old Man. "She knew we were here all the time, Ikey. I 'spects she got James safely treed when the wolves came sniffin' round, and made up her mind for a little innercent fun. We'll git even with her, though. Don't pay no more attention to her'n if she was a tater bug. That 'ill take the starch out of her."

"Why do you want to take the starch out of her, Old Man? Starch is a mighty good thing, even for a mule."

"I dessay. But Miss Wilks is gittin' to think she runs the hull show. When you've had as

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much painful and laborious study of wimmenkind as I have, you'll know once they takes that notion into their heads you can't do nothin' with 'em."

" But you're all-fired proud of her, Old Man. All-fired ! There ain't another mule in the world like her. When I told the Sheriff that t'other day, just arter she'd let fly at him, he said : ' Thank God for it ! ' "

Old Man looked tired as he pulled out his pipe and leisurely filled it with some tobacco scrapings which he extracted from the subterraneous depths of a pant pocket. " Course I'm all-fired proud of Miss Wilks. That's where the hell is. But once I let her see it, she'll boss us for all she's worth. We'll just saunter round kind of permiskus-like, 'sif we'd come out to git an appetite for breakfast, and not take no notice of her. Then she'll be real mad and jump that wolf to a jelly. Look at her now ! Ain't she a lamb ! "

It would have been difficult to imagine anything more unlamblike than Miss Wilks as she cropped the sweet spring herbage with assiduous preoccupation. Now that the day had dawned and the sun flooded the world with light, the peculiarities of her construction were painfully apparent to the most ordinary observer. She was ewe-necked, blind of one eye, one-eared (the other ear had been " chawed " at by an Indian pony in the days of her youth), slab-shouldered, lean, scrawny, with odd bulging knobs of muscle which gave her the appearance of an unfinished study for a mule, an

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embryonic something which by dint of care and diligence might yet be moulded, fashioned, and shaped into the semblance of a real mule. At present the effect was crude, inefficient, marred by scars and a colour which would have been scorned even by the traditional "yaller dog." But in spite of her peculiarities, there was sufficient force and power about Miss Wilks to make a hasty judge reconsider his opinion as to her merits. And the expression of her one-seeing eye—no longer flaming with the light of battle, but of a soft, clear, tender brown—as she momentarily allowed it to stray toward the thicket where Old Man still lingered, filling his pipe, was beautiful to behold.

The expression was but momentary. Miss Wilks knew that he was in the thicket, and she also knew that Old Man was aware of her battle. But she had been nursing a grievance—a grievance which had caused her to seek the sylvan recesses of the Bush in high dudgeon, and did not intend to abate one jot or tittle of that grievance until Old Man apologized for not having taken her part on the previous evening concerning that little matter of Ikey's whisky. Old Man had told her that too much whisky was bad for her, and the mere telling was an insult, for she always knew when she had had enough, which was more than could be said of Ikey. It was something new that Old Man should object to her taking a few ladylike nips. What would these two forlorn, lost, unfortunate men

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do without her ? Let them try it. She asked no more from the Great Manitou than that ; and once more scrunched the sweet grass with a vicious energy which disclosed her perturbed mind.

Old Man, having successfully lighted his pipe, handed the match to Ikey, and paused in well-feigned surprise. " What's that dum thing over yonder ? Bagosh, it can't be a mule ? "

" A mule ? Oh, I dunno." Ikey carelessly drew near and surveyed her physical charms in a manner which caused Miss Wilks to blush inwardly. " The poor critter seems to think she's a mule. P'r'aps she is a mule. Shouldn't be s'prised if it turned out to be an attempt at a mule. Got to know it well fust. D'you mind walkin' round and learnin' t'other side of it, Old Man ? "

" Oh, yes, it's a mule right enuff," said Old Man, as Miss Wilks, with a lightning-like *Et tu, Brute*, glance at him, resumed her morning feed. His heart smote him for his cruelty to this constant companion of his joys and sorrows, the unwearied guardian of his slumbers, the devoted termagant who never allowed anyone to bully him but herself. But he feared her moral supremacy, and to give in now would be fatal.

" I know exactly what you're thinking, but you can't fool me," Miss Wilks implied, as, resisting a strong desire to plant her hoofs in the grinning Ikey's stomach, she carelessly scratched her ear and went on with her meal.

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Old Man knew that Miss Wilks knew his thoughts, and though he began to feel the tacit reproach of her silence, the knowledge hurried him on to further cruelties. "It does seem a sort of mule, suthin' like ours," he repeated reflectively. "Wonder what it's doin' out here with no one to take care of it?"

Ikey bestowed another would-be indifferent glance on Miss Wilks. "Don't go too far, Old Man. Her temper's gittin' up. I know that look in her eye."

"She's too old to hurt anyone. 'Spect she's been turned out for wolf-meat," Old Man cruelly conjectured.

Miss Wilks looked at him again. Such a look! With difficulty, Old Man refrained from flinging his arm around her neck and making it up on the spot. Though she was ashamed to ask him for whisky, he would have given her all the whisky in the world had she really wanted it.

"There don't seem to be much chance of finding James," Ikey diplomatically threw in.

"Of course there ain't any chance of *our* doin' it," said Old Man aggrievedly. "Now, if we'd only got Miss Wilks here, we might ha' done suthin' to restore James to his sorrowful fam'ly. Where is Miss Wilks, any way?"

"'Spect she's gone off in a huff to Millette's bar and is hangin' round there for a free drink, Old Man. She'd be no good for trackin'. If she was to see a real wolf she'd run away from it."

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"I don't s'pose there is any wolves—not real wolves—round here now, Ikey. They've all gone way back of the mountains."

"You blind beavers! You blithering idiots! What, in the name of all that's ladylike, d'you mean by talking like that when there's a dead wolf right under your noses!" Miss Wilks made an end of her pretence of eating, came up, and indignantly showed them the dead wolf.

"What is it, Ikey?"

"Dunno. Maybe it's a dead dog, Old Man. Come and let's look for James. That fool of a Miss Wilks dunno where to find him."

With a shrill scream of hybrid imprecation, Miss Wilks swung round, and Ikey's rifle, which he had thrust in front of him to guard himself, was instantly kicked into space. Seeing that Ikey was too frightened to move, Miss Wilks screamed again, opened wide her jaws, and, her one ear erect, thundered down upon her terrified tormentor with glistening yellow teeth.

"Stop her, Old Man! Stop her! She'll have the innards out of me," cried Ikey.

Old Man flung himself in front of Ikey, opened wide his arms, and the next instant all Miss Wilks's anger vanished, she laid her huge head on his shoulder.

Old Man caressed the soft lips which nuzzled so gently against his ear. "I 'pologise, old lady, take it all back. We're dum well ashamed of

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ourselves. Ain't we, Ikey? And we're proud of you. Real proud!" He lifted up the shapeless mass from the ground. "Where'd you git this? Kicked him to smithereens! Lord, you don't say so! Finest young dog-wolf I've ever seed. Set to work to skin him, Ikey, afore he stiffens."

"Skin that, Old Man! Me skin that! You can't skin a jelly."

Miss Wilks bestowed upon him one look. "Better do it at once or I'll skin you," her manner implied.

Ikey reluctantly got out his knife. "All right, Old Man. All right. I was only funnin'. I did have a sort of a kind of idea as we'd set out to find James," he added, with a sarcastic glance at Miss Wilks.

Miss Wilks disdained to answer him, for her sorrow was still poignant. Had he not caused her to force herself upon Old Man!

"Better let up on him, old lady," gently suggested Old Man. "He wouldn't ha' done it if I hadn't made him. He's right about James, though. Where is the little shaver?"

Miss Wilks, who was gently nipping Old Man's right ear, reared up, pulled back a cedar branch, and disclosed James snugly asleep in a huge fork of the giant trunk. Then she let the branch swing back again and withered Ikey with a glance.

Ikey was overwhelmed. "My word, Old Man! I take it all back. James could never ha' climbed up there by himself. She must ha' put him there

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out of the way of the wolves." He pulled aside the branch and let in the light upon the slumbering occupant of this improvised cradle.

Aroused by the sound of voices below him, Master James Fiske woke up, stretched his pearly teeth in a yawn, and looked down with wondering eyes. "Where——? That you, Old Man? I remember now."

"Course it's me. Come down, James, and help Ikey skin thisyer friend of yours. Looks as if he'd bin tryin' to git a chance to skin you."

Old Man extended welcoming arms, and James unhesitatingly scrambled out on a branch and let himself drop into them.

"Now then, don't choke me, James Fiske, Esquire, 'only son of the Public Persecutin' attorney for Four Corners,' as *The Gazette* would say in its obituary notice if the wolves had found you and Miss Wilks hadn't. Now then, Jimmy, what have you got to say for yourself? Ikey's real mad at havin' to git up and come to look for you when he's scared out of his life at the sight of a wolf."

"Oh, I'm so hungry, Old Man. So hungry! Dad got mad drunk last night and chased me with a chopper, so I put out. Then I heard the wolves; and the first thing I knew, Miss Wilks came along, slung me up here and I went to sleep."

"Don't you cry, sonny. Don't you cry. Brave chaps like you don't make any fuss about such a

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little thing as that. That's all right. Course Miss Wilks come along. What she don't know about wolves ain't worth knowin'. I couldn't git on 'ithout her. She's more'n a mother to me 'cept when Ikey upsets her. I've got some bread and meat in my pocket for you, and you can eat while Ikey skins. Just find that rifle he *dropped* in the Bush a while back," Old Man added to Miss Wilks, with a tactful desire to ignore her recent outburst.

Miss Wilks dashed after the rifle, brought it back and laid it at Ikey's feet. The little fellow, half starved and with tear-grimed eyes, busily began to devour a huge chunk of bread and meat.

Old Man felt in his pistol pocket and produced a flask.

Miss Wilks licked her lips expectantly.

"I climb down." Old Man poured some whisky into the hollow of his hand. "There ain't nobody in Four Corners as deserves a drink better'n you do."

Miss Wilks lapped up the whisky with a pink, protruding tongue which was the one dainty thing about her.

"Now you help Ikey to skin thisyer wolf, James," Old Man paternally addressed his young friend. "Leastways, it was a wolf once. I dunno what it is now Wilkie's knocked all the stuffin' out of it. We'll come back for you presently."

Ikey paused in his sanguinary task. "Come back! Why, where are you goin', Old Man?"

"Can't a man take a stroll in the Bush with

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a lady friend to talk over your foolishness 'ithout you wantin' to come along too?" demanded Old Man, with well-feigned exasperation.

"Well, I'm d——d!" quoth Ikey.

The truly great are ever generous. With a magnanimous gesture, Miss Wilks allowed her tongue to stray over Ikey's red hair.

"Don't you proticerpate, Ikey. Don't you proticerpate," said Old Man, and, his arm around Miss Wilks's neck, strolled away into the Bush.

"Where are they going, Ikey dear?" artlessly demanded James, beginning anew on Ikey's bread and meat.

"Dunno, James," said Ikey shortly. "Dunno. Things is gittin' to be too many for me. Your dear poppa goes off on a jag, Miss Wilks loses her temper, Old Man fools her, and she fools Old Man. It's a darned uncumferable world and I'm left out in the cold. Jamesy, I'm the little lonesome worm as nobody loves."

"No, you're not, Ikey." James nestled up to him, his cherubic face aglow. "I love you. Have some of my bread and meat."

To please the little lad, Ikey took a mouthful.

"I'll buy you a silver rifle when I'm a man, Ikey." James finished his bread and meat and went to sleep again.

Ikey covered him up with his coat, laid him gently under the cedar, and fell to skinning the wolf.

CHAPTER III

A FAMILY ARRANGEMENT

IT was a somewhat tired and gory procession which entered Four Corners, Miss Wilks triumphantly leading the way with an air which implied that she had not only killed the wolf but skinned it as well. In the course of Ikey's labours, he had become almost as dirty as the defunct wolf, the more especially as he had taken the opportunity of indulging in a weird ceremony with the youthful James, which he called "blooding him"; that is to say, he had dabbed wolf's blood on James's innocent countenance as well as his own, and informed him that henceforward they were "blood brothers" of the wolf, an obligation which entailed their coming to one another's assistance should they at any time find themselves in difficulties. In their youthful days, Old Man had solemnly gone through these same mystic rites with Ikey, and the latter, recollecting them as well as he could, felt that James ought to be initiated into the glories of a hunter's career in the same manner. Though the ceremony was impressive,

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it had the drawback of being decidedly messy, and both James and Ikey looked as if they were returning from a battle-field.

Ikey carefully explained all this to James, who, so sleepy was he, did not understand it in the least, but took it for granted that his friend meant well. Though the sight of the blood gave the lad "qualms in the stummick," he gradually woke up a little, felt inordinately proud of this sanguinary ceremony, and already esteemed himself a mighty hunter before whom even mountain cats and wolves would flee away and be as naught. With a pleased smile on his blood-stained, cherubic countenance, he trotted along, holding fast to the wolf's tail as it drooped from Ikey's shoulders, and wondering whether it was nearly time for another breakfast.

Old Man leisurely brought up the rear of this awe-inspiring procession with a sardonic grin, which implied that by thus insisting on a public entry into Four Corners, Miss Wilks was carrying her love of ceremonial a little too far. He consoled himself, however, with the reflection that she was entitled to a certain amount of compensation to atone for the contumely with which she had been treated. All the time she was endeavouring to further the interests of her friends, they had jeered at and flouted her, although had it not been for her sagacious tracking of James, in all probability his disintegrated remains would

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long since have been carried away in sections by various wolves to the other side of the river.

As he walked along, Old Man was conscious that this night's work threatened to bring him further responsibilities in addition to the arduous one of looking after Ikey and Miss Wilks. It seemed as if the time had come when it might be necessary for him to take charge of James's future. James's present was unduly complicated by the drinking fits of his periodically penitent and bibulous parent, who, on those occasions, always evinced an insane desire to brain everything and everybody. Not even the temporary seclusion of the gaol, whither his friends sometimes conducted the Public Prosecutor in the hope that the contemplation of an unbroken heap of stones in the prison yard might cause him to consider his own ultimate fate, had the desired effect on Mr. Fiske, Senior. He simply regarded the stones as heaven-sent ammunition for the purpose of pelting anyone who dared to intrude upon his legal leisure ; and it was not until he had sobered off and paid an industrious habitant to replace the stones in their former position, that he realized the cruel kindness of his friends. Curiously enough, in his rare intervals of sobriety, Mr. Fiske's great anxiety was to provide adequately for James's future. He was passionately devoted to the little lad, and hoped that he would one day become a legal luminary of the highest magnitude.

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Mrs. Fiske at first contemplated her husband from afar, very much in the manner of an Eastern devotee who cannot make up his mind whether to smash or to worship his idol. After some years of this indecision, circumstances had reduced her to a condition of Oriental fatalism with regard to Mr. Fiske's erratic proceedings. Had she been versed in Eastern idiom, she would have said that "Allah was with him," a polite way of declaring a man's madness. But she was not versed in Oriental idiom, and was forced to relieve her overwrought feelings in the unconventional, yet equally forcible, language of Four Corners. On the occasion of Mr. Fiske's periodical outbreaks, when she saw him "weaving" his devious way homeward, she invariably proceeded to bar the door and go to bed, her reason for this method of dealing with the situation being accounted for by the fact that Mr. Fiske had once turned her out in her night-dress into the snow. From mere force of habit, she adopted the same tactics when her husband's periodical fits of inebriety happened at midsummer. Only when Mr. Fiske, shaky, blear-eyed and tremulous, the next morning approached their residence, and expressed surprise that the door had been barred against him on the previous evening, did she meekly apologize to him for her forgetfulness.

Husband and wife had long ago given up all attempts at either explanation or expostulation. By a fiction agreeable to the feelings of both,

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they accepted Mr. Fiske's erratic actions as the result of a supernal Power which was so busy in the direction and superintendence of more important matters that *It* had no time to regulate the Public Prosecutor's vagaries. Hence, when things went wrong, *It* was to blame and not Mr. Fiske, he being merely the conduit pipe through which *It's* actions reached Four Corners.

Although she was tenderly attached to James, and realized with a dull agony that his youthful career might be cut short at any moment by the parental chopper, Mrs. Fiske knew that she could do little or nothing to avert such a catastrophe, and that if it did happen, Mr. Fiske would be the first to protest in injured tones that *It* was again responsible for leading him into the commission of so unnatural and unpremeditated a crime. After some years of constant stress and strain, this knowledge induced Mrs. Fiske to seek out Old Man, who on several occasions had shielded her from her husband's unconscious violence, and make a certain proposition to him with regard to James's future. Her confidence in Old Man was so great that, had he told her to take the law and the chopper into her own hands and brain Mr. Fiske for the good of the community at large, she would unhesitatingly have done so, and pleaded what the lawyers call *force majeure* in extenuation of the act.

The remembrance of his interview with Mrs.

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Fiske, pervaded Old Man's visage with a certain thoughtfulness as the stately procession wound its way into Four Corners. "Does seem 'sif we wanted 'trumpets also and shawms,' though I dunno what a shawm is," he declared as Ikey turned round to see if he were bringing up the rear with an air of appropriate decorum.

"Sorter cow-horn, I reckon." Ikey picked up the footsore and weary James, whose sleep-laden, staggering gait marred the majestic effect of the cortège. "What are we to do with thisyer young shaver, Old Man? Take him home to his mother?"

James, sleepily realizing that his mother was a somewhat inefficient protection against Mr. Fiske, piped out that he preferred to stay with Old Man and Ikey. She had always told him to come to them when "Dad was raising Cain."

"That's all right, Sonny. Don't you take on." Old Man patted him encouragingly on the shoulder. "We've got your father safe in the hut, and I'm goin' to leave you with your mother. After I've had a 'heart-to-heart' talk with the Public Persecutor, maybe I'll fetch you away to live with us; and if he dares come near us, Miss Wilks 'ill eat him, bones and clothes and all."

Charmed by this prospect of immunity from being offered up as a sacrifice to some unknown deity, and accepting with the unhesitating faith of childhood any statement which these two demi-

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gods made to him, James went to sleep so soundly that he did not wake even when Ikey placed him in his mother's arms.

The unhappy woman, in spite of her would-be stoicism, pressed James tightly to her heart and covered him with kisses. "Poor little lamb! Poor little lamb! It might have been kinder, might have saved you a heap of trouble, to leave you to the wolves." Then her habitual reserve returned. Presently, as Old Man said nothing, she looked at him questioningly. "Tell me, Old Man. Is the boy safe here?"

"Safe? Safe as houses for a little while. Don't you worry about him," said Old Man, lying with an easy geniality born of long practice acquired in ministering to the necessities of his friends.

"And where's Fiske?"

"Fiske? Oh, I'd forgot about him for the moment. He's asleep in my bunk. You leave him to me. There ain't no call for you to worry yourself about him."

"S'posin' he gets up and comes home?"

"Oh, that's all right. The worst of his jag's over. He's bin at it for ten days or more," said Old Man reflectively. "A man can down a lot of whisky in ten days when he sticks to it. Then it downs him. If he breaks out agin, I'll take away his clothes and blister his feet. That 'ill give him time to think of the error of his ways."

"I wouldn't blister him unless you're really

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obliged to, Old Man. It might hurt the feelings of a tender-hearted man like him."

Old Man, unable to detect any lurking sarcasm in this extraordinary statement, although mentally characterizing it as "tough," accepted it as having been made in good faith. "It might," he said, in matter-of-fact tones. "I dunno as we'll have to do it this time, seein' as how Ikey slammed him through the floor. Sorter sobered him off, so to speak. I'll send Ikey back agin presently when you've tidied up James and got his clothes ready."

Mrs. Fiske gave one comprehensive glance at Old Man, then started back as Miss Wilks's huge head suddenly protruded itself over that worthy's shoulder. "What's that pesky mule doin' here, Old Man?"

Old Man proudly explained Miss Wilks's share in the proceedings, and Mrs. Fiske gratefully patted her velvet muzzle. "I take back all I've ever said against you," she explained to Miss Wilks. "Your ways ain't my ways, but I guess I've been prejudiced. Any time you like to look in here and regulate the Public Prosecutor a bit—you can use your teeth or your heels—I don't care which—both if you like—I'll be real pleased to see you."

Miss Wilks accepted this *amende* with a gracious condescension which more than ever confirmed Old Man's belief in her tact, and they went back to the hut, walking abreast lest a repetition of their former pomp should arouse the curiosity of certain

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Four Cornerites who were standing in their doorways, lazily wondering whether anything would ever happen to relieve the ennui engendered by agricultural pursuits. It was not yet warm enough to sit on Millette's verandah and "swop yarns." Besides, certain crops could not possibly be expected to grow unless the seed were previously put into the ground. These preliminary facts being taken for granted, the struggle between inclination and duty must be settled one way or the other without the intrusion of alien topics which might disastrously divert their thoughts.

Fully recognizing the complications of this annually recurring situation, Old Man, Ikey and Miss Wilks strolled leisurely back to the little hut on the river-bank, and found the door still fastened. Owing to the heavy snoring within, they concluded that Mr. Fiske was sleeping off the effects of his debauch.

Old Man paused thoughtfully upon the threshold. "Smell of that wolfskin might upset him a bit, Ikey. Jus' sling it into the shed and bring me a bucket of water. Then you and Miss Wilks can stop there whiles I wrestles with Fiske."

Mindful of a certain softening effect produced by James's arms confidently clinging round his neck, Ikey hesitated. "Let him down as gently as you can, Old Man. He can't help it. 'Sides, I must ha' slammed most of the teeth out of him."

Old Man nodded. "The things as you and he

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can't help, Ikey, 'ud fill up an Amalerkite with stock-in-trade for the rest of his life."

"Dunno any Amalerkites. Who's this un, any way?"

Old Man looked at Ikey in sorrowing amazement at his colossal ignorance. "You dunno who an Amalerkite is?"

"No, I dunno who an Amalerkite is, Old Man. D'you?"

"Not prezackly," Old Man reluctantly admitted; then seeing Ikey's triumphant grin, felt that he must make an effort to recover his lost prestige. "I ruther fancy it's a fam'ly Parson Black knows t'other side of the river, and don't think much of. He's always deludin' to 'em in his sermons. You did orter know you ain't got no locust standby to ask such dum ignorant questions."

"What sort of a locust's that, Old Man?"

"A kind of a brown and yaller insecck." Old Man wrathfully drew his bow at a venture.

"And what's his standby? Tell me what's his standby. Tell me that, if you can, Old Man."

"Durn you and your standby. There you've got me," Old Man admitted, as he cautiously opened the door of the hut and paused upon the threshold. "Why don't you go and git that bucket of water 'stead of showing your ignorance." His lofty air at once restored Ikey's tottering faith in his learning and research.

"All right, Old Man. Don't git on your ear.

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If you say it is so, why in course it is so. There ain't no argifyin' about it, though I do know most folks t'other side of the river, and ain't seen none of that fam'ly you mentioned jus' now. Reckon I'll go for that bucket of water ;" and Ikey, fearful of again provoking Old Man's anger, hastily disappeared in the direction of the shed.

Although, to adopt his own graphic phraseology, Old Man could "fool Ikey into the ground," he hesitated to encounter Miss Wilks's quizzical look. "I know it was playin' it lowdown on him," he said apologetically ; "but in course he ain't had our opportunities. Don't you git makin' faces at me, but go and keep him comp'ny in the wood-shed."

Miss Wilks graciously accepted Old Man's apology, and followed Ikey to the rear of the shed.

Old Man watched her disappear, then turned to go within. "Now," he said, "for the establishin' of diplermatic relations with ref'erence to the future of our young and intelligent feller-citizen, Master James Fiske." He went inside the hut and pulled the door to after him.

By the light of the little window, which only partially dissipated the gloom, he could dimly discern the sleeping figure of Mr. Fiske. One slender-fingered hand hung down outside the coverlet, and Old Man musingly regarded its frailty ; for it was the hand of a scholar and a gentleman, and, as such, instinctively inspired reverence. "To think," he said sadly, "d'reckly he gits full

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of whisky he's just a lowdown, tomahawk-throwin', chopper-chippin' Injun, with all his eddicashun gone to the winds. Though I hates to do it, I've got to wake him up. Miss Wilks 'ud have a fit if his father was to git little James in one of his mad sprees."

Ikey knocked cautiously at the door.

"Who's there?" Old Man roused himself from his abstracted reverie.

"Only me, Old Man." Ikey cautiously thrust his red head in at the door. "I've brought you the bucket of water. It's as cold as charity."

"Thankee. If he wakes up, he'll want some whisky in it. Now clear out agin. Theseyer purceedin's is goin' to be strictly 'tween him and me, as the little boy said when the schoolmaster asked him to come into the study. Git out, Ikey." Old Man, although hardly conscious of the fact himself, was moved by a certain chivalrous desire that no other eye should witness the Public Prosecutor's gradual awakenment to the knowledge of his own degradation.

After Ikey had withdrawn, he went up to the bunk and roused the sleeper by the simple yet effectual expedient of removing the blankets.

Mr. Fiske ceased to snore, wearily opened his eyes, and put both hands to his aching forehead. "Is the Court sitting yet? My, but I've a head on me! And a tongue like a blanket! What time is it?"

"'Bout ten o'clock."

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"Where am I? Who are you? Give me a drink, Millette. I say, give me——"

Old Man partly opened the door and let in the bright spring sunshine. With a groan, the Public Prosecutor turned his face to the wall.

"Don't do that," said Old Man sharply. "Better git up."

The unhappy man turned round, and, shading his eyes, groaned again with tender self-pity. "I've such a head on me that I cannot see anyone. Who are you? And where am I?"

"I'm Old Man Evans. You're in my hut."

"How did I get here? But I'm not fit to talk. Any whisky about you, Old Man?"

Old Man reluctantly produced a quart flask from the capacious pistol pocket in the back of his pants. "In course. I s'pose, though you don't deserve it, I'd better give you a hair of the dog as bit you."

"A hair! Only a hair! Give me the whole dog. If you knew what my head is like, Old Man!"

"I dunno; and I dunno as I wants to know. Git up."

"I can't. Where's the whisky, Old Man?"

Old Man reluctantly poured out three fingers of whisky.

"Better let me have the flask," suggested Mr. Fiske, as Old Man replaced it in his capacious trouser pocket. "You haven't given me enough to wet my throat."

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"It's all you're goin' to have," said Old Man determinedly. "Git up."

"I have already told you that I do not want to get up. I—I want to lie here and reflect."

Without wasting further words, Old Man put out his sinewy hand and dragged Mr. Fiske from the sheltering bunk. Before the Public Prosecutor could realize what had happened to him, his head was immersed in the bucket of icy river water—water chilled with the melted snows of a thousand Ottawa creeks and tributaries. When he was in danger of choking, and not till then, Old Man relaxed his iron grip.

Mr. Fiske's head emerged from the bucket, his lips sputtering impotent wrath, the lank hair usually parted in the centre now plastered down on each side of his face. Then he limply subsided on the edge of the bunk and buried his face in his hands.

"There! There!" Old Man was more moved by Fiske's wordless agony than he would have been by any outburst of violent language. "There! There! Don't take on so, Fiske. Maybe I was a bit harsh with you. Here's a towel to rub yourself dry agin."

The shivering wreck of a man shook his head. "No, Old Man. No. It's the old, old story. Will no one put a bullet through my head and end it all?"

"I reckon it's 'bout time as someone did suthin' for you." Old Man fetched up the log which did

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duty for a chair and seated himself upon it. "D'you mind baccy? Think you can put on a pipe?"

"No, Old Man, I can't smoke. My tongue's as rough as Esau's hand. I can't do anything except wish I'd never been born."

"Most of us says that some time or other," philosophically returned Old Man, prolonging the operation of slicing his tobacco in order to give the unhappy wretch before him time to recover himself. "Most of us says some time or other as our enemies have opened their mouths agin us, have hissed and gnashed their teeth at us, and have led us into darkness and not into light, and there ain't any health in us, 'specially if we takes too much whisky. Most of us says that, and then goes and does it agin soon as the jag's wore off."

"I know, Old Man. I know. You can't tell me anything about it that I haven't heard before."

"Oh, yes, I can, though." Old Man deliberately filled his pipe, rammed the tobacco home with a horny finger, and searched his pockets for a match. "Don't happen to have a match 'bout you?"

"Damn your matches!" said the other, with an outburst of weak petulance. "Of course I haven't a match about me. D'you take me for Wilson's store? Can't you see I haven't anything?"

"Pockets empty?"

The Public Prosecutor turned out his pockets

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" Did you ever know the end of one of these drunken
sprees when my pockets weren't empty ? "

" Can't say as I ever did." Old Man continued
to smoke with ominous calm.

" Well, why don't you say something ? " irritably
demanded the other. " Don't sit there like a
d——d statue of Melancholy smoking at Grief.
Say something, if it's only to tell me what a miser-
able hound I am."

" I've said most the same things every time
you've come here. I dunno as you'll care to hear
'em agin."

" I don't know that I do. My head! You
couldn't give me another drink, Old Man ? "

" I could, but I won't."

" I'd sell my soul for a drink."

" Arter last night, I dunno as your soul 'ill fetch
even that."

" How dare you speak to me in such a way!
You forget that I am a lawyer and a gentleman."

" I don't forgit it half as offen as you do."

" That's true. Yes, that's true enough, Old
Man. But you needn't have the gratuitous cruelty
to throw it in my teeth."

" Sometimes one has to be sorter cruel." Old
Man took his pipe out of his mouth for the purpose
of emphasizing this statement. " 'Tain't pleasant,
but it has to be done. I s'pose you ain't any kind
of idea what's happened this time ? "

" Not the slightest. Don't sit there asking me

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such stupid questions, Old Man, but give me another drink."

"Maybe I'll give you one when I've done with you and maybe I won't. Jus' listen to me a bit."

"I don't want to listen to you. I want to go home to my wife and child." He rose unsteadily to his feet and made a feeble attempt to walk to the door; then sank back on the bunk again.

"I dessay; but you ain't goin' till I've done with you."

"You'll repent this, Old Man. You'll be sorry when——"

Old Man's form swelled and dilated as he rose up and confronted Fiske. "Maybe I shall and maybe I shan't. D'you—I ask you agin—D'you know what happened last night? Don't sit there a-argifyin' and procrastitin', or you'll be sorry for it. D'you know what happened last night?"

"I have already told you that I do not. Why do you keep on asking me such stupid questions when my head's splitting?"

"Because you put out after James with a chopper and might have split his head open." Old Man paused as the stricken wretch before him turned white.

"Ye-es?"

"And this time you nearly got him."

"Nearly! Then?"

"Then he hid in the Bush, and——"

"And——?"

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“ —There was wolves about.”

Fiske started to his feet with a frenzied yell. “ You don’t mean to say that they—that they—— Oh, my God ! ”

“ Sit down agin.” Old Man forced the cowering wretch down on the edge of the bunk. “ It’s no thanks to you as they didn’t. But for God’s mercy and Miss Wilks (I don’t want to be sacrilegious, but I’m ’most inclined to put Miss Wilks first), they’d ha’ got the poor little feller sure enuff.”

“Then they—they didn’t get him? He—he’s safe?”

“ The mule yanked him up a tree, killed one wolf and druv off the others. Me and Ikey found her there guardin’ James.”

The miserable man, still holding his head in both hands, vainly endeavoured to follow the details of his friend’s narrative. “ But how did James get down again ? Where is he now ? ”

“ He fell asleep in the tree and Miss Wilks watched over him. It was one of them big cedars with a nat’ral sort of cradle in the middle.”

“ Ah, well, I’m glad he’s safe. Of course, I wouldn’t really have hurt a hair of his head. The next time I go to Ottawa, I’ll buy him a little gun for himself.”

“ I don’t think I’d trubble about that if I was you.”

“ Why not ? I must make some amends for my cruelty—my inhuman cruelty—towards him.”

Old Man asked what, at first sight, appeared to be a rather irrelevant question : “ Ever seen that shed at the back of the Court House ? ”

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"Of course. What has that to do with it?"

"Noticed anything curious-lookin' up on the rafters there, sort of c'lection of poles and scaffoldin' things?"

"No, I cannot say that I have."

"Well, I have. It's where the Sheriff keeps the County gallows."

"Still I do not follow you."

"Dessay. If you ain't careful, most of us 'ill be followin' you some of these days to that gallows arter it's bin put up in the gaol yard."

"What for? I do not understand you."

"Whaffor? For child murder! That's whaffor. But 'tain't no good talkin' to you. Not a mossle of good. I've done it over and over agin till I'm sick of it. Now, I'm goin' to take the law into my own hands."

"Do what you like, provided you let me go home and sleep this off. I need scarcely say how much I am indebted to you for your thoughtful care of myself and James."

"That's what you said last time."

"With infinite shame and penitence I say it again, Mr. Evans. Now, I really must go home."

"You can go home when we've had a clear understandin', not afore."

"What is there to discuss? I am perfectly aware of my own folly and wickedness. God knows how sorry I am."

"God may know; but that won't bring James

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back to life agin if you catch up with him in one of your mad fits."

"This is old ground. We have gone over it dozens of times before."

"I dessay. And some day, though nothin's happened yet, you'll go over it agin faster'n James will."

"I tell you, Old Man, that nothing will happen."

"And I tell you it will. It's bound to happen. James can't expect to have the luck all the time. This will happen: I'm goin' to take the lad and eddicate him. If his mother wants to see him, she can come to the hut to do so. You can come too—when you're sober. If you come when you're not sober and dare to lay a finger on James, I'll throw you into the river and take care you don't come out agin, or if you do come out, I'll let loose the mule on you, and you'll wish you'd stopped in the river."

"You know very little law if you think that you can take a man's child away from him because his father happens to drink occasionally." Mr. Fiske attempted to speak with a certain chilling dignity which never failed to be effective in Court.

On this occasion it wholly failed to impress Old Man, who got up and flung wide the door. "Now we've settled thisyer little matter," he said cheerfully, "I'll see you home."

"You dare not be guilty of such an outrage as to take my son from me!"

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"Oh, yes, I dare. And, remember, I've give Miss Wilks orders to savage you if she sees you near the lad when I ain't round."

"This is too much."

"'Tain't yet, but 'twill be if you ain't dum careful."

"But you are a poor man; I am a gentleman. How can the son of a gentleman be properly brought up in your beggarly hut!"

"That's my affair. You know me?"

"I have that misfortune, Mr. Evans."

"The misfortnit part of it comes 'bout even on both sides, I reckon. Guess I'll be able to drag James up somehow. It's better to do that'n have him murdered in one of your drunken fits. Here's t'other drink of whisky, and I'll help you home as soon as Ikey's back with the child. It 'ud scare James out of his wits to see you in thisyer state, so Ikey'd better take him round to the shed."

In rapid response to his ear-splitting whistle—a whistle which caused Mr. Fiske to shiver and wince—Ikey's flamboyant hair made sunshine through the shady hut.

"Jus' go up to his mother's and fetch James, and keep him in the shed till we've gone," said Old Man briefly. "Whistle when it's all right."

"You bet I'll whistle for all I'm worth, Old Man," and Ikey joyously departed on his mission.

"But——" spluttered Mr. Fiske.

"I dunno as I want to talk to you more'n I can

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help," said Old Man placidly. "You might rouse me, and I'm real ugly when I'm roused. I ain't scalped nobody since I had that little run round among the Plains Injuns two years ago."

"I can't see very much difference between them and you," angrily declared Mr. Fiske; then discovering that Old Man was utterly unmoved by the spectacle of his facile contrition, he once more threw himself upon the bunk, there to toss in agonized humiliation and self-reproach until a shrill whistle announced the arrival of James.

"Now," suggested Old Man with winning courtesy, "if you're still a little bit shaky on your legs—I think you was more'n a little last time—hold on to me, and I'll see you safely *past* Millette's bar."

"Your impertinent interference in my affairs is really too much, Mr. Evans. You do not in the least appear to realize that I have some important business to transact with Mr. Millette on my way home."

"So've I—just as important as yours. Reckon I'd better come too."

Seeing that Old Man was not to be shaken off, Mr. Fiske reluctantly accepted his arm, and tottered down the road, only to be received in stony silence by Mrs. Fiske, who made no allusion whatever to the events of the past night.

"Here he is, all clean and shiny. Told you I'd bring him back safe and sound," remarked Old Man,

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in a vain endeavour to lessen the pain of the meeting between husband and wife.

"Thank you for nothing, Old Man. I'd rather you'd left him in the river." Contrary to her usual practice of patient submission, Mrs. Fiske pushed her husband into his bedroom and turned the key on him. "Let him go to sleep again like the hog he is." She threw her apron over her head, and, dry-eyed, sat down beside the fire, holding an imaginary James to her aching breast.

"What d'you mean by locking me in here, woman?" the Public Prosecutor bawled through the keyhole.

Old Man put his mouth to the keyhole. "Stay put, or I'll come in and larrup the life out of you," he said forcibly, and, with a friendly nod to Mrs. Fiske, was about to hurry away, when she threw off her apron and laid her hand timidly upon his arm. "You'll be good to my little lad, Old Man? I can trust him with you? You will be good to him? He's all I have except—that," and she pointed to the bedroom with scathing contempt. "You'll be a real father to him? There's no one else in the world I'd trust him to 'cept you. You won't go back on him?"

"I'll be mother and father to him," declared Old Man, not daring to face the sorrow in her washed-out eyes—eyes faded with the grief and menace of a haunting fear lest her little son should one day be done to death by his father's hand.

CHAPTER IV

OLD MAN EXPLAINS

FOR a child of ten, James of the blue eyes and curly golden hair was unusually dreamy and backward in all that pertains to the practical things of life ; and in spite of Miss Wilks's vigorously expressed belief in him, evinced no juvenile ability whatever. The shadow which had hung over him for so many years was only partially lifted, for although the child loved his father, he never forgot the haunting terror of his midnight flight into the Bush. With the passing of the years, Mr. Fiske, in spite of occasional fits of maudlin penitence, displayed little intention to mend his ways. In moments of lachrymose and alcoholic confidence, he truthfully declared that they were past mending, and bitterly resented Mrs Fiske's attempts to keep him alive. " I am one of those unfortunate men," he would dreamily observe to the grinning habitants in Millette's bar—" I am one of those unfortunate men who have been denied by Fate the position to which they are justly entitled. In the circumstances, therefore,

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there is nothing left for me but a proud and stately acquiescence in that unhappy fortune which has dogged my footsteps ever since I was fool enough to leave Ottawa and set foot in this infernal hole—a hole where, in spite of the differences of upbringing and education, everyone has the consummate impudence to think himself my equal. Yes, three fingers, please, Millette,” and he would gracefully drain his glass to the premature destruction of those illiterates who presumed to question the actions of a man of genius.

Curiously enough, some instinct lurking in his drink-soddened brain prevented Mr. Fiske from attempting to molest James on the occasion of his periodical sprees. It was a bitter blow to his pride that the little lad had been taken away from him. The only thing which prevented him from starting legal proceedings to recover the custody of the boy was the conviction that Old Man would promptly keep his word, and throw him into the river at the first hint of such a step. Besides, he had a horrible fear, retained by him even on the verge of delirium tremens, that Miss Wilks would one day tear him limb from limb. As soon as he saw her coming (she perambulated the main street of Four Corners whenever she felt inclined to show herself on that fashionable promenade), he turned into the nearest store and waited until she had passed. If he were not in a condition to walk, he fell on all fours and crept into Wilson’s buggy shed.

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When no such resource was open to him, and a meeting became inevitable, he shuffled by Miss Wilks with averted head, as though conscious of the baleful regard of the mule's one useful eye. There seemed to him to be so intimate a connection between the expression of that eye and the beautifully-shaped heels which she used with such elegant precision.

Ostensibly strolling round Four Corners for purposes of social relaxation, such as worrying Millette's billy-goat or attacking some forward habitant pony stallion which presumed to shriek a friendly greeting to her, Miss Wilks was seldom far away from James in his play hours, although she invariably affected to be unconscious of his presence. When a playmate became too vigorous, and handled James with more roughness than the mule considered strictly necessary, she strolled by, fixed her glittering eye on the delinquent, and intimated that matters had gone quite far enough. If, however, the offender refused to accept the hint, she took him by the slack of his pants and carried him up and down until she felt that he had been sufficiently punished by being thus exposed to public derision. This duty accomplished, the mule invariably returned to an abstracted contemplation of the surrounding scenery until her services were once more required.

When Mrs. Fiske wanted to see James, she came

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down to the cabin, investigated the state of his linen, mended his socks, and made him repeat after her "The Whole Duty of Man." The intercourse between father and son, in spite of the strong affection between them, was more limited.

"Morning, James"—"Morning, Dad," was all that they said on meeting, for each felt that safety lay in the rigid observance of the conditions indicated by Old Man. That worthy seldom made arbitrary regulations of any kind, but when he did so he insisted on their being carried out.

Mr. Fiske, therefore, shivering at the thought of Old Man's expressed determination to duck him in the river should he break their compact by molesting James (he had all the drunkard's traditional dislike for cold water), contented himself with wistfully regarding him as the lad went past the old schoolhouse on the river-bank, where pretty Cynthia Hannum ruled her small charges with a would-be sternness which sat ill upon her lovely face. The only exception made by her was when James of the winning countenance and elegant figure, came down the crazy sidewalk to pay her an unofficial visit at the tin-roofed schoolhouse. In a rare fit of childish inspiration, James had once attempted some halting verses "To Cynthia," verses which Miss Hannum tenderly cherished. Rumour had it that she was the victim of a passion for Old Man—a passion which Miss Wilks's tireless vigilance prevented from ever coming to a head.

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The mule had a theory in her own mind that Old Man could not get on without her, and that he was far too young and inexperienced to undertake the responsibilities of matrimony. In some mysterious manner, she contrived to convey this to her master, and he, feeling that there was a certain amount of truth in it, and valuing her society almost as much as he did Ikey's, continued to drift happily along in a state of single-blessedness.

Miss Hannum was also aware of Miss Wilks's unspoken compact with Old Man. Hence, when she saw the mule in the distance, Cynthia lifted her dainty skirts and crossed to the other side of the road with an expression of ladylike dislike. Coming from anyone else, this would have been resented by Miss Wilks in her most militant and convincing manner ; but as she knew that Old Man was on the friendliest of terms with the schoolmistress, the mule invariably pretended to be surveying the landscape upon the other side of the river and passed on in silence.

But there was something in the unnaturally bright colour of the beautiful schoolmistress's cheeks, her fragile, weary air, which betokened that consumption had already marked her for its own ; and Miss Wilks, after receiving the strongest of hints from Old Man that if she persisted in her aloof manner toward the stricken girl there would be trouble between them, repented of her ill-nature. It was not in the mule's nature to do things by

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halves. Conscious of Old Man's unspoken approval, she, somewhat coyly at first, proceeded to make friends with the delicate girl, and do her best to banish any coldness which had arisen between them. She seemed to know instinctively that there was no real cause for jealousy, but rather the need of a tender compassion which might help to smooth the path of this fair flower to its untimely grave.

Cynthia, although appreciating the mule's repentance, did not grasp the real reason for it. She knew, however, that she was very ill, that daily tasks which had once been easy to her were now become a burden. She was grateful for the mule's change of attitude, for Old Man and Ikey's constant yet unobtrusive attempts to help her in all the little things of life. She felt, however, that there was something wrong with her, that her steps were daily becoming more feeble, and she was glad to have Old Man's strong arm to lean upon. His devotion to James touched the failing schoolmistress. It seemed to her that a man who could thus burden himself with the care of a little child, would some day exhibit an even greater tenderness to the woman he loved.

On several occasions, Cynthia, therefore, had pointed out to Old Man that James ought to begin his educational career under her care at the village school. Up to this time his visits to her had been purely ceremonial and unconnected with learning.

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She loved to see him, partly for his own, but principally for Old Man's sake.

Moved by Cynthia's repeated solicitations, and after having given due consideration to the subject, Old Man sought out his youthful charge one fine spring morning to take him to school. "You've got to do it, James," he explained. "As Parson Black says, 'Eddicashun is the crown of Civilizashun'; and, whether you likes it or not, you've got to come along and be crowned. You don't want Ikey crowin' over you all the time as he can spell better'n you can."

James, with a fine fluency born of his legal parentage, vainly protested that he was no hog on the subject of education, and did not see any necessity for wasting his time in the acquirement of useless learning just as the fishing began to be in its prime. Besides, he wouldn't know what to do with a silly thing like a crown if he had one.

Old Man, caught for the moment by this specious argument, which chimed in so well with his own inclination, wavered, then grinned broadly at Ikey, and informed James that he must put on his best clothes and prepare to tread the painful path which would ultimately lead to his worldly advancement.

"I don't want any worldly advancement, but I'll go if Ikey and Miss Wilks will go with me," declared James with unusual obstinacy. "They need to be crowned quite as much as I do, and more."

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The thought of Ikey struggling with an educational primer filled Old Man with unholy mirth, and the youthful objector to education began to think his cause was gained. Ikey, equally convinced, broke into hilarious laughter, but speedily checked it when the expression on Old Man's face made him realize that it was premature.

"What ha' you got to say about it?" Old Man asked Miss Wilks, as the mule put her head into the hut and remained a silent though interested spectator of the controversy.

"What have I got to say about it? Oh, nothing," Miss Wilks implied. "If anyone wants me to go to school, of course I'll go. One's never too old to learn. Besides, I might be able to give them one or two pointers on the subject of education as applied to outdoor sports."

"That settles it," Old Man hastily declared, in order to avoid further discussion. "If a poor dum' creature like Miss Wilks don't see no dejection to it, I don't see any neither. Put on your best togs, James, and we'll start right away."

"There aren't any clean towels," objected James, in the desperate hope of gaining time for some further excuse.

"What d'you want towels for?" queried Old Man, inwardly amused by the ingenuity of his young friend. "Ain't there plenty of soap and a bucket in the shed?"

"How am I to dry myself without towels?"

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tearfully inquired James. "I can't go to school all over soap. Miss Hannum wouldn't like to kiss me if I'm all over soap."

"She ain't goin' to kiss you in school hours."

"Why not?"

"It's agin the reggerlations. You take a roll in the sand on the river-shore same as Miss Wilks. She never forgits her absolutions. Now, Ikey, come on, or you'll be thinking of some other dodgasted trick to git James out of this."

"I ain't thought of nothin' 'cept I've got an almighty big hole in the back of my best pants," weakly declared Ikey, to whom James's will was law. "I can't show myself down in that school-house 'ithout the boys tryin' to make the holes bigger and puttin' me to public contumerly."

"You and your 'public contumerly!' If your pants was all holes, you'd have to come when I gives the word." Old Man began to be thoroughly roused by the evident disinclination of his friends and subjects to partake of the benefits of education. It seemed to him to cast an unwarranted slight on his own use of striking expressions.

"So they are mostly," Ikey temporized, and, after further discussion, it was "carried yuanimously" that Ikey and Miss Wilks should accompany James to the school, there to remain outside or within easy call. Cynthia, who happened to be passing at the time, suggested this way out of the difficulty, on the ground that there was no class-

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room sufficiently large enough to accommodate Miss Wilks, and that her presence might distract the attention of the children when they had finished the demolition of Ikey's pants.

Once he had made the plunge, James, assisted by Ikey and Miss Wilks, overcame his former dullness, proved himself to be an apt pupil, and even, as the years went by, acquired a great reputation for readiness in debate and the flowery and impressive manner in which he recited "The boy stood on the burning deck." When he had a new poem to learn, he always discussed it with Old Man after the day's work was over; but in spite of his eloquence, he could never make that worthy look upon "Casabianca" as other than a "dum fool" for not following the excellent example of his friends in clearing out from the doomed ship. "Must ha' bin a nat'ral born fool," was Old Man's invariable comment. "It's all right to obey orders, but when one's goin' to be roasted alive for not gittin' a move on, I don't see no sense in it."

Old Man, freed from the care of James in the daytime, turned his attention to agricultural pursuits, and congratulated himself that, for once, Fate had "let up on him." Under Cynthia's gentle care, James progressed satisfactorily, both physically and mentally; his father was steadily and assiduously drinking himself to death, a consummation which everyone in Four Corners awaited

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with undisguised impatience, and there was no cloud upon the horizon to mar Old Man's peaceful contemplation of sunset and evening star as he sat smoking his pipe on the wharf and listened to the lapping of the Ottawa's amber flood against the wooden piers. Then James suddenly fell in love with the whole-hearted passion of a man of sixteen summers and refused to take any interest in his food.

It was Ikey who called Old Man's attention to this momentous fact. Up to the present, James had never missed a meal; in fact, he generally clamoured for food long before the proper times. Now he was more than irregular—shunned the company of his friends, and “put out” for the Bush, there to wander and carve the name of his beloved upon birch-bark after the immemorial manner of all true lovers. He became thin, began to grow too much for his strength, and occasioned an unconscious restraint in the social atmosphere of the cabin when he could be persuaded to pretend to take a meal there.

On this particular evening, Ikey, bitterly wounded by James's lack of inclination for his society, humped himself on a log, and sat moodily waiting the errant one's return. “Don't seem 'sif I was no dum use to d——d nobody,” he forcibly declared, expectorating at an intrusive potato-bug with an accuracy of aim which speedily sent the unfortunate insect to the Land of the Ponemah.

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"Gently, Ikey. Gently. What's the matter? What's that pore insecck done to you?" Old Man seemed surprised at this unwonted outburst from the patient Ikey.

"James is the matter. I'd like to skin him," said Ikey briefly, and looked round to repeat his slaughter of the innocents.

"I wouldn't skin James if I was you," Old Man declared, shifting his log a little nearer to Ikey's.

"Why not, Old Man? He did orter be skinned givin' himself airs and goin' off like this arter all we've done for him."

"No, I wouldn't skin him if I was you," repeated Old Man. "'Twouldn't be the square thing to do. Sorter givin' yourself airs, 'sif you knew better'n Providence how many skins he oughter have. The Injuns has a kind of idea, if you don't run square all your life, you won't go to the Happy Huntin' Grounds but the Great Manitou 'ill put you back to begin agin as a tater-bug, or a ground-hog, and make you work your way up."

"Guess I've saved that tater-bug a lot of trubble workin' his way up, Old Man. There ain't much work left in him."

"You don't help him much by spittin' at him. He'll only have to git hatched out once more and go at it all over agin."

"I dunno as I wants to help him." Ikey, with difficulty, refrained from the extinction of another potato-bug, which confidently attempted to climb

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into his boot. "Maybe, thisyer feller's somebody I knew when he was alive, and I ought to be real glad to git another go at him."

"Maybe it's somebody as you once—loved!"

"Gosh! I never thought of that, Old Man. You don't say so! You're a wunnerful man to think."

"I am. Oh, I am! I'm a whale at thinkin'." Old Man tenderly picked up the pretty but destructive little insect and put it on a shrub outside the hut. "Good luck to you, whoever you are."

"Now you're overdoin' it, Old Man—overdoin' it. Wonder you didn't offer it a drink."

Old Man laid one hand on Ikey's shoulder. "Fact is, we're gittin' soft, Ikey—kinder soft; that's what's the matter with us. We've got laid up on the shelf and did orter put out and see the world agin."

"Ain't Four Corners big enuff for you, Old Man? Most Four Cornerites thinks as it's the yuniverse, plum sure."

"They do, dum 'em," absently returned Old Man. "That's what's the trubble with 'em. If they thought the place was smaller, they might git bigger themselves." He paced restlessly about the floor of the little hut and tenderly tidied up James's belongings. Then he sat down again with a relieved air, rested his head on his hands, and let the pipe fall from his lips.

Ikey caught it as it fell, and was alarmed at this

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exhibition of heedlessness on the part of Old Man, for the pipe was one of his most cherished possessions, a pipe which had been given him by a "blood brother" among the Sioux. "You ain't well, Old Man," he said anxiously. "You ain't well. I knew as there was suthin' wrong with you when you didn't down your whisky last night."

Old Man, wrestling with a thousand opposite attractions and desires, mournfully shook his head. "I know I ain't. 'Member Yellow Feather's squaw?" he asked suddenly.

"That copper-coloured bit of impidence as allers makes eyes at you when she comes in with baskets to sell?"

Old Man nodded. "Sure."

"She ain't bin here for months."

"I know; and I wants to see her," Old Man shamelessly declared.

"Then I'm disappointed in you, Old Man. Disappointed! Nice goin's-on, when you're s'posed to be Parson Black's right hand. Never thought, consid'rin' the way I've trained you, as you'd want to take up with a squaw, a brazen hussy like that, though she's real pretty to look at, and did nurse you when you was down with fever way back of the mountains. 'Sides, what 'ill James say when he hears 'bout it? He'll go and tell Cynthia and Parson Black, and they'll come and 'sit' on you, Old Man, and raise hell. What'll I say to my friends?"

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"I dunno and I don't care. Say what you dum please."

"And Parson Black? He's a holy terror when he starts on a man."

"Oh, he'll say :

'A charge I has to keep,
A race to multiply.'"

"Then if you've got a charge to keep, why don't you keep it and not go hankerin' arter squaws? 'Sides, Yellow Feather carries a tomahawk. For two pins, he'd knock your brains out."

"I know, Ikey, I know; but I ain't goin' to give him two pins to knock my brains out. I wants 'em myself;" and Old Man again relapsed into earnest thought as he felt round for his pipe.

Ikey filled the pipe with practised ease, and slid it into his hand, at the same time endeavouring to keep from Old Man the knowledge of what a grievous blow it was to him that his idol should even for a moment contemplate an alliance, matrimonial or otherwise, with this dusky Venus, Yellow Feather's squaw.

"That's the wust of it," Old Man said, discontentedly sucking away at his pipe. "The Gov'nment can't git Yellow Feather on to a Reservation; he's allers movin' camp to dodge 'em; and they don't want to send an army arter him. Yet, I've got to find him somehow."

Ikey laid a determined hand on Old Man's

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shoulder and looked him squarely in the face. "Drop it, Old Man. Drop it. You'll only git yourself into trubble with that cuss Yellow Feather. He's an ugly devil when his dander's riz."

"I know, Ikey, I know. You can't tell me nothin' as I don't know 'bout him." Old Man's good-humour suddenly returned as he looked quizzically up into the troubled countenance of his friend. "Out with it, you slab-sided innercent. What's worryin' you?"

"You are. Old Man, I don't hold with thisyer takin' up with Injun squaws as has got husbands of their own. When the time does come for us to be pyrogenitors, let's——" He hesitated.

"Well?"

Ikey made the etymological effort of a lifetime. "Let's pyrogenitate with our own kind."

Had Old Man been intimately acquainted with the works of "the German poet," "Ze great Williams," he would have dramatically asked: "Sits the wind in that quarter?" As his knowledge of the dramatist's plays was of the flimsiest character, he simply stared at Ikey, threw himself back against the wall, and grinned all over. "You dum fool," he said. "You pick'rel-headed, flopped-dum fool!"

Ikey was offended, showed it plainly, yet could think of no further argument to advance against Old Man's rushing into what he called "copper-coloured" destruction. "There's James to think

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about," he feebly declared, with a reproachful look at his mentor. "You dussent take up with that squaw and contamernate the morals of James."

"Who's thinkin' of contamernatin' the morals of James, or anybody's else's morals, you red-headed, tomarker-coloured outrage?" said Old Man, with a dexterous movement regaining his equilibrium on the log and again grinning broadly. "How was I to know what you'd got into that red head of yours? Of all the dum fools I ever see, Ikey, you're the dumdest."

"I don't care. You're tryin' to carry it off with a fine flow of langwidge, but if you spoke as fine as the Angel Gabriel, it wouldn't make no diff'rence. It's enuff to strike anyone dum', Old Man, the way you talks of carryin' on with Pahnewuska."

"Carryin' on with who? That her name?" inquired Old Man, with a calculated indifference which showed an artfully suppressed desire to conceal his joy at hearing the name of the dusky belle. "Come to think of it, you wide-mouthed old Pharisee, how d'you git to know her name?"

"Sorter picked it up, Old Man. Sorter picked it up when you was ill with the fever and she come to our camp," Ikey retorted in some confusion at thus having the tables turned on him.

"Sure that's her name?"

"Sure? Course it is. Pah-ne-wus-ka. It means 'Flower of Summer.' Why, you told it to me yourself last Fall."

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"So I did. Funny I should ha' forgot to remember I remembered it."

"Dum funny! You did orter be ashamed of yourself, Old Man. I'm sorry for any Elders as has the disciplinin' of you."

"So am I—sorry for the Elders. So you think—you really think, Ikey—I'm in love with Pahnewuska just acause she nursed me for a day or two?"

"'Twas over a fortnight. And it does look like it, Old Man, don't it?"

"Don't care what it looks like, you purple idgeot, you gutter-rakin' muckrake, you downside-up and upside-down son of a gun, allers ready to b'lieve the wust of your friends. I wants to know whether you really thinks it."

"Go on. Let yourself go, Old Man. You'll be callin' me names in a minnit. 'Tain't like you, I know, to go a-worshippin' copper-coloured imidges, though they are hansum. Maybe there's a lot to be said for you, if one only knew what it was. I don't mind admittin' you've a takin' way with wimmen, Old Man, only you needn't take up with copper-coloured ones when there's plenty of white girls as 'ud give their skin to git you."

"Don't procrastitute, Ikey."

"Never did no such a thing in my life, Old Man. I has my faults, but that ain't one of 'em."

"Ain't it? I ruther thought it was." Then, seeing Ikey's distress, Old Man condescended to

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explain. "You wonder why I've bin so thick with Pahnewuska?"

"So does Parson Black," said Ikey, goaded beyond endurance at Old Man's indifferent reception of his well-meant advice. "He says he did have hopes of you bein' a brand snatched from the burnin'; but if he sees you carryin'-on with that copper-coloured Pahnewuska, you can dum well burn, and he'll fill up the fire with kerosene and tracts to keep it goin'."

"Will he now, bless his dear innercent old heart!"

"Yes, he will, Old Man, and serve you dum well right, and I'll hand him the matches. I've done all I can to bring you up proper, but I washes my hands of you. You and James atween you worries the life out of me, and I've had enuff of it. So long." Ikey got up.

"Where you goin' off on your hind legs like that, Ikey?"

"I'm goin' down to Millette's bar. That's where I'm goin'; and it don't matter to you a curse whether I'm goin' on my hind legs or my front ones. I'm goin' to stay there all night."

"Whaffor?"

"You know whaffor, Old Man. I'm goin', as Parson Black says, to 'look upon the wine-cup when it's red,' or pink, or blue, or yaller, or purple, or piebald, or green, or butternut. S'long as it ain't copper-coloured, I don't care what colour

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it is. You'd better come and pay my fine in the mornin', when the Sheriff gits hold of me."

He was about to fling out of the hut in despairing misery at the unlooked-for change which had come over his friends, when Old Man softly called him back. "You purple idgeot, Ikey, you tinpot little tin image on wheels! Couldn't you see as I was gittin' a rise out of you and foolin' you all the time?"

"No, I couldn't, Old Man." But Ikey halted irresolutely on the threshold, a smile hovering faintly about his distressed lips. "'Tain't right of you, Old Man. 'Tain't right."

"Sit down, Ikey. Sit down. I ain't no more in love with Pahnewuska'n you are. Sit down and we'll have a Council of War for the circumnavigatin' of Yellow Feather."

"What d'you want to circum—circumnavigate him for! He ain't done nothin' to you. You circumnavigate the Ottawa River, and set an example to me and James; that's the only kind of sailin' as you're good for, Old Man, and don't you forgit it."

"Sit down, Ikey. We'll 'tend to James d'reckly; but first"—Old Man's tone suddenly changed from gay to grave—"we've got to 'tend to the Schoolmistress."

"What's the matter with her, Old Man?" asked the bewildered Ikey. "I ain't noticed no diff'rence. She's lookin' just as peaked as usual. What's wrong with her?"

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"She's dyin'; that's what's wrong with her," said Old Man bitterly. "Dyin' by inches. The most beautiful girl God A'mighty ever made is dyin' by inches."

"What's that got——?"

"Shut up! You wonder why I spent so much time comprommissin' myself in the face of Parson Black and all Four Cornerites a-talkin' to that pretty squaw?"

Ikey nodded.

"Well, I'll tell you. One day, Pahnewuska see me lookin' at the Schoolmistress as she went by and got angry."

"Why?"

"Ask me suthin' easier. I dunno why. But she got real mad. 'Him heap soon die,' she said. 'Injun squaw ill like that no die. Find plant way back mountains. Git heap well.'"

A light began to break in on Ikey's confused understanding.

"I've seen folks die suddenly," Old Man continued, his eyes fixed upon the past. "I've seen 'em mauled by bears and wiped out in taverns and scalped—hurts a good deal when a man ain't quite dead afore he's scalped—but I ain't never afore seen a flower perish and fade away 'sif sunshine couldn't warm it, air nourish it, nor God A'mighty's awful hand succour it. You don't often see me down—not dumped down in a heap, so to speak, as I am now."

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" I know, Old Man. I know."

" Well, I'm down now. That girl's *got* to be saved. Why, if she was to die, the birds wouldn't sing ; there wouldn't be no more sunshine in the yuniverse."

" Can't she go to a doctor ? "

" Go to a doctor ! I tell you the doctors can't do nothin' for her. They've had millions and millions of cases of consumption since the White Man settled in Canada, but they can't cure 'em. They pretends to, and lets 'em linger on till they die. Then they say they knew it from the first, but didn't like to say so. Nobody can do nothin' for Cynthia Hannum 'cept me and Pahnewuska. But I'll do it. You know me, Ikey. I'll do it or——"

" You needn't shout, Old Man. I take back all I said 'bout your carryin's-on with Pahnewuska. We've got to find her and make her tell us what plant it is and how we're to git hold of it."

" I know, Ikey, I know. The thing is how are we goin' to make her tell if we do git hold of her." Old Man, his emotion vanishing as suddenly as it had arisen, nodded. " Now I've told you 'bout this Herb of Healin'," he said, cheerfully knocking the ashes of his pipe against his boot, " we'll put out for a stroll and see what James is up to. I've bin neglectin' James of late, so to speak, and it's time I looked arter him a bit, me bein' resonserable for him to his mother. Now he's risin' seventeen, he's gittin' all sorts of notions in that brainy head of his. But he's down, too."

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" I know, Old Man, I know. Seems to me, though, as we ain't got no right to interfere in his private affairs. He ain't took us *publicly* into his confidence, Old Man. 'Sides, he's sixteen and a bit."

" If James ain't took us into his confidence, Ikey, that's his look out. We'll take ourselves into his confidence permiskuslike whether he likes it or not ; it's all for his good. All for his good, as Parson Black says, when he tells of a man named Job and his three friends."

" Dunno any of 'em, Old Man. Some of that Amalerkite lot ? "

" Course you don't know any of 'em. 'Cordin' to Parson Black, thisyer Job had heaps of trubble, and didn't make any fuss 'bout it, neither, 'cause he thought the A'mighty was doin' it for his good and the A'mighty knew what was best. He'd ha' come out of it 'ithout a stain on his character if it hadn't been for those dum friends who was so sure he did orter be thankful for his boils and cinder-heaps and things. Thankful ! "

" Well, what did thisyer Job do to 'em, Old Man ? "

" Didn't do nothin' to 'em, Ikey. That's where he slipped up and made a big mistake. He scraped himself 'stead of scrapin' them friends—with an axe, Ikey. At last he did git mad, and was goin' for 'em all of a heap, when it struck him as t'other trials were only prelimnary, so to speak, and his friends was the real trial. See ? "

OLD MAN EXPLAINS

"I see, Old Man. You means as friends as don't b'lieve in you are more trial'n they're worth, and——"

"Prezackly. And the poor old parson's in hot water, too. He's dyin' by inches and no herb of healin' can save him. Arter we've tended to James, we'll do our best to give him a good send-off to the Happy Huntin' Grounds. You did orter have more faith in me, Ikey. I ain't never bin back on you yet."

"I'm sorry, Old Man. I allers was a bit of a jay. Real sorry."

"You did orter be, that's a fac'. In His wisdom, the A'mighty made only one friend for me, 'stead of three, so I can stand it a heap better and three times as long as Job could. And don't mind my lettin' fly at you like that, Ikey. I wouldn't ha' done it only I was worried—real worried. Cynthia's gittin' worse day by day, and ev'ry time I looks at them big pleadin' eyes of hers, it's like some poor dumb animal askin' to be put out of its pain. But I will save her, though. I will. I—— There! There! I've got it off my chest, and I'm all the better for it. You're a real comfort in your way, Ikey, though you ain't much to look at, and folks will make jokes 'bout warmin' their hands at your hair. Come on and help me to hunt up James. Where did you see him last?"

"Down on the river-shore," Ikey reluctantly admitted, for he felt himself a traitor to James, who had few secrets from him.

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"Come on, then." Old Man flung his arm round Ikey's neck after the manner of their happy boyhood. "Where's that durned old mule? She ought to be in thisyer fam'ly party."

"You bet she's in it, too, Old Man," said Ikey joyously, as his troubles melted away into thin air. "She and James is thick as thieves. You bet she's in it up to her neck."

"Is she now, the old tergiversator."

"Don't call her that, Old Man. Don't call her that. Sounds awful! 'Sides, I don't b'lieve as even the Recordin' Angel could spell it."

Old Man's only answer to this impassioned appeal was to put his arm in Ikey's and drag him out of the hut. "Come on, or I'll call you suthin' worse. I ain't forgot that long word you let fly at me jus' now. Where'd you git it, Ikey?"

"Jus' dreamed it, Old Man. Jus' dreamed it. Call me anything you like, s'long's we're friends agin."

Old Man halted in amazement. "What's the matter with you now? Friends! Course we're friends! We've never bin anything else, you old tergiv——"

But Ikey clapped a huge hand over Old Man's mouth, and headed him away in the direction of the river-shore, where Miss Wilks could be dimly discerned keeping her sentinel watch over earth and air and sky and—James!

CHAPTER V

LELOTA

FOR some time the mule remained motionless, her one ear bent slightly forward, as if to catch every familiar sound of the night, from the soft lapping of the waters against the boulders half embedded in the sand to the gentle whispering of the wind amid the reeds and the cries of half-awakened wildfowl. When the maniacal laughter of a loon rang shrilly out on the night air, she flapped her tail uneasily and put her ear back as if conscious that the bird was alarmed by the approach of someone.

"That dum loon's let on to her as someone's comin'," whispered Ikey disappointedly. "I was hopin' to take her by s'prise, Old Man. 'Tain't offen we gits a chance, and I wanted to make the most of it."

"I reckon," said Old Man briefly, "when you catch Miss Wilks asleep, it 'ill be the sleep as knows no wakin'. No, no. She's only playin' possum, and pretendin' as she don't hear us. She's never forgot how we treated her over that wolf bus'ness,

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and ain't goin' to give herself away. No, sir. She'll let us git close up to her 'ithout sayin' a word."

As if to verify Old Man's prediction, Miss Wilks struck a picturesque attitude, and awaited their approach with a naturalness which was a little overdone.

"Now then, you disreperable old outrage, what are you about, aidin' and abettin' James in his skand'lus outgoin's and incomin's?" Old Man asked the mule, as she received them with a sentimental air which contrasted oddly with her ungainly form. "I s'pose as you'll go on dissemblin' and makin' b'lieve as you were waitin' for us, 'stead of goin' off on your own, for all you're wuth and a good deal over?"

Miss Wilks relaxed her attitude in a way which implied that its statuesque beauty was utterly wasted, and swung her head on Old Man's shoulder with an affectionate hint that he had far better remain where he was, without seeking to pry into matters which did not really concern him.

Old Man, in spite of his incredulity, became a little uneasy at her sudden solicitude, for the mule loved a "scrap," and when life in Four Corners became too monotonous, usually did her best to promote one. But on this occasion, in spite of her sentimental attitude, she was manifestly ill at ease.

"What's she makin' all thisyer fuss about, Ikey?" Old Man carefully withdrew his shoulder

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from sustaining the heavy burden of Miss Wilks's head.

"Dunno, Old Man. Dunno; and it's no use askin' her. Better tell her to lead the way to what she has on her mind. Wonder whether she's upset 'cause you ain't got your gun with you?"

"Maybe," said Old Man doubtfully. "Maybe. Gin'rally speakin', she ain't so dum partickler. If she can only git within range, she seems to think her heels wuth all the guns in creation."

"Better let her go ahead, Old Man. Better let her go ahead. Then we'll find out what she's got on her mind. Reckon she knows a darned sight more about James'n we do. They're allers together, doin' their best to make things uncumferable for their neighbours."

There being nothing else to be done, although Old Man shrewdly surmised that Ikey knew more of James's affairs than he felt himself at liberty to divulge, he signalled to Miss Wilks to lead the way.

After casting another reproachful glance at Old Man, implying plainer than words that he could never take a hint, the mule reluctantly did so, shambling along between the rough boulders which fringed the shore, and dodging the willow boughs overhanging the water with a readiness which proved that she had often been over the same ground. With head hanging low, her nose almost touching the earth, she shuffled on until a bend

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in the river hid the twinkling lights of the long wharf which ran out into the bay. Soon the willows gave place to a dense cedar growth almost down to the water's edge. The boulders disappeared. Between the cedars and the water was a level stretch of yellow sand.

Old Man drew off his mocassins and motioned to Ikey to do the same. "Reckon we'd better take to the water. 'Tain't too cold. There's plenty of room for Miss Wilks to git along, and it 'ill be easier goin' for us."

"You bet, Old Man. I ain't had a paddle for ages. Swimmin' time 'ill soon be along. We're most abreast of Peter Lunn's. Why, what are you laughin' at? I don't see anything so dum funny in comin' out by Peter Lunn's."

"Peter Lunn's! No, you wouldn't. In course you wouldn't." Old Man suddenly sat down on the top of a log which projected about a foot above the surface of the water. "Don't you see, Ikey? "

"Don't see nothin' to laugh at."

"Peter Lunn's shanty's jus' round the corner on the top of the bank. That's why the mule didn't want us to go on 'ithout my gun. She knows Peter and Peter knows her."

"What's that got to do with it? He can't make a fuss about our bein' on his land if we stays in the river."

"Peter's the kind of man as 'ill make a fuss

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about anything if he feels he wants to make a fuss. 'Sides, he has all the shore rights. Like as not, he'll say we've come to steal his driftwood agin, same as we used to afore we grew up. His driftwood! When God A'mighty sends it into every little bay and bend of the river for poor folk to take. He ain't never forgiven us for not collectin' the driftwood and bringin' it to him, the mean old hunks."

" Well, I don't care. I ain't afeared of him, Old Man."

" I am, Ikey, when I ain't brought my gun along. And so would any sensible feller be afraid. If two men has an argeyment, and one of 'em likewise has a gun, you can bet your boots as the feller 'ithout the gun ain't goin' to git the best of the argeyment. If I wasn't worryin' 'bout James, I'd turn back for mine and load her up with buckshot. There's more real sympathy in buckshot, and it scatters more'n any other kind. James ain't afeared of nothin', 'cause, with the innercence of youth, he don't know how far Peter Lunn's shotgun 'ill carry ;" and Old Man rubbed himself reminiscently on that portion of his frame which historical tradition asserts it is equally rude to expose to a friend or an enemy.

" Why should Peter Lunn want to hurt him? James ain't done nothin' to him."

Old Man once more burst into a fit of silent laughter, the necessity for not making a noise

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causing him to contort his features in a manner hideous to behold. When he had sufficiently recovered, he regarded Ikey with pitying sorrow for his lack of perspicacity. "Peter's got a daughter, ain't he? You know that as well as I do."

Ikey started, as if he had been anxiously endeavouring to keep this fact from Old Man's knowledge. "Of course, Old Man. You bet I know he's got a daughter. Lelota's about fourteen."

"Take it by and large, how old's James?"

"Risin' seventeen. You don't think, Old Man, as James has started out to court Lelota Lunn? The pluck of him!"

"You bet he has, Ikey. You know that quite as well as I do, in spite of your makin' out you're as innocent as an unborn babe."

"Then, if you thinks so, in course we'd better go home agin, Old Man. I allers did b'lieve in gittin' spliced young, or lettin' it alone altogether. If James is goin' to settle down as a fam'ly man 'stead of a bein' a lawyer like Fiske, he can have my share of the farm. I never did think much of farmin', any way."

Old Man, amazed at the transparent duplicity of Ikey's attitude, and suspecting there was something behind it which was being kept back from him, silently handed the red-headed one his flask. If anything could loosen Ikey's tongue, whisky would not fail to do so.

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Ikey took it. "Whaffor, Old Man?"

"To drink to the young couple," Old Man suggested, with biting irony. "I b'lieve as Miss Wilks 'ud like to join you; she seems to know as much about it as you do."

Miss Wilks sentimentally extended her long pink tongue, sniffed, and signified her ready acquiescence in Old Man's proposal.

"Seein' as I said it, I s'pose you've got to have it." Old Man poured out a generous supply of whisky in the hollow of his hand, and the mule lapped it up with sinful relish.

He put back the flask in his pistol-pocket and surveyed the proceedings of his two friends with genuine astonishment. Either they had gone mad or he had. Their preposterous and evidently premeditated acquiescence in the situation filled him with surprise, for he had not taken it seriously, and it was evident that they had. Resolving that on the first opportunity he would subject the deceptive Ikey to searching interrogatories, he motioned to the mule to go on, for the water gradually grew colder, and not even the warming effects of the whisky could prevent him from shivering.

With a business-like air, Miss Wilks once more started off, and the two friends followed closely in her wake until they came to the scene of their boyish depredations.

Peter Lunn's cabin was picturesquely situated

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beneath the overhanging bank of the river. Time and a landslip or two had shaken the bank down into a little level space on which he had built himself a home. His daughter Lelota, when she had any time to spare from the consideration of her own affairs, which was but seldom, had busied herself in converting the remaining area into a flower-garden. From this garden a pathway led down to the sandy beach, where her father kept his canoe, and, with the aid of a comprehensive jug of whisky, pretended to fish. The path from the beach to the top of the little plateau was fringed with bushes tall enough to hide a man, should he wish to approach the cabin unseen. Sometimes there were reasons which made the visitor hurry over his visit as quickly as possible, lest he should be overtaken by a charge of buckshot from the irascible Peter's gun.

In view of Peter Lunn's fiery temperament, and his somewhat premature desire to shield his daughter Lelota, flashing-eyed, black-haired, beautiful as a dream, from the ardent attentions of youthful Four Cornerites, Old Man and Ikey knew that they incurred a certain risk in entering upon premises which were practically taboo to anyone but the exceedingly limited circle of the old autocrat's friends and acquaintances. Lelota was the apple of his eye, and had suddenly developed in the last few months in that amazing way peculiar to the Canadian girl who has inherited the heirship of

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river, air, and Bush, all the sweet wholesome things of Nature which go to the making of an equally sweet and beautiful woman. She was on the brink of womanhood at fourteen, with those graceful curves and undulating outlines which made Four Cornerites wonder what her mother could have seen in Peter Lunn to leave him such a legacy of beauty.

The girl herself was passionately devoted to her father, wild, wilful, full of an eager delight in the mere joy of living, with one of those strong, ardent natures which cannot acquiesce in the experience of others, but must find out and live through things for itself. Although so young, the whole world of Four Corners was at her feet ; she had already entered into that innocent kingdom of girlhood which lasts as briefly as the interval between dusk and darkness, when the sun suddenly dips behind the Laurentians and withdraws its light.

Lelota was full of expectancy, of sweet dreams, maiden longings, the desire to test her power. She and James had always been at school together. Only a week ago, with a ferocity altogether foreign to the general placidity of his nature, he had fought the former school bully on her account ; and it was Lelota, an unwilling witness of the Homeric combat, who had turned defeat into victory at the critical moment by striking down James's ruthless antagonist with a cedar stake which happened to be lying at the edge of the road.

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As they stood there, James bleeding "bluggily" from his Greek nose, with one eye completely closed, the girl glowing, panting, the tears in her eyes, the prostrate body of the foe between them, she had leaned across what Ikey called "the diseased" and pressed her innocent lips to James's, until the blood from his olfactory organ stained her lovely face. Forgetting his woe, he had wiped it away, and returned her kiss with a delight which changed to sudden compassion for the inanimate thing at their feet—that thing which a few seconds ago had been so full of blustering, tyrannous life, had so loudly formulated its determination to "make hogmeat" of James unless he admitted himself vanquished and for ever forsook Lelota's society.

The iron-muscle bully—a lad of nineteen—lay low in the dust, with a big welt across his freckled forehead where Lelota had dealt him so shrewd a blow. As the boy and girl gazed at their common enemy, they were conscious of a certain awe, a something which suddenly put their childhood behind them. They were primeval, had fought for one another, belonged to each other. But even then, with rustic coquetry, Lelota drew back, affected to regret the impulse which had bidden her smite and spare not. She knelt down in the dust, and an indescribable pang seized James as she lifted the stricken one's head. "Run and get some water in your cap," she said, without looking at James.

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"It's no good, Lelota. He's dead. I'd better bury him or throw him in the river, and get it over. Then he won't trouble us any more. If we leave him here, I shall get hanged for it."

"You didn't hit him; I did."

"Well, but of course you did it for me, and I'm going to take the responsibility. You just run away, Lelota, and leave me to bury him."

"You're real mean, James. I'm almost sorry I hit him."

"Then why did you hit him? If you're sorry for him, I'd rather have been downed by him."

"I don't know—I—I didn't think. I—I wanted you to win, James dear. Get the water at once or I shall be taken to gaol. And you don't want that dreadful old father of yours to get me hanged or sent to the Penitentiary for life."

"James dear" went for the water, brought it in his cap, and motioned to Lelota to put the bully's head down again. Then he dashed the water over his foe's face, and the latter opened his eyes. "Gosh!" he said, with a bewildered groan. "I thought Miss Wilks had bit me or kicked all the stuffin' out of my innards."

Then he remembered, raised himself on one elbow, and glared fiercely at James. His eye travelled from James to Lelota, and he became fiercer than ever. "Was I fightin' 'bout you?"

Lelota nodded.

"For sure?"

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"For sure."

"A girl as I used to go to school with, a girl as 'ud come and down me with that," he pointed to the gory cedar stake, "when I was lickin' another feller for her sake? You did down me with it?"

"Yes," faltered Lelota. "You were goin' to down James, and so of course I had—I had to down you. I—I'm sorry."

"You ain't half as sorry as I am." He raised himself with laborious scorn. "Even an Injun squaw wouldn't ha' done a mean, cowardly thing like that jus' when her brave was goin' to scalp his enemy."

"But I didn't want James to be scalped. He has such beautiful hair."

"Beautiful hair! Even a Digger Injun's squaw wouldn't ha' done it."

"But I'm not an Indian squaw and I did do it. On second thoughts, if you take it in that way, I don't know that I am sorry," retorted Lelota with spirit. "Let me tie up your head with my handkerchief and help you home."

The bully staggered to his feet, picked up the stake, and made a dash at James with it. The stake dropped from his feeble hands; he would have fallen had not Lelota caught him.

He pushed her away. "Go away, coward. To down a man like that! Don't you dare touch me no more. I'd ruther you was poison ivy. To think I fought for *you*! You! Wait till I git

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well again and you ain't round. I'll sweep the earth with him," and he glowered darkly at James.

"I don't care," said Lelota miserably. "You knew James hadn't a chance with you. You deserved it. You're two years older, and you're a miserable bully, any way."

James produced a dainty revolver from his pants pocket, Ikey's present to him on his last birthday. "See here, Jim Ferguson," he said, "I had this in my pocket all the while and could have blown your head off; but I fought fair and was taking my licking like a man. If it's any satisfaction to you to know I was beaten, I don't mind saying so, though I'd have died rather than give in."

"Then why didn't you?" groaned Ferguson.

"Because"—James had acquired a certain fondness for long words from Old Man—"because the unpremeditated action of Miss Lunn——"

"You mean Lelota!"

"I mean Miss Lunn; and don't you forget it, or I *will* blow your head off."

"I daren't show up at Four Corners agin. But some day I'll fix you for sure," Ferguson added menacingly, and almost fell.

Lelota came to his rescue. "You don't deserve it," she said loftily, "but we won't tell anyone what has happened. It serves you right for swagging about Four Corners as if all the girls belonged to you."

Ferguson gazed at James's puffed countenance

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with undisguised satisfaction. "You can't git over that. Everybody 'ill know my marks on him," he said with melancholy pride. "There's a style about my hittin' as 'ill give him away. I'm not denyin' that it 'ud be a favour to me if this thing didn't git out. Downed by a girl—a girl with a cedar stake. Second thoughts, I think a heap more of the Schoolmistress'n I do of you. She's real pretty. If you wants that punkin-headed feller for your beau, I make you a present of him."

"I'd better drop him in the river," James said, with unaccustomed hauteur. "He's too foul to live. Even the Ottawa couldn't wash him clean."

"No, no, James. It's not fair to the river. Naturally, he feels sore."

"Feels sore! Of course I feels sore. Who wouldn't feel sore after such a wipe on the head with thisyer stake," muttered the impenitent Ferguson. "I wonder you didn't take a young pine whiles you were about it. What'm I to say to mother?"

Lelota thought hard. "You were both out fishing, fell off that branch of the cedar which hangs over the Creek, hit against the rock where that old pickerel hides, and damaged yourselves."

"But everyone will see that the branch isn't broken," said James.

"Oh, yes, it is," Lelota triumphantly returned. "I was fishing there this morning, caught the pickerel and fell in." She drew aside the beautiful

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hair from her right temple and showed a great graze "I just missed the stone," she added simply.

Ferguson, overcome with sudden remorse, held out his hand to James. "To think it might ha' killed her! I take back all I've said." With a certain chivalry of which he was heartily ashamed afterwards, he kissed Lelota's shapely hand and staggered homeward, only pausing for a moment ere he disappeared round the curve of the road to warn James that the time would surely come when there would not be any cedar stakes about, and the issue between them could be fairly fought to a finish.

Thus left alone with James, a sudden change came over Lelota. All the coquette in her was aroused by the fact that, metaphorically speaking, she had "tasted blood," was an object of contention and desire, had been fought for, had decided the issue with her own capable hands. She picked up the cedar stake, and was about to go home when James stayed her with a gesture. "Lelota!"

"Well?" She came back a step. "Can't I keep this in case Ferguson comes round again?"

"You darling, you queen of the earth, you—you—you——" He paused, overcome by emotion, and was about to take her hand when she repulsed him.

"Let me alone," she said, bursting into tears "Let me alone. I hate you." And was gone.

The sun darkened, a cloud spread over the blue

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sky, the birds ceased to sing, the monotonous chirping of the grasshoppers changed to a derisive note. James could not understand Lelota's sudden revulsion of feeling. She had thrown down the cedar stake, left it in the dust.

He picked it up, supported his feeble steps with it, tottered down to the river's edge, and fainted, for Ferguson had dealt him many a shrewd blow before being knocked out of action.

Something tenderly licked his face and, awaking from his swoon, James put up a bewildered arm to ward it off. Then the mist cleared from his eyes, and he knew that Miss Wilks had taken charge of him and all was well. "You!" he said gratefully. "You! I might have known you wouldn't desert me."

Miss Wilks's eye, which had been blazing with anger at the maltreatment of her protégé, softened. "It's a good thing you didn't get here when the row was on. You'd have killed him," the boy said, terrified by the passion his condition aroused in her.

He got up, dipped his head in the amber flood, washed the blood from his nose, put a dock leaf on his swelling eye, and vainly endeavoured to make himself presentable. "Now, Wilkie dear," he said, "take me home before Old Man gets back from Hawklesville. I don't want him to know what's happened to me."

With infinite difficulty he struggled up to the

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mule's back, and, still carrying the cedar stake, held on to her scanty mane as she slowly and laboriously climbed the steep bank into the road. Once there, he felt her stiffen, saw her eye flame savagely as she put her nose to the dust and began to smell out Ferguson's track. He had all he could do to prevent her from following it.

"No," he said gently. "No, you mustn't, Wilkie dear. I was fairly licked. Take me home to Ikey. He'll help me to pull myself together again."

Dearly as James loved Old Man, there was a certain simplicity about Ikey which made it easier to unburden himself to him. It was his first love affair. Later, when it ripened, he determined that he would acquaint Old Man with all the details. At present he was too exhausted to do more than cling to the mule's mane and be borne gently home to Ikey, who made much of him, mourned over him, promised religiously to keep his secret until such time as it became absolutely necessary to share it with Old Man, and washed the grit from out his wounds.

Thus it will be seen that Ikey, in spite of his enforced dissimulation, knew perfectly well where the mule was leading them, and his heart grew lighter. Never before had he hidden anything from Old Man. He knew that Old Man knew that he was hiding something, and that sooner or later the truth must be told. Now, Old Man, thanks

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to the mule, was in a fair way to find it out for himself.

Old Man broke in on Ikey's reverie. "Guess it's about time you left off dissimerlatin' and we find out what James is up to," he said, and, motioning to the mule to remain where she was, cautiously began to ascend the path leading to the hut.

CHAPTER VI

AN ARMISTICE

WITH the stealthy step of an Indian, Old Man, followed by the equally noiseless Ikey, wound his sinuous way on hands and knees up the steep path until they came to the little plateau where Peter Lunn had erected his household gods. "The moon 'ill be up d'reckly," he murmured discontentedly. "It's like Old Fiske. Allers gittin' up when 'tain't wanted and lyin' down when it is. But for ways as is dark gin'rally, Peter Lunn can give the moon points any day. You don't catch him ever tryin' to hide his goin's on." He shook his fist at the pale orb as she struggled through dark clouds, which cast portentous shadows over the broad gravel sweep in front of the verandah—a sweep which was only kept free from weeds by Lelota's constant care.

"What are we going to do now we are here, Old Man?"

"S-s-s-sh! Like as not, Peter's sittin' on his verandah in the blessed hope of gittin' a pot shot at somebody. He ain't happy unless he's catchin' or killin' suthin'. That's the kind of feller he is.

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Never would come into the open like a man. Lucky we'd got his driftwood on our *backs* when he fired that load of dust-shot into us, Ikey. I can remember the ticklin' of it still."

Ikey gave a reminiscent chuckle. "Sorter stings even now, Old Man ;" and memory led him to place a horny hand on the formerly afflicted part.

"You bet it stung ; and he's still got that old gun of his. 'Tain't like a bee, as stings once and can't do it agin. Reckon Peter and his gun can go on stingin' for all eternity. You jus' lie low and I'll work my way round under cover. There ain't no light in the hut. Maybe he's gone to bed or else he's only lyin' low, the—the decepterous old heathen."

Old Man slid noiselessly along the ground until he reached the other side of the house, where another plateau furnished Peter Lunn with "garden truck." As he did so, the moon came out brilliantly, if inopportunately, and showed James sitting on a log beneath an old thorn, gazing with wistful expectancy at a little window close to the door.

"That's Peter's winder next to it," Old Man reflected ; "and James ain't such a dum fool as to be lookin' at the wrong winder. Peter's got his shutter up, or James might git a charge of shot in him afore he knew anything about it. 'Sif buckshot, or dust-shot, or any other kind of shot could keep a boy from courtin' a girl ! First time I've ever seen that loony look on James's hansum

AN ARMISTICE

face. If I go back to fetch Ikey, the lad may git into trubble with Peter 'ithout me to stand by him. Course I don't want to hear what he's got to say to the girl—I've said it to a good many girls in my time—same old sickenin' slush—but I can't help myself. Ah-h-h! Here she comes! My, but she's a real beauty! 'Enter village maiden with her hair down,' as they said in that play last winter in Hawklesville, only Lelota's hair's real and that play-actin' woman's wasn't."

Lelota's shapely brown hand noiselessly opened the door, and she came out clad in a flowing garment which seemed to the appreciative eyes of Old Man the very embodiment of poetry. "I knew she'd have her hair down," he chuckled. "They allers do when the moonlight gits into their souls. Why, it most reaches to her knees. Time that girl's twenty, what she don't know about bindin' her beaux in chains and tramin' on 'em with those pretty feet of hers won't amount to much. She's pinin'—jus' pinin'—to begin now. If it warn't James, it 'ud be a broomstick, if nothin' else came handy. And there's that loony James lookin' 'sif he *wanted* to be trampled on, when he ought to be abed or readin' up for his law zaminations. Nice figger he'll cut when he tries to pass 'em if he spends all his evenin's up here."

But as Old Man watched the rapt faces of the beautiful youth and the beautiful maid slowly advancing to meet one another through the

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moonlight, he veiled his eyes, for he seemed to see not Lelota, but Cynthia Hannum—not James, but himself. A fierce pain gripped his heart; he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. When he looked again, James and Lelota were kissing with innocent fervour.

From below there sounded the soft, ceaseless lapping of water against the rocks. Over on the other side of the river, lights gleamed in the little white habitant cottages—snowflakes dropped amid the verdure—cottages which slept peacefully beneath the fostering branches of the pines. Behind them, brightened by the benediction of the moon, rose the hoary Laurentians, old when the world was young, grey with lichens, gemmed and starred with silver birches on the lower slopes, mid-way fringed with tamarack, on the summit clad in luxuriant maples. Later in the year the maples would turn to scarlet and gold, deck the mountain's rugged side with a mantle of crimson richer than any king's. The soft rustling of the branches in the little garden, where dreaming birds stirred sleepily, the glitter and gleam of fireflies tangling their flight in inextricable confusion, the monotonous chirping of wandering grasshoppers, the background of tall cedars shutting out this tiny domain from every intrusive eye—all combined to impress Old Man with a sense of unreality, as if he were sole spectator at some phantasy of fairy-land where never mortal entered.

AN ARMISTICE

"How very beautiful you are, Lelota!" he heard James's voice. "So very, very beautiful." He took up the long tresses of her hair, wound them round his own throat, shivered with ecstasy.

Slowly Lelota withdrew them. She trembled a little at his passionate words. "You mustn't, James, you mustn't, dear. The moonlight turns your brain. You don't know what you're saying."

"Turns my brain, Lelota! Can't you see, dear, it's my heart? It's full of you! Always you! There never was, there never will be, any other girl in the world like you. I want to kiss you again, Lelota."

"But you mustn't," the girl cried a little wildly, her sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks showing how profoundly she was moved. "You mustn't, James. It's very wicked of me to meet you here like this. I didn't know I was coming, I didn't know you were there. Something whispered to me, made me get up and come to you. Did you call me, James?"

"Call you? No, darling heart! I prayed to God, to the stars, the skies, the whispering winds to bring you to me, and they all heard my prayer. You came. I knew you would come. I should have died of grief if you hadn't."

"But if father sees you he will be very angry; he might hurt you. When father is angry, he's just like Lajeunesse's red bull. Everyone has to get out of his way or he tosses and tears them to pieces."

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"Nothing can hurt me while you are with me, dearest one. How beautiful your throat is, how milk-white in the moon-rays, Lelota!"

Lelota hastily drew the slight wrapper more closely about her throat. "You mustn't, James, you mustn't, dear. Father will be very angry. You know how he hates Old Man and Ikey and any friend of theirs. He thinks me still a child, doesn't know that I have grown up fast, have a world of dreams and fancies of my own." She shivered and clung more closely to him.

"What is it, dearest? You're cold. Selfish brute that I am not to think of it. Let me put my coat round you. There! There! Dear heart! dear heart! You make the world more beautiful by living in it."

"I must go now, James dearest. Dearest, dearest one, I really must go. And you mustn't come here any more. I am terrified. If father were to see you, I don't know what he would do. He—he might kill you."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of him. I'll come to him, tell him I love you, and that he'll have to let me love you."

"No, no. That would only make him worse. He hates Old Man and Ikey. If he thought it would give them pain to make you suffer, he would make you suffer too, dear. You must go now."

"So soon? I haven't been here for more than a second."

AN ARMISTICE

"Yes, at once. At once. Every moment makes it more dangerous for both of us. If father hurt you, I should never forgive myself or him either."

"I shall come again to-morrow night, dearest."

"No, no. You must never come again, James. What will people think of me! But, indeed, indeed I didn't know you were here. Only—only——"

"Only what, dearest?"

"Something called to me and I had to come. I couldn't keep away from you. Now I must go back. Let me go, James. You must let me go, dear."

She drew off his coat, wrapped it tenderly round him, and he kissed it because it had touched her sweet body. "I didn't mean to be so horrid to you after the fight, but I was so frightened. I wanted to kiss your poor face until the swelling had gone down."

"Listen to me, Lelota, darling of my heart. I'll never, never give you up, never, never love anyone but you in the whole world. And I'm going to work hard, make money, so that I can bring it to you by the handful. I mean to be a millionaire, then your father can't object to me any more."

The girl looked at him wistfully. "Do you love me so very, very much, James? More than you love Old Man and Ikey?"

"It's a different kind of love, most beautiful.

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Of course I love Old Man and Ikey ; they're so good to me that I'd die for them any time they wanted me to. They saved my life. So did the mule. When I tell them about you——"

"When you tell them about me! No, no, James, you mustn't tell them about me. Indeed, you mustn't! Our secret is too sweet to tell to anyone. Besides, they—they will laugh at us call us children—say that we're only playing at loving each other."

James shook his head. "Oh, no, they won't. You don't really know them if you think that. They've the truest, kindest hearts in the world. Old Man's worrying himself day and night because people are treating Parson Black so badly and staying away from the church. He's going to make them come to hear the poor old fellow's farewell sermon. I've treated Old Man badly, too, by keeping our secret from him. You must let me tell them both, dear. It's their right to know. I owe everything to them. Old Man pays all my legal fees and has set his heart on my becoming a great lawyer. I mustn't disappoint him in any way. If it hadn't been for Ikey and Old Man, father would have murdered me long ago, and then killed himself when he found out what he'd done. Old Man's really my father. No one could ever be as good to me as he has been. You don't know, you can't think, what a great tender heart he has."

AN ARMISTICE

Lelota hesitated, then pouted with the charming inconsequence of youth. "I believe you love Old Man and Ikey more than you do me."

"If it hadn't been for them you would never have known me, Lelota. Think of my terrible childhood, that dreadful father of mine, my poor mother's agony—an agony which never knew a moment's peace. Old Man and Ikey stepped in, took me away from it all, healed her wounds, once more made her unafraid to live. Before, every moment was one of terror to her. She never knew when my father might break out and try to kill me. Poor mother! Poor dad, too! You can't wonder I love Old Man and Ikey. But my love for them is so different from my love for you. It doesn't interfere with it a bit."

"I gave Miss Wilks some sugar the other day. She wanted to make friends with me."

"Now that I've told her our secret—there was no harm in telling her, because she's so wise and I *had* to tell somebody—she's as fond of you as I am, and knows all that I say to her," laughed the boy. "I go into the Bush with her, rave to her about you, of what we're going to do when we're married. Married, Lelota! Think of that! When we're married!"

Lelota blushed rosily. "Oh, James, you mustn't talk like that, even to her. You mustn't say such dreadful things to anyone but——"

"But?"

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"—Myself. I must go now, dearest. I really must! God be with you till we meet again. Good-night! Good-night! No—no. You've kissed me twice already. You——"

"Good-night, dearest. Good——"

"Not so fast," said a gruff voice, as Peter Lunn stepped into the moonlight, its rays silvering his gun-barrel. "Not so fast, young man. Not so fast. What are you doin' here with my daughter at this time of night? That's what I want to know, and, by hell! I will know! Git into the hut, Lelota. Git. I'll talk to you presently, when I've flayed this feller alive."

He dropped his gun and seized James roughly by the arm. "Wait till I git a switch," he said grimly. "I'll take the hide off you, you sly, sneakin' little devil."

"How dare you hurt him! Let him go, father. Let him go! He's not doing any harm here."

James stood perfectly helpless in Peter Lunn's iron grip. "Better go into the hut, Lelota," he said quietly, "while I talk matters over with your father. I'm glad to get a chance of doing so."

"But he'll kill you, James. He'll kill you! You don't know how cruel he can be when he's roused."

"Oh, no, I won't kill him," said Peter grimly; "but there won't be much left of him to go foolin' round when I've done with him." His eyes roved in search of a switch. "Pity I ain't got a cowhide. That 'ud cut the heart out of him."

AN ARMISTICE

“ Father ! Father ! ”

But Peter Lunn thrust Lelota rudely back. “ Go into the hut,” he shouted, “ or I’ll treat you in the same way.”

“ But I love him, father. You shan’t touch him. You shan’t ! You shan’t ! I asked him to come here.” Lelota told the lie with frenzied despair.

“ No, she didn’t. I came because I wanted to see her. She didn’t know I was here,” said James.

Peter Lunn, unaware that a dark form was rushing up the bank, shook James violently. The next moment Miss Wilks, foaming at the mouth, seized him in her great yellow teeth and began to savage him.

“ Gimme my gun,” shouted Peter Lunn, relaxing his grip on James, who had been knocked off his feet in the first fury of Miss Wilks’s charge.

Old Man quietly possessed himself of the gun. “ Drop him,” he said to Miss Wilks. “ Who told you to come up here eatin’ dirty feed like Peter and spoilin’ all the fun ? ”

Miss Wilks flung Peter Lunn against the trunk of a thorn-tree with a force which knocked all the breath out of his body ; then turned to James and began to caress him, uttering a series of fierce grunts and moans. Nothing but her obedience to Old Man had made her relinquish her prey. At a sign from him, she would have worried and kicked the life out of Lelota’s father.

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Old Man whistled shrilly for Ikey, then turned to Lelota with all that tenderness which lay hidden beneath his rough exterior. "There's no harm done. Better say good-night to James, my dear," he said gently. "I'll see arter things."

"But my father! You won't hurt him?" The girl went to her father, stood between him and Miss Wilks. "Please, Old Man, you won't hurt him. And you won't let the mule hurt him?"

"Course I won't." Old Man handed her the gun. "Better take this and hide it whiles you've got the chance."

Seeing that Lelota still lingered, Old Man did his best to reassure her. "Your father can't do any harm now we've got his gun; and you may be sure, for James's sake as well as yours, we'll remember he's your father."

"But, Old Man, what must you think of me! I didn't know James was coming here. Indeed, indeed, I didn't." The tears began to stream down her cheeks.

"I know, my dear." Old Man's voice was very soft and sweet. "I know. Suthin' seemed to call to you to come out to him, and you heard God's voice and came."

"It—was—God's—voice? Not my own wicked heart, Old Man?"

"Wicked! You wicked, you innercent lamb! Why, there wouldn't be any fun at all in the world if everyone was as real wicked as you are."

AN ARMISTICE

"You're laughing at me, Old Man! You're laughing at me! How can you call it 'fun' when it's all so real, so dreadfully in earnest?"

"I know, my dear, I know. Now, you run and hide thisyer old gun and go to bed agin; and when you wake up in the mornin', think you've had a dream. Just a dream."

"You promise me you won't hurt my poor Daddy, Old Man?"

"Of course I won't. I'll even give him a drink of whisky if he'll let up on his swearin'. It's such a bad example for Ikey, too, seein' as I've looked arter his morals all these years. Now run away and git to bed agin or you'll catch your death of cold. Good-night."

To Old Man's infinite surprise, Lelota flung grateful arms round his neck and kissed him, Ikey looking on enviously the while, and at the same time keeping a watchful guard over Peter Lunn, whose language was most certainly unmeet for maids to hear.

When Lelota had gone, Old Man turned to Miss Wilks. "Soon as you've done smarmin' James about in that undignified, disgustin' and unladylike manner, p'r'aps you'll explain why you took on yourself to interfere jus' now when I was goin' to lend James a hand. Seem to think you can do as you like and——"

Miss Wilks, who was rapidly becoming normal, distinctly winked at him.

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"Oh, all right. You done your best—unpremeditated homicide, as the Coroner calls it, only don't do it agin 'ithout orders. If that's how you feel about it, I ain't nothin' more to say," Old Man protested. "That hellish screech of yours nearly frightened the life out of me, that's all. Next time you really want to eat anybody, don't make such a dum fuss about it, or folks 'ill say as I don't feed you properly. Now git out, and Peter Lunn 'ill never know what hit him or bit him or slammed the breath out of him."

Miss Wilks, with another comprehensive glance from an eye out of which the light of battle had now wholly faded, implied that in her desire to protect James she had perhaps been a little precipitate; then slowly negotiated the river-bank, the hinder part of her grotesquely silvered by the moonlight as she disappeared.

"Now"—Old Man felt in his pocket for his pipe—"Now we'll light up, Peter, and have a real friendly talk. Seems a long time since we powwowed together. I'm kinder lonesome for what Parson Black calls a 'heart-to-heart outpouring.'"

The bewildered Peter Lunn sat up, scratching his head and alluding to his and Old Man's optics in terms sufficient to incarnadine the universe.

For some time, Old Man listened to this breathless and damnatory eloquence in silence. When Peter paused for breath, he handed him his cake of tobacco. "That's right. Now you've got it

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off your chest, you'll feel better, real nice, so to speak."

With a contemptuous wave of his brawny arm Peter Lunn swept the tobacco away, and again repeated his intention of hamstringing Miss Wilks and of crimsoning the Ottawa with Old Man's blood. He also alluded to that worthy's liver and kindred organs in terms of scathing vituperation.

"P'raps I spoke a bit too soon. You ain't emptied yourself yet. Go on! Go on! You'll feel better arter a little. Ikey, where's your manners! You're sittin' on Peter's log in his own garden, 'ithout so much as sayin' by your leave or with your leave. Git up and give him your seat and dust him down a bit."

"I don't want to sit down," growled out Peter Lunn, who, now that his first wild fury was over, had a morbid horror of making himself ridiculous. "You jus' wait till I git my gun agin, Old Man, and I'll send you to Kingdom Come. You jus' wait. That's all."

"Oh, no, that ain't all, by no manner of means; and I've told Lelota to hide your gun so's you can't git it," Old Man rejoined, with the air of one discussing a complicated question of international politics. "You and me's bound to have a straight talk some time or other, so it's just as well to git it over. Beautiful night for a pow-wow, ain't it? Real soothin', so to speak."

Peter gritted his teeth.

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"Don't do that," Old Man tenderly advised him. "You're gittin' on in years, Peter, and they won't last."

"What the hell d'you want?" growled Peter. "I'll be even with you some day, if I swing for it, Old Man."

"That's right. You'll soon be yourself agin, Peter. I allers did think as folks didn't take pains to understand you rightly. Now I'm sure of it. Fust thing on the agenda of thisyer friendly meetin' is that little matter of the dust-shot you peppered me and Ikey with a good many years ago."

"I'm darned glad it hit you. It did hit you?" Peter Lunn anxiously inquired. "I thought I heard Ikey yell, but I wasn't quite sure. He mostly did yell when he see me comin'!"

"Hit us! Did it hit us! Why, Ikey's still got a little map all over his lower back chest," said Old Man imperturbably. "Can't run wuth a cent, he's so filled up with shot. Sometimes it travels all over him, but allers comes back to roost in the place where it first hit him. Seems lonely if it gits up to his shoulders or down to his ankles."

"Sorry I didn't git you too."

"Oh, but you did, only I went to Doc Higgins and had 'em took out," Old Man affably explained. "His gittin' 'em out with a knittin' needle hurt more'n your puttin' 'em in with your durned old gun. But I didn't let on. No, I didn't let on. Doc Higgins said he knew that brand of shot, and

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'lowed you'd git into trubble some day with your fancy shootin'."

"It 'ill be buckshot next time, Old Man, and don't you forgit it."

"Oh, no, I won't forgit, only there won't be any next time."

"Why not?"

"'Cause unless you listen to reason, I'll git you first—no lowdown, ornary, triflin' buckshot, but a bullet—and you know very well I'm the best shot in Four Corners."

"I don't care a cent what kind of a shot you are."

"All right, Peter. All right. Keep your hair on—what's left of it. I only thought I'd mention it, seein' as we're sort of runnin' an account with you, and I want it to come out straight and square. That's all. James has set his mind on Lelota, but he's too young to marry yet—a darned sight too young. You've heaps of money. Why not send her to school in Montreal to be polished up a bit. Then James 'ill be able to git on with his law studies."

"I'd sooner see Lelota in her grave than let her marry anybody havin' anything to do with you," hastily protested Peter.

"Oh, no, you wouldn't, not by a durned sight. That bein' slammed up agin the tree's shook the sense out of you. You love Lelota too much for that. 'Sides, Peter, the world's gittin' too civilized

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to go shootin' everybody on sight when you disagrees with 'em. These two children love one another. Give 'em a chance to prove themselves worthy of their love. I'll look arter James, if you'll keep up your end of the stick with Lelota. And when in the fulness of time they really grows up—say in a couple of years or so—we'll come to some financial 'rangement to make 'em cumferable and happy ever arter."

As he looked at the shabbily dressed pair before him, Peter thought that this might possibly be the best way out of the difficulty, for, in spite of his bluster, he knew very well that Lelota could twist him round her little finger. "You ain't got a dollar to spare, neither of you," he said contemptuously. "The only terms I'll ever agree to, and I don't bind myself to nothin', mind you, will be as you planks down five dollars for James for every one as I planks down for Lelota."

"Nobody could say fairer'n that," Old Man placidly returned. "Nobody. You allers was a just man—when you'd time."

"Stop a bit." Peter was visibly softened by Old Man's ironic compliment. "We ain't allowed nothin' for that d——d mule's shakin' my inside out."

"Oh, we'll set off Doc Higgins' bill for pickin' the shot out of me agin that and call it even. Better keep Ikey's damages in reserve, 'cause, arter all, it's your property, not his, he's hikin' round with him."

AN ARMISTICE

"Anything else now we're about it?" asked Peter Lunn, with the air of a man who would strenuously object to whatever that anything else might be.

"Nothin' 'cept that bygoness is to be bygoness, and you're not to worry Lelota more'n you can help. If she ain't gone to bed yet, I'll jus' step into the hut and git your gun back."

"And s'posin' you're fool enuff to give it back to me, how d'you know as I won't shoot the head off you?"

"Oh, no, you ain't that kind of a man, Peter. A feller like you must have his fun, but it wouldn't take that shape. You'll git a heap more 'food for religious thought,' as poor old Parson Black says, in seein' how James and Lelota turns out."

Peter Lunn appeared to be much struck by the force of this reasoning, although "thought," more especially "religious thought," was not much in his line. For the first time since the beginning of the conversation he ceased to frown, for Old Man had unwittingly pointed out a far more subtle form of revenge than his shooting them and taking the attendant risks of so rash an act.

"They'd lynch you for sure if you was to git us," said Ikey, making his first pregnant contribution to the conversation, and Peter Lunn knew that he spoke the truth; that if anything untoward were to happen to the two cronies, the inhabitants

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of Four Corners would arise in their wrath and massacre him without a moment's hesitation.

Leaving Ikey and James engaged with Peter Lunn in affable converse about the seasons, Old Man went away to the little hut and tapped at the door of Lelota's room.

She opened it, pale but composed. "What is it, Old Man? What do you want?"

"Only your dad's gun. We've finished our pow-wow. You're to be sent to school in Montreal to be polished up."

"And—and James? If I go, you won't let anyone harm him, Old Man?"

"Not if he was one of Parson Black's sparrers as falls to the ground—not even one of them dum English sparrers as is much too artful to fall to the ground, but spends all their time in flyin' up the valley into other birds' nests and knockin' out the robins," said Old Man solemnly. "Think as you can hold out, Lelota, when you've bin polished up and Peter builds a big house to hold you and gives parties and puts on a biled shirt?"

Lelota smiled as she placed her shapely hands on Old Man's shoulders. "Will you do something for me, Old Man?"

Old Man nodded. "You bet. I'd do most anything for you and James."

"Then please tell James to do his best to pass all his examinations and build a little house for me, and——"

AN ARMISTICE

“ And—— ? ”

“ And as soon as I’m ‘ polished ’—as soon as possible, Old Man—I’ll come back to Four Corners to see what it’s like.”

Old Man cast a hasty glance round the dainty little room. “ There’s a blue hair-ribbon over there on the table. Maybe James ’ill have a tough row to hoe if he’s ever to git you.”

“ I know, Old Man, I know. But he’s sure to hoe for all he’s worth.”

“ P’r’aps he’d be wuth more in the hoein’ line if you was to send him that bit of ribbon,” suggested Old Man. “ James has been shook up a bit, and he’ll want suthin’ to help him along.”

“ You think it will help him along, you dear, good, kind, sweet Old Man ? ”

“ Sartain sure, Lelota ; it ’ud help me a lot if I was his age.”

“ Then take it, Old Man. Take it.”

Lelota hastily pressed the ribbon to her lips, and, wrapping it in a little cobwebby handkerchief, gave it to Old Man.

Old Man, after receiving the gun, returned to explain to Peter Lunn that he had “ remonstrated ” with Lelota, who was quite prepared to go to Montreal and be “ polished up,” provided Peter kept his part of the bargain.

Then, after a friendly drink to drown all ill-feeling, they said good-night to the placated Peter and made their way along the road leading into

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Four Corners, a much easier route than by the river.

James spake no word, but walked between Old Man and Ikey, with Miss Wilks leisurely bringing up the rear.' The two friends respected his silence, for they saw that he was still confused by the variety of his experiences during this eventful night.

James walked on as one who, though akin to earth, has fixed his eyes upon a star. To the danger which had threatened him he paid no heed, for the magic of that moonlight meeting with Lelota filled his young soul to the exclusion of all else, robbed him of his boyhood, made a man of him. Was she sleeping now in her little snowy-curtained room? Did she dream of him? Did she understand what it meant to him when their lips met in the moonlight? The bewildering rapture and anguish of it all flooded his soul as he stumbled along the road, scarce lifting his feet to avoid the rough stones with which it was strewn. Lelota loved him. Her love opened the gates of a new world; the old with its hopes and fears, its pleasant companionships and joys, its bitter griefs and terrors, fell from him for ever. It was as if a huge sponge had been passed over his life, completely wiping out all its previous impressions—even the haunting terror of his drunken father. And yet, as he stumbled along between his two friends, he was so lonely, so deso-

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late without Lelota, that his soul cried aloud to Heaven for sympathy and succour.

When they reached the hut (Ikey and Old Man paused to allow James to enter, whilst Miss Wilks rubbed her sympathetic muzzle against his shoulder) he did not want to go into his own little room lest the darkness should descend and overwhelm him. He was separated from Lelota, to be parted from her perhaps for years whilst she endured the vague process of being "polished up." It seemed to the excited lad that she was to be "polished up" out of his life, and he vowed a mighty vow that this thing should never be.

Old Man guessed his thoughts and lingered. Then he made a sign to Ikey to leave them together, and placed the little parcel in James's hand. "From her," he said, as he followed Ikey.

And James, left alone with Lelota's love-token, put away all childish things and fought with his sorrowing heart until there came to him

"The strength that walks in ways of quietness,"

—the strength that struggles and endures and makes no moan, though all the paths of life be hard and high to climb.

CHAPTER VII

THE VISION

THE next morning Old Man turned his attention to other matters which required an immediate settlement before his contemplated journey to the back of the mountains in search of that healing herb, the secret of which was known only to the dusky Pahnewuska and her husband, the ever-thirsty Yellow Feather. Though he knew very well that he would encounter a certain amount of risk from the amorous advances of Pahnewuska, at all hazards he was determined to make an attempt to save the life of Cynthia Hannum, bring back the colour to her cheeks, the laughter to her eyes; for Cynthia's disease was advancing so rapidly that something must be done at once or she would surely die. Her step grew feebler, every little ordinary duty became an heroic task for which it was necessary to nerve herself before she could attempt to do it. And all the while she walked the ways of life with a gentle serenity, a smiling sweetness, which maddened Old Man as he thought of how soon the time might come

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when she would be carried to the little burial-ground beyond Four Corners and her place know her no more. The loves of James and Lelota seemed almost infantile to him when he deplored Cynthia's sad plight and watched how the shadows daily deepened beneath her lovely eyes.

Although Old Man chafed and fumed at the delay, the expedition to the mountains, however urgent, had to be postponed for a few days until the uncrowned king of Four Corners had attended to another affair, which did not admit of any delay whatever ; for his friend, Parson Black, was dying even more swiftly than Cynthia, and the manner of his passing had been so embittered by the heartless conduct of certain Four Cornerites, that Old Man was determined to give his ancient friend a glimpse of happiness before the coming of the end. Parson Black had been more than a father to himself and Ikey, had unceasingly endeavoured to lead their footsteps into the way of peace ; had persistently encouraged all that was good in them and had as persistently discouraged all that was ignoble or bad. Now his congregation, with characteristic fickleness, did not greatly care whether he lived or died. A wave of religious dram-drinking had swept over the settlement and partially taken the place of its customary consumption of tanglefoot. The Parson suffered from an incurable complaint, and his sufferings were augmented by the knowledge that a stiff-necked

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generation of Four Cornerites hung upon the utterances of a younger and more energetic preacher in the hope that the newcomer would "make things hum."

On grasping the situation, Old Man also determined to make them hum, but not in a way which was generally anticipated in Four Corners. Although in the early days of their arrival at the village, he and Ikey had not "gone much on religion," they both considered that it ought to have a fair show.

Bearing in mind the friends' somewhat elementary theological views, Parson Black had often fervently wrestled for them in prayer. As Old Man said, however, the mistake made by the reverend gentleman was in wrestling for them conjointly. Had he attempted it separately, some good might have resulted; but Old Man and Ikey were both conscious of such variegated careers that a single "gospel duck," however able, could not possibly cope with their united iniquities. Still, they encouraged Parson Black to do his best, and from time to time supplied him with such information as would tend to throw a dispassionate light on the gaudier incidents of their past lives. They felt, in justice to themselves, that reticence would be unwise, as it was not likely that anyone else would ever take the slightest interest in the subject. With characteristic optimism, however, Parson Black had strenuously insisted that

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these joyous pagans possessed souls capable of being saved, and Old Man and Ikey let him have his own way; indeed, as a mark of their appreciation of his gentlemanly attitude toward them, they even invited the good man to witness a hanging, and were much impressed by his efforts to give the unfortunate horse-thief a "send-off."

In these circumstances, it may be imagined that Old Man and his familiar were much concerned when Parson Black solemnly announced to them one morning that he had very little longer to live. There was something wrong with his heart, and that something might kill him at any moment. He did not repine, he added, at thus being called away. Death could have few terrors for a man who had lived thirty years at Four Corners. What grieved him most, however, was the barren result of his labours. All the "toughest" cases continued to exhibit a perennial toughness, and the congregation in the church was so scanty that even the most eloquent sermons were wasted on it. The time for preparing his own soul was short, continued the reverend gentleman, and he had been compelled to call in the services of a young colleague from the nearest theological college as a stopgap. He trusted that this proof of inability further to labour in the vineyard would bring home to his erring parishioners a sense of their own shortcomings.

"You bet it will," said Old Man, grieved and

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surprised beyond measure that Parson Black could find Heaven more attractive than Four Corners ; “ you bet it will, Parson. Ikey, just you take your shotgun and drum up them fellers as has bin stoppin’ away from church. Though the Parson mayn’t be round much longer, religion’s got to be respected whiles he is round, and don’t you forget it. If you can’t git along alone, better take Miss Wilks and turn her loose among the wust of ’em. If she can’t reform ’em with one end of her, she may have better luck with t’other.”

But Parson Black protested against Old Man’s method of obtaining hearers, and announced that he depended upon a final series of sermons, if he were spared to finish them, to bring his congregation to a sense of their shortcomings. With much difficulty he preached four of the series to empty benches, and then, heart-broken by the spiritual torpor of Four Corners, stated that the Rev. Archibald Graeme would occupy the pulpit on alternate Sundays. When the younger and fairer members of the flock heard this announcement, they at once bought fresh dresses and declared their intention to turn over a new leaf if the Rev. Archibald were at all good-looking.

To Old Man’s intense disgust, the youthful Rev. Archibald was not only very handsome but he speedily filled the church. His florid eloquence and rousing periods made a pleasant change from the feeble efforts of the dying man, and, in the

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charm of novelty, Four Cornerites forgot the faithful service of thirty years.

The maidens admired the raven locks and saintly smile of the new-comer, especially when he called them " Dear Sisters " and said what an inspiration it was to see their fair faces look up to him as he preached. It is needless to state that he was unmarried. Many maidens in Four Corners were conscious of the fact, and did their best to lead the Rev. Archibald into the thorny paths of matrimony.

It was evident, too, that the Rev. Archibald was not unwilling to be led ; but he was poor, and felt that he must, of necessity, marry a wealthy bride in order to do justice to his mission. Being a practical young man, he laid more stress on dollars than beauty, and was speedily purchased by an elderly damsel who possessed the requisite funds. In deference to his wishes the engagement was kept secret, the Rev. Archibald, with great worldly prudence for one so young, recognizing the fact that the knowledge of their disappointment would perhaps render the other fair damsels of Four Corners somewhat vindictive toward him. In the meantime, by dint of judicious ambiguities of expression on his part, no less than six young ladies cherished fallacious hopes of becoming his bride. Feeling, however, that the Rev. Archibald had not actually committed himself, each was careful not to compare notes with her neighbour ;

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and thus the young cleric attained much honour and glory, and was invited to sumptuous high teas at every household in Four Corners.

Old Man and Ikey alone failed to succumb to the spell of the new-comer, who, when he was not on matrimonial schemes intent, indirectly criticized his dying colleague's methods of preaching as somewhat old-fashioned and tedious and not likely to result in the "capture of souls."

"He's a-sittin' in the City gates, a-stealin' of the Deacons' votes," said Old Man wrathfully, under the impression that he was quoting Scripture. "That's what he's doin', Ikey, 'sides foolin' round with old Miss Soames. I've a good mind to tar and feather 'em both, same 'sif they was Adam and Eve, and git 'em druv out of the place."

"Can't be done, Old Man. Can't be done. All the wimmin 'ud tar and feather us and wouldn't leave us any more clothes'n Adam and Eve had when they first started farmin'. Better give him fifty dollars to marry Miss Soames right away and clear out with her. There was a fire at the printin' place last night," he added hastily, by way of changing the subject, "and Parson Black's bin most killed over it."

"How's that?" demanded Old Man, who had been absent from Four Corners on the previous day in a vain attempt to discover the whereabouts of Pahnewuska.

"He dragged a long ladder right up to the place,

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his heart goin' like a pump, went in through the first-floor winder, and pulled the editor out of it, Old Man. When I see the Parson workin' away and that young gospel duck lookin' on, I just waded in bald-headed and helped the old man back to the Manse. He was nearly done for, and he'd ha' bin quite done for if I hadn't made him swaller five fingers of whisky. Then I went back and told that young jay what I thought of him."

"What did he say?"

"Say! He let on as his life was 'dedicated to another,' and it wasn't his place to take pursuance of his elders."

"Take what?"

"Pursuance of his elders," said Ikey hurriedly. "You allers seems to think as all the long words belongs to you, Old Man. So I just made him pursue that ladder back to the Manse! You should ha' seen the blisters on his lily-white hands afore we got there, me doin' the directin' and him doin' the haulin'. He's to preach to-morrow, and he said as my 'ruffianly conduct would prevent him from justifyin' himself to his Maker.'"

"Preach, is he? How did you git him along with that ladder?"

"Moral force—moral force, Old Man. Didn't waste no time just argifyin' with him or any dum nonsense like that, but held my gun to his ear and he come like a lamb. [Said he wasn't afeared of

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my 'murd'rous violence, but 'ud teach me a lesson in Christi-an 'umbleness.' "

Old Man, who had smiled at Ikey's idea of "moral force," suddenly became grave again.

"I ain't pleased with thisyer Four Corners crowd, Ikey. The Parson can't live more'n a few days; he must ha' broke his heart over that ladder. What's settled him is the blamed ingratitude of folks, and he's took that way of hurryin' up things just to die a bit quicker. If he'd bin well and in his right mind, he'd never ha' made all that fuss over savin' a Four Corners editor from fire; it's only puttin' off things for a time. Ev'ry editor as I've ever known in Four Corners has got ready for his fucher by drinkin' all the tanglefoot he could git down his throat. 'Sides, you can't have a parson like ours every day. Soon as he's gone, theseyer Four Corner jays 'ill be ashamed of the way they've treated him, and subscribe to buy a tombstone as 'ill lay over any of them marble monuments in the Catholic buryin'-ground."

He moodily drained the whisky jug. "When I think of that man's pluck in wrestlin' over you and me, Ikey, I'm goin' to give him a good send-off or scoot out of Four Corners. What's thisyer notice as I found stuck up in the post-office?"

He produced a crumpled paper from his pocket and handed it to Ikey.

Ikey laboriously spelled out a document stating that Parson Black would preach his farewell

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sermon to the members of his flock on Sunday next.

Old Man's features puckered up in a wrathful frown.

"When was that?"

"Last Sunday."

"How many folks went?"

"Nine!"

A grim smile pervaded Old Man's features. "I'll go for a ride on the mule"—he took his gun from the corner—"and look up half of these jays. You look arter the other half, Ikey."

Ikey cast a mournful look at the empty whisky jug. "It's rainin', and I don't feel very well, Old Man."

"You'll feel a durned sight worse if you ain't started in ten minnits," said Old Man, with such emphasis that Ikey raised no further objection, but got ready to "round up" his unwilling brethren.

"What am I to say?" he asked, as he came back with his three-cornered apology for a horse.

"Say! Tell 'em if they ain't all in their places at the proper time to-morrer, I'll come along the first thing on Monday an' they'll think an earthquake's struck 'em."

"But thisyer Archibald's goin' to preach to-morrer," urged Ikey. "Most of 'em 'ill come to hear him, 'specially Miss Soames. They say he's makin' up to her—wants her money to pay his

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college debts. Wait till he hears *her* preach and he can't git away from her. He's to preach to-morrer, I tell you."

"Is he!" said Old Man, with deep meaning. "Maybe not, though he thinks he is!"

Ikey began to understand darkly. "You wants to rope 'em all in to make sure, Old Man?"

"I wants to rope 'em all in to make sure," repeated Old Man.

The result of this conference was that the Rev. Archibald, on meeting Ikey energetically canvassing Four Corners in the rain, felt that there had been a little mistake over the ladder incident. "It's very kind of you to help me to get a congregation for to-morrow, although your efforts are not at all necessary, Brother Marston," he said conceitedly. "After much prayerful effort, I have resolved to forgive you for your impulsive conduct about the ladder. It may possibly have occurred to you that I ought to set an example to others. In my wrath, I spoke somewhat hastily."

"Oh, I'm a kind man and I don't bear no malice," said Ikey, "'specially as you carried the ladder and got a stiff back over it. How's Parson Black to-day?"

"Ill—very ill. I fear that our dear brother will soon be called hence, but when I ventured a hint about my desire to know whether he was prepared for the Great Change, he would not even discuss

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the matter with me. He's very set in his ways, I fear. Very set, poor man."

"No chance of his preachin' to-morrer?"

"Not the slightest." The Rev. Archibald exhibited an unbecoming haste in his anxiety to make Ikey understand that it would be cruel to Parson Black to expect him to enter the pulpit again.

"Asked him?"

"Asked him! Of course not. Brother Black is not in a fit condition to be worried about Church matters. It's truer kindness to leave him to—to his own meditations."

"I reckon as you've worried him a good deal. P'r'aps he'd die happier if you was to git your hair cut."

"Cut my hair! Why, I'm getting the congregation back. They come to look at it, especially the maidens. There is even a talk——" He stopped hastily, for very shame's sake.

"There's a deal of talk round here jus' now," said Ikey drily. "Absalom made a deal of talk in his time, but he got hung up by his hair, all the same;" and he rode on.

"What did the ruffian mean by that?" thought the Rev. Archibald. "Miss Soames must not hear about that ladder, or I shall never be able to hold my own with her. Sometimes," he sighed, "I cannot help wishing that, to put it in a worldly way, there was either more of the spring chicken about Miss Soames, or more of the old rooster about

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myself. That other ruffian, Old Man Evans, who seems to be a power in the place, asked me a fortnight ago if Miss Soames intended to adopt me. I have noticed that when he wishes to make me look ridiculous he has a singular knack of saying unpleasant things in the most innocent way in the world." He sadly shook out his flowing locks and went home to prepare a sermon for the morrow.

The next morning, at a quarter to eleven, the inhabitants of Four Corners were greatly surprised to see Ikey standing by the church door, counting their numbers. He also exchanged greetings with all his friends, and, from time to time, threw out the apparently gratuitous statement that there was a good sermon in store for the godly. Most of the congregation, in return, informed Ikey that they were not accustomed to take their theology second-hand from him, and were quite capable of judging a sermon for themselves. With unusual urbanity, Ikey went on counting, and disdained to make any rejoinder. People somewhat bitterly remembered afterwards that he continued to stay outside the church.

The congregation, however, would have been still more surprised, could it have seen Old Man coming from the Manse, with Parson Black leaning feebly on his arm. There was a look in the ancient clergyman's eyes which scarcely harmonized with his feeble footsteps. From time to time, Old Man

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encouragingly patted him on the back, and, after repeated stoppages in order to get his breath, the dying parson once more tottered toward the church.

Ikey helped him up the steps with respectful solicitude, and as soon as he and Old Man had passed in, barred the heavy wooden door from the outside.

There was an audible stir when Old Man led Parson Black toward the pew which immediately fronted the pulpit. The Rev. Archibald, who sat on the platform behind the pulpit, stared with astonishment. Had he not tenderly tucked up Parson Black in bed, and requested him not to worry about the spiritual needs of Four Corners, as they were quite safe in his (the Rev. Archibald's) capable hands? It was a shock to him to see the tall figure of the old clergyman moving feebly toward the pew. He also noticed the pink flush on Parson Black's prominent cheekbones, and the effort with which he kept himself from falling. It seemed to the Rev. Archibald that there might be a scene in the church which would quite spoil the effect of his own sermon, and he more than ever resolved to get Old Man driven out of Four Corners, should he ever be in a position to do so.

The congregation, looking at their dying pastor, felt a pang of shame. He had married most of them, christened their children, had always been available in moments of temporal or spiritual

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difficulty. Now they had run after a strange idol, had tired of their old friend, had not had even the common decency to wait for his death to do him dishonour. Most of them buried their faces in their hands as the aged parson tottered to his seat. Though they hid their faces, they could not hide their shame. It did not seem natural that Parson Black should be in the pew opposite the pulpit which he had occupied for so many years, whilst the spruce young man with the raven hair and glossy broadcloth sat complacently fingering a Bible and waiting for an opportunity to display his eloquence.

Old Man looked round with a grin of satisfaction, slowly and emphatically counted the congregation, and sat down beside Parson Black.

The Rev. Archibald began the opening prayer so briskly that the congregation soon forgot the bent figure of Parson Black, who rose to his feet with difficulty and clung to Old Man's arm. When, however, sermon time drew near, people were surprised to see Old Man step up on the platform beside the Rev. Archibald, notwithstanding the fact that he was absorbed in prayer, and give his flowing coat-tails an irreverently vicious pull. The Rev. Archibald, blushing pinkly, after a whispered remark from Old Man, hurriedly left the platform and seated himself in a back pew. To the congregation's still further surprise, Old Man came down from the platform, tenderly led Parson Black

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toward the pulpit, and, placing a glass of water by his side, handed him his notes.

Old Man cleared his throat, and, with a significant gesture, put one hand in his hip-pocket. The congregation, accustomed to his eccentricities, serenely awaited developments, for it looked as if he were about to "draw" on somebody in the sacred precincts of the church. To the jaded appetites of Four Cornerites, the possibility of a row added a renewed piquancy to the scene.

Old Man, after casting an anxious glance at the trembling form of Parson Black, advanced to the edge of the platform, his eyes filled with withering scorn.

"I dessay," he said ironically, "as you'd ruther hear a sermon from me or that black-headed woodpecker yonder." He pointed a threatening finger toward the shrinking figure of the Rev. Archibald, who, at this pointed allusion, vainly tried to slip out of the church.

"'Tain't no use your tryin' to git out." Old Man's glance followed the Rev. Archibald. "Ikey's outside—with his gun—and the big bar's on the door." He turned to the congregation again. "For thirty years," he said impressively, "thisyer grey-headed old parson of ours has bin tryin' to rope you in for the next world. If he'd known as much about you as I do, he might ha' give it up in thirty minnits. But he didn't know what a contract he'd got to tackle, and he's gone on

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tacklin' it ever since, throwin' in me and Ikey as a kind of crownin' cross. And now, when he's about to pass in his checks, you won't listen to his partin' words. I was way back in the Bush last Sunday, or I'd ha' rounded you all up. I hear as there was a powerful sermon, 'How Enoch walked with God.' " ("Enoch knew better'n to walk with any of you durned Four Cornerites," parenthetically remarked Old Man.) "Most of you, by some onfortnit accident, missed it. Now, as you've come back to the fold, like lambs snatched from the burnin', so to speak, we're goin' to have thisyer sermon over agin; and you've *got* to listen to it. You hear me! I puts it to thisyer meetin' as Parson Black lets fly about Enoch agin, though it's hard on him and hard on Enoch to come before such a crowd. I may also remark as anyone goin' to sleep 'ill wake up agin in the next world 'stead of this."

Several times it seemed as if Parson Black would break down. Behind the words of the sermon the congregation detected the pain which was there, and were visibly moved. Once or twice, when the dying man faltered, lost the thread of his discourse and looked piteously around, Old Man was at his side, ready with the glass of water, or to turn over the pages of his sermon. Without Old Man it would have been impossible for the aged clergyman to preach; but with this faithful comrade at his elbow he conquered his growing

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weakness and manfully struggled on to the end.

When the sermon was over, Old Man also had something to say, and was not slow in saying it ; but he first brought forward a comfortable chair to the edge of the platform and put Parson Black into it. Then he once more faced the congregation, his hand still in his hip-pocket in that curiously suggestive manner with which he always enforced an argument.

“ Now, as we’ve had thisyer interestin’ sermon, and have learned a good deal about Enoch as it wouldn’t hurt us to imitate, there’s one thing more to be done. You’ve all gone astray, lookin’ for a new shepherd afore the old ‘un’s passed in his checks, which is durned disrespectful ; but ‘tain’t a mossle of good callin’ names to a tough crowd like you. The least you can do afore you clears out of thisyer buildin’ is to ‘pologise to the Parson and say—good-bye. Soon, he’s goin’ a long way off, and you ain’t none of you done much to help him on his journey. ‘Sides, where he’s goin’, you ain’t likely to meet him agin when any of you leaves Four Corners. If you don’t come up, every man, woman and child,” he added, glaring fiercely around, “ you’ll jus’ stay here, Sunday dinner or no Sunday dinner, till you grows old.”

What touched the congregation more keenly than Old Man’s stinging scorn was the fact that Parson Black uttered not one word of reproach.

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The women and girls wept audibly as they implored the old man's forgiveness, the men turned their heads away from him.

When he had shaken hands with all of them, he laid his trembling fingers on the heads of the children and blessed them ; then, still leaning on Old Man's strong arm, and looking up into his face with tender gratitude and love, tottered back to the Manse to die.

It was evident to Old Man's experienced eyes that the end was very near. He sorrowfully helped to put the dying minister to bed, that bed from which he would never rise again until he was carried away to the lonely little cemetery beyond Four Corners, and was about to turn away when his friend called him back.

Old Man knelt down beside the bedside. " What is it, Parson ? " he asked huskily. " Jus' pull yourself together, an' me and Ikey an' Miss Wilks 'ill take you out campin' by the river. The sweet air 'ill soon put new life into you, make you forgit all these unnat'ral hounds."

" Speak not of them with bitterness." Parson Black's long, thin fingers stole out to his young friend. " I would fain, too, give you my blessing before I depart, ease the secret sorrow of your heart ; for God's voice tells me that you are sorely afflicted, could not have ministered to me had not you also suffered."

Old Man bowed his face in his hands ; the tears

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that strong men rarely shed trickled through his fingers. "You bet I'm afflicted. I've got a hard row to hoe, Parson. A hard row."

"I know, I know. Is it that poor child who teaches the other children in the school? Alas! Alas! my friend, the hand of death is on her."

"I know." Old Man hastily dried his eyes. For the first time in his life another man had seen him weep, and he was ashamed. "It's so awful lonesome for her, Parson. That sunny-haired child's goin' down into the Valley of the Shadder while all the world rejoices round her; and I—I've got to look on and do nothin' 'cept a miracle happens to save her."

"A miracle! Why not?" The dying man slowly and with difficulty raised himself in his bed. "The age of miracles is not yet past. Half the sorrows and troubles of the world come from its unbelief. You have been very good to me, my son. For His own wise purposes (doubtless I was arrogant and hard of heart, thought that my poor sheep could not get on without me) the Almighty has been pleased grievously to afflict me ere I am called hence. But in His infinite goodness and mercy He hath put it into your heart to soften my affliction, to minister unto me and heal my wounds. He is a God of justice, of light. Something tells me that this poor child whom you love may yet be spared to you. Do not lose heart, do not lose faith, do not lose hope.

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In the distance there is always the Cross." His eyes shone with the light of the visionary who knows no check to his belief. "I see a bleak hilltop where huge rocks rear upward to the sky. On the topmost rock towers the figure of the Crucified Christ, at the base grows a strange plant. At the foot of the Cross is the kneeling figure of a man."

Old Man raised his tear-stained eyes. "Yes, Parson, yes?"

"A snow-white bird flies downward from the Cross. It rests upon the man's shoulder. The figure of the man seems familiar, though I—I cannot—cannot—see——"

"Look agin, Parson. Look agin. For God's sake, look agin. Who kneels there?"

"I—cannot—see—his——"

The hand in Old Man's gradually relaxed its tender clasp, grew cold and stiff, and still Old Man remained kneeling beside the bed. "A miracle!" he murmured. "A miracle! A miracle sent to tell me what to do."

He kissed the dead man, now so wan and white, reverently covered the face from which God's Hand had already smoothed away all care, and silently crept down to the river-shore. "A miracle!" He dipped his burning hands into the amber flood. "A miracle! God of the river and the mountain, God of earth and air and sky, lead me across the river, over the mountain, into the Great Beyond, till I come unto Thy Cross."

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A light step broke in upon his reverie, and Cynthia Hannum came toward him. It seemed to Old Man that she carried palm branches in her hands. "You here? You, Cynthia?" he said in astonishment.

"Yes, Old Man," she answered sadly. "I often come here at this hour. Soon I shall come no more; soon the sweet world will fade from me and I shall be taken away from it." She buried her face in her hands. "I thought I had one friend who would stay with me until the darkness passes and the shadows flee away, yet Ikey tells me you are going on a journey."

"Yes," said Old Man solemnly, "I'm goin' away; and I dunno when I shall come back. It rests with God A'mighty. But when I do come back, it will be to—you."

"Don't leave me! Don't leave me, Old Man! You are going away for my sake? Some wild quest? Ikey has told me of it. Perhaps you may—come—back—too—late. And then how very, very sorry you will be to think you were not with me at the last."

Old Man took her hands in his, so small, so white, so tender, that they seemed to him little fluttering doves. "I'm comin' back to make you well agin, Cynthia. To make you well agin."

She shook her head. "I wasn't afraid to die with you beside me. But now——"

Old Man drew her to his heart and comforted

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her. "Soon you shall be made whole, Cynthia," he said gently. "Soon, by God's mercy, you shall be made whole."

"Yes," she said, sorrowfully pacing the shore with him, while the westering sun shone upon the sad radiance of her eyes, as the soft lapping of the water made melancholy music against the wharf's wooden piers. "Soon I shall be made whole, Old Man. Soon I shall be made whole. But you will not be with me when it comes to pass, and I am sore afraid."

CHAPTER VIII

OLD MAN MAKES A CALL

AS the days went by, Miss Wilks beheld Old Man's preparations for his trip "way back of the mountains" in search of the Indian girl Pahnewuska with undisturbed equanimity. She knew that this unwonted activity, this testing of saddle-gear and getting out of guns, meant that she was needed for a journey, and, with characteristic prudence, took great care of herself. On more than one occasion Old Man's life had depended on her strength and fleetness, and she made herself "fit" in her own peculiar way. Although she liked to wander far and wide, always provided that she was within measurable distance of her friends, it was a matter of supreme indifference to the mule whether she lived in Four Corners or on the summit of Kicking Horse Pass. To so restless and inquiring a spirit, Four Corners did not comprise the universe. Travel might produce adventure, but Old Man and Ikey invariably did so, for they had an all-compelling instinct of interesting themselves in the affairs of their fellow-creatures which was

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bound to produce exciting incidents, especially when the fellow-creatures considered the interference an outrage on the liberty of the subject. In her own heart, the mule was cognisant that much of the world remained to be explored ; that Nature had not intended her to spend the rest of her days in Four Corners, and that her reputation demanded that she should achieve fresh deeds of derring-do. But, somehow, as she saw that James did not join in the preparations for departure (he spent most of his time in the Court House, poring over various calfskin-bound volumes which did not interest her in the least), Miss Wilks relaxed her preparations, became thoughtful, failed to do justice to a naturally vigorous appetite, and even omitted to ask Old Man for her evening drink.

Conscious of the struggle which was going on in her mind, Old Man watched his four-footed friend with a certain solicitude. They had been companions in arms for so many years, had encountered, and triumphantly emerged from, so many perils together, that he could not bear to be parted from her, for she understood him even better than Ikey did. Now, however, that she had become so accustomed to "mothering" James, he could imagine the difficulties which beset her when she had to choose between the comparatively new friend and the old. Anything immature and callow always appealed to Miss Wilks's better self, restrained her vicious propensities, made her

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more gentle. James, with a certain guileless simplicity which characterized all his actions, had won his way into her heart, and she would fain have had him make one of the party.

"Please yourself, you one-eyed Methusalem," Old Man said magnanimously one evening, as the mule leaned her head on his shoulder and affected an altogether factitious interest in the mountains on the other side of the river. "If so be as you wants to stay with James—stay; if you'd ruther come along with me and Ikey to search for the Herb of Healing—come. James is all right: he's big enuff to look arter himself 'ithout your fussing round him like a hen with one chicken. Nobody 'ill hurt him afore we gits back." He artfully paused to let his words sink well into Miss Wilks's mind. "'Sides, you allers did like kickin' the stuffin' out of Injun ponies. Barn-doors ain't nearly so good to practise on."

Miss Wilks's ear went up. "Did you say Injun ponies, Old Man? Injun ponies?"

"Course I said Injun ponies. We ain't come across any real Injun ponies for years and years. You don't pay no attention to them little Cannucks as the habitants drives into Four Corners. They ain't wuth botherin' about for a mule of your powers."

Miss Wilks gave a quiver of pleasurable excitement. Old Man's chance-launched arrow had found her weak spot, for a part of her youth had

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been misspent in Indian encampments, and he knew that she loathed Indian ponies with an intensity which was only equalled by her affection for himself. If the mule had hesitated before, she hesitated no longer. When contrasted with the superior joys of conflict, James was weighed in the balance and found wanting.

"In course, if you don't want to come, I'd have to go on hossback. You wouldn't like to see me ridin' a hoss—a lowdown, ornary, common, three-cornered bag of bones kind of a hoss—when I've got you," persisted Old Man.

An indignant shake of Miss Wilks's head indicated clearly enough the trouble in store for any other quadruped which Old Man might bestride. Though she had no objection to Ikey's venerable ruin of a roan (she had long ago kicked him into admiring subjection), or a packhorse to carry their belongings, her magnanimity stopped there. If Old Man were bent on going to perdition in search of the adventure perilous, it was clearly her prerogative to carry him to his doom, and she signed, sealed and delivered this unspoken compact between them with a lick of her pink tongue, her customary method of affixing her signature to any transaction of unusual magnitude.

Ikey, although not very sanguine as to the success of his friend's quest, was equally resolved to be one of the party, for he, too, laboured under the delusion that without him Old Man was a

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helpless infant who could not be trusted to run alone. Every few months there stirred in his veins that irresistible longing for action which with other men took the form of a carouse. Ikey, however, though he liked his whisky well enough, was not an habitual drinker. When he was "on a jag" it was always the result of some mental trouble which he could find no other way of forgetting, a most inconsequent course of action; for, as Old Man pointed out to him, when he emerged from his spree the trouble was there waiting for him just where he had left it. Ikey, however, in pursuit of his rights as an individual entity, declined to be reasoned out of this illogical course of action, declaring that it was a real comfort to be able to put your troubles behind you, even though you were not in a condition to realize that you had done so. Owing to the dilapidated state of his nether garments he had borrowed Old Man's best trousers for Parson Black's funeral, and, in spite of his aristocratic appearance, had failed to recover his spirits. Nature intended him for a man of action. Give him plenty to do and he was as happy as the day was long. Tell him to sit still to meditate upon the future, and he immediately got into difficulties with the present.

Knowing this idiosyncrasy of Ikey's, Old Man set him to work to repair their tent, overhaul the pack-saddle and other gear. He did this with such an affectation of inability on his own part to deal

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with those recondite matters, that it instantly restored Ikey's cheerfulness and enabled him to throw off those sombre reflections which would otherwise have landed him in Millette's bar for an indefinite period, and, possibly, in the Four Corners jail for a definite one. At the same time, he enjoyed the importance of foiling the curiosity of certain Four Cornerites who wanted to know the reason for this projected journey.

"Reason? Why, we're goin' off on a trip for the benefit of our healths," he said grandly. "You don't think we'd stay in thisyer City of the Plain and be destroyed with the rest of you for your unkindness to Parson Black. Even the Digger Injuns wouldn't ha' treated their worst Medicine Man as you treated the poor old parson."

Thus touched upon a tender spot, his conscience-stricken questioners reported to their neighbours that Ikey was giving himself airs about his projected journey with Old Man, and that Miss Wilks had "spread herself all over the place, cuss her!"

When it was delicately hinted to James that his family life was to be broken up for some time, he, too, became unusually serious. His mother, with that touching fidelity which is always so much more pathetic in proportion to the utter worthlessness of its object, refused to leave Mr. Fiske to look after himself and take up her abode in the hut until Old Man's return. James was safe in the hut; if he came back to his father's house

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the old anxiety and suspense would return with him, for Mr. Fiske, though in his sober moments adoring James, directly he had swallowed more "tanglefoot" than was good for him, invariably thirsted to destroy his son. Even when drunk, his awe of Old Man sufficed to keep him away from the hut, and in this fact lay James's safety. In some irrational way, the notion always obtruded itself into Mr. Fiske's befuddled brain that James would be an acceptable sacrifice to the Almighty if offered up as an atonement for his father's sins. If James were foolish enough not to share this view, it was solely because of his youth and inexperience with regard to parental privileges.

Anxious to avoid the publicity of a general farewell, Old Man and Ikey refused to divulge the date of their departure. Miss Wilks, however, was not afflicted by any false modesty with regard to her own importance, and, after calling on several acquaintances and helping herself to whatever forage she fancied, wound up by looking in at her friend the blacksmith's and declined to leave until provided with a new set of shoes. In ordinary circumstances she did not greatly trouble herself whether she were shod or not, but, with a journey on the tapis, prudently determined to run no risks of being lamed by the way. Hence, when it occurred to Old Man to inspect the condition of her feet, he was not surprised to find that she had already looked into the matter on her own account.

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"Jus' like your dum previousness. S'pose all I've got to do is to pay for 'em," he suggested.

"Of course," Miss Wilks implied, with the indifferent air of one who does not consider the matter worth mentioning, and went to sleep with her head on his shoulder.

Of his farewell visit to Cynthia Hannum, Old Man never spoke, even to Miss Wilks. The school-mistress had taken it for granted that nothing could stop him from setting out on his useless search for "the Herb of Healing." Although it was very sweet to feel that his devotion carried him to such lengths, she was conscious that her vitality would rapidly become lowered in his absence. Whenever they met, something of Old Man's superabundant vigour passed into her, and she did not lose ground so rapidly. Now that he was going away, she shuddered to think how slowly the long and dreary days would pass.

The evening before his departure, Old Man dropped into the verandah of Labois' lavender-coloured little house, where Cynthia Hannum "boarded," and discoursed with amazing cheerfulness on what he called his "fishin' party way back of the mountains."

Cynthia, an unusual colour in her cheeks and wearing her prettiest frock for Old Man's benefit, lay back in her rocker as she listened to his mendacious statements with the air of one who had momentarily banished the grim spectre which

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stood behind her chair. "As if you really wanted to catch fish, Old Man, when the Ottawa's full of pickerel."

"They gits too much sawdust in 'em from the mills, and I don't hold with the flavour of it. When I wants to eat sawdust, I likes it plain and not with a fishy flavourin'."

"Very well, then," said the girl with unusual brightness, as she roused herself to meet him half-way. "We will take it for granted that the fish in the Ottawa are not good enough for you, and that you are really setting out in search of something wonderful. But when do you come back, Old Man? And what will you bring me? It was an Indian basket last time. You're very fond of Indians, aren't you?"

"I ain't quite clear how it happened, but I've got a touch of Injun blood in me myself," Old Man asseverated, "else I shouldn't be so much at home with 'em. But Injuns ain't what they once was. No, they're a disappointin' lot, most of 'em. Now all their time's taken up with cadgin' for whisky and dodgin' flea-powder on the Reservations. The only real live Injuns left in Canada, real cut-your-throat-as-soon-as-look-at-you Injuns, is Yellow Feather's tribe; and it takes 'em all their time to skip out of the Reservation Agent's reach as wants to wash 'em and pile 'em on to a Reservation where they can't do no harm."

"You think they would do harm if they got

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the chance ? ” Cynthia inquired. “ That beautiful squaw—if she were white, people would rave about her—who sometimes shows herself in the village—the one you always talk to for such a very long time when she does come—doesn’t look very dangerous.”

“ Doesn’t look dangerous ! Doesn’t she ! The things I’ve seen her heave at old Yellow Feather when he’s put her back up ! Though she nursed me out of an illness once, she’d knife me as soon as look at me if we quarrelled.”

“ Why should she ? ”

“ Oh, it’s just Injun nature, and you can’t go agin it any more’n she can. She don’t understand herself and nobody else can understand her. Wash Injuns, dress ’em, flea-powder ’em, cut their hair,” added Old Man, waxing eloquent, “ buy ’em Bibles and sivilize ’em, and a month arter they’ll be just as dirty, just as undressed, with their hair as long as before. You can dab an Injun all over with sivilization, same as he dabs himself all over with paint, and the sivilization don’t last as long as the paint.”

“ But that squaw was exquisitely neat and clean, Old Man. Her dignity of carriage was simply beautiful. All her clothes were embroidered do-skin, and must have cost a small fortune.”

“ Oh, no, they didn’t,” said Old Man innocently. “ When I was down with fever way back of the mountains, and she nursed me, me and Ikey

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clubbed together and bought 'em for her. She said she could afford to buy her own clothes when she wanted 'em, but she took 'em, all the same. Sometimes I fancy old Yellow Feather gits a bit riled 'cause she won't wear any of the things he gives her."

"Oh-h-h!"

"What's the matter?" anxiously asked Old Man. "Suthin' gone wrong?"

"No; only a cramp," and Cynthia moved a little uneasily in her chair. One look at Old Man's frank, ingenuous face made her ashamed of herself for cherishing a feeling of jealousy against the squaw who had nursed him. She envied the squaw. "What is her name?"

"Pahnewuska—Flower of Summer."

"It is pretty. Not quite so musical as Mahnewana or Monongaheela, but pretty."

"And she's pretty too—pretty as a picture," said Old Man, so openly that Cynthia felt more ashamed of herself than ever. "I reckon Yellow Feather'd kill her, and him too, if she took up with anyone else. They do say he's got a real pretty collection of Reservation Agents' scalps hidden away back of the mountains. He uses 'em to fringe his mocassins with."

Cynthia's charming lashes drooped rather wearily. "You will be careful and not run any risks? I can't bear to think of your going away when——" She hesitated, and the innocent

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candour of her appealing eyes tore at Old Man's heart-strings, for he knew very well that she feared lest she should never see him again.

"Ikey and Miss Wilks 'ill look arter me and I'll look arter them," he said hastily, "and James 'ill boss things at home. They're a wunnerful folk, Injuns." He gazed absently through the screen of "morning glories" which shaded the Labois verandah from the fervent heat of the summer sun. "Wunnerful folk, full of myst'ries and b'liefs and legends as nobody 'ud suspect 'em of. Once on a time they owned all thisyer valley, and hid their gold in it, although nobody's ever succeeded in findin' it. Their ancestors and great chiefs were buried on Prophet's Hill yonder, and they b'lieve, so Pahnewuska tells me, as one day they'll come into their own agin. The graves on Prophet's Hill 'ill open, the chiefs ride out on their war ponies and clear the Valley of the White Men, the forests grow over the clearin's, the Great Manitou once more fill their huntin' grounds with game, their rivers with fish. You can't really git to the back of an Injun's mind, and when you do git there, it's moved on somewhere else."

"But why should you want to get to the back of their minds, Old Man?"

"'Cause though they're nearly all wiped out, what's left of 'em are a wunnerful folk," Old Man repeated, as he gazed on the ethereal loveliness of the fair girl before him, so frail, so thin, that it

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seemed as if even a passing zephyr would waft her away into the Infinite. "A wunnerful folk. They knows all sorts of nat'ral cures for illnesses as we think can't be cured, all sorts of healin' herbs as 'ud knock the spots off Doc Higgins's prescriptions. He don't seem to have done you much good lately," he added, with an affectation of carelessness so natural that it would have deceived anyone else than the dying girl.

Cynthia Hannum ceased to rock in her chair and glanced round. "No," she said, pressing her handkerchief to her lips, and was again the same delicate, sorrowing creature whom Old Man had so often comforted. "No, he doesn't seem to do me much good, Old Man. What is the use of expecting him to do me any good when you know as well as I do that nothing can save me; that it is only a question of time, of a few months more at the most, before the end comes. I shall go on teaching as long as I can, and then——" She shivered a little, dropped her eyes, but presently raised them again to his. In the dim starlight which penetrated the leafy screen (outside the whole world lay bathed in the silvery radiance of the moon) Old Man could see that they were filled with tears.

"And then, Cynthia?" he said gently. "And then?"

"And then." She laid a transparent hand upon his arm. "I—I don't want to be taken to the

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graveyard beyond the Cross Roads. I want to be near the river, to hear it whisper of peace as it flows downward to the sea. I want to be near you and Ikey and the children. Up there it is desolate, neglected. The nettles grow rankly over forgotten graves. I couldn't rest there, Old Man. I couldn't rest there with you so far away. I want to be near you—and Ikey—and the children who love me. Promise me that I shan't be taken there when——”

“ When ? ”

“ Promise me that when the time comes you, and Ikey, and Miss Wilks will carry me through the starlight into the solemn hush and mystery of the Bush, lay me to rest where the maidenhair and the pines lean to the little brook as it runs singing to the river. Even then I shall hear it, shall know that you sometimes come to kneel beside it. Promise me this, Old Man, and I will try to be happy till you come again.”

Old Man reverently raised her thin, white fingers to his lips. “ If I promise you that, Cynthia, will you promise me suthin' too ? ”

“ Of course I will, Old Man. You know very well that I would do anything for you. What is it ? ”

“ What I want you to do,” Old Man said gently, “ is to try with all your might and main to make up your mind to live. Lots of folks dies when there's no need for 'em to die, jus' because they

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thinks they've got to. If you're allers thinkin' as you're goin' to die, you haven't a chance; if you make up your mind you're goin' to live, you may be able to throw it off. 'Sides," he added, " there *is* another chance, and I'm goin' in search of it. D'you think as anything else in the wide, wide world 'ud take me from you now? D'you think as I'd keep away from you a moment longer'n I had to? "

" I didn't know, Old Man. I feared—I dreaded that my feebleness disturbed you, that you couldn't bear to see me suffer, and so you—you wanted to leave me."

" I've *got* to bear it." Old Man rose reluctantly. "'Tain't one of those things as anyone else can bear for me."

Cynthia rose too, her eyes gazing fearfully into his. " Don't go, Old Man. Don't leave me. I could die more happily if you were here to help and guard me. I—I shouldn't be so much afraid with you to hold my hand and turn the shadows into sunshine. Don't leave me. If you knew how I think of it through all the darkness of the long and lonely nights, you'd never have the heart to leave me. You couldn't do it, Old Man. You couldn't do it."

" I must leave you or I shall go mad."

" No, no; you are so brave and strong. When you're near me, I'm not so very much afraid. Not so very, very much. Your arms are so strong

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and tender, so kind, so sheltering that when I rest within them they drive away all fear. If you go away, I'm afraid of the darkness, the black night, the voices which whisper to me of—Death. I'm frightened. Oh, so frightened of the loneliness and the dark."

"Yes, yes, my pretty, my darling, my dear. I know, I know." Old Man wiped away Cynthia's tears, sought to comfort her with tender words. He was going to Pahnewuska to gain from the Indian squaw the healing herb which should make her well and strong again. He would come back with it, cure her, and then——

"And then?" Her eyes looked up into his, and Old Man tasted the unutterable joy which comes to a man when the shackles of the world fall from him and he realizes the tender sweetness of a woman's love.

CHAPTER IX

THE START

“OUCH! What’s the marrer?” Ikey dreamily turned over on his side and, once more pulling his blankets about him, sought to escape Old Man’s inexorable hand—that hand which had stripped him of so many illusions as well as blankets.

“Daybreak’s the matter, Ikey. ‘Bout time to start, I reckon. Git into your buckskins.”

“Don’t want to git into my buckskins. Wansh go sleep agin. Let’s start to-morrer, Old—Ouch! What the hellanblazes are you doin’ that for?”

A jug of cold water directed with remorseless precision by the hand of Old Man had suddenly taken his breath away, and Ikey sat up spluttering, swearing, unwilling to face the chilly dawn, and uttering exclamations more forcible than polite.

“There warn’t no other way when you kep’ on squeezin’ my hand and sayin’ you’d never leave me. I had to do it,” Old Man apologetically

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explained ; " it's a ' work of necessity.' You know I allers has to when we're startin' out agin. The Angel Gabriel's horn wouldn't wake you if I didn't."

" I'd ruther hear it'n you," sleepily muttered Ikey. " He wouldn't fill it with water and let it drip on my face. Takes a man like you to do that. You'll give me the chills some day, if you ain't more careful, Old Man, that's what you'll do." Then he got up, sat with his long, lean shanks dangling on the edge of his bunk, and wiped his wet face. " Why didn't you put a little whisky in it ? Then I'd ha' smelt it and woke up."

" 'Twould ha' taken a bar'l at least," ironically returned Old Man. " Pull on your britches for decency's sake. Here's Miss Wilks a-shovin' in her head at the door ; " and Ikey rapidly clad himself, dipped his head in a bucket of water and, his equanimity completely restored at the remembrance of the journey before him, cheerfully announced that he'd only been " playin' possum."

Totally ignoring this mendacious statement, Old Man brought him a mug of steaming hot coffee. " Now, Ikey, you're the best cook in Four Corners. Git a fancy breakfast ready whiles I loads up the mule and straightens things out a bit. I like to think the beginnin's goin' to be pleasant, whatever the end may be."

Thus diplomatically lured to forgetfulness of his imaginary wrongs and flattered in his weakest

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point, Ikey foraged round and proceeded to fry some pork, mixing the rashers up with sliced potatoes in an alluring manner known only to himself—a manner which stirred even Miss Wilks's appetite as the two friends hastily did justice to the meal and from time to time handed her a chunk of corn bread dipped in the grease in which the rashers were fried. Then, as if knowing what was coming, the mule edged the whole of her body into the hut and looked thirstily at Old Man.

"What's the matter now?" asked Ikey, feigning surprise at Miss Wilks's expectant manner.

"What's the matter? You can't fool her. She knows as well as we do it's time to drink to our luck, Ikey." Old Man gave the mule her customary allowance of whisky, and the three friends drank to the success of their expedition, for Ikey had a superstitious idea that if this all-important ceremony were omitted, ill-luck would come of it. For himself, he was not greatly concerned, but his faith in Old Man's infallibility had been roughly shaken with regard to this mad quest for the Herb of Healing. He knew enough of Indian nature to be aware that Pahnewuska was not likely to help to cure her rival in Old Man's affections. Still, if Old Man did not think so, there was no more to be said.

"Now"—Old Man poured out libations to the gods in the shape of whisky dregs—"now for a Council of War. Where's the pipe, Ikey?"

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Ikey reached down an Indian pipe—a pipe ornamented with human hair—which hung on the wall, solemnly rammed in a special brand of tobacco, took a few whiffs, and handed it to Old Man. Old Man smoked in his turn and gave Miss Wilks a handful of the choice tobacco to chew. “That’s the last you’ll git of that brand till we’re home agin,” he explained, “so don’t waste it.”

“What are we goin’ to do next, Old Man?”

“We’ve got to find Yellow Feather,” Old Man explained, when the pipe had been put back in its place. “I dunno zackly where he is, but I reckon he’ll be some days back in the mountains, dodgin’ any Reservation officers as may be tryin’ to lure him into the fold. He’s got spies all over the place who’ll let him know as we’re comin’.”

“Well? What’ll you do then?”

“If Yellow Feather wants to see us, he’ll put himself in our way; if he doesn’t, he’ll put himself out of it, and it ’ill be like searchin’ for a needle in a bundle of hay. He’s dodged Gov’nment people for so many years, it ’ill be easy enuff for him to dodge us.”

“Oh, he can’t. The mule can pick up a trail a month old. Once we gits on Yellow Feather’s trail, we’ll be all right, Old Man.”

“Yes, but we’ve got to find it first, and I ain’t no manner of knowin’ where to look for it. If you’re anywhere near an Injun camp, you can gin’rally smell it a mile off, but he may be thirty

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or forty miles away beyond the mountains. No one but prospectors ever goes as fur back as that."

"If the mule comes across Injun sign, she's bound to foller it up. I've never known her miss a trail yet."

"And it 'ill fill up all our time to keep her quiet when she does find it. She don't love Injuns any too well since a pony bit off one ear and they blinded her in one eye. Seems to think she ought to chew up every one of 'em she meets, even when they ain't got no war paint on and come in to sell baskets."

"Oh, she'll be all right, Old Man, if you tells her to keep quiet. Where do we start from?"

"We'll git Lajeunesse to take us across in the ferry, way down by the Judge's. You load the packhorse and bring him round. I've got a lot of coloured beads and red and yaller silk handkerchiefs for Pahnewuska and Yellow Feather, and half a dozen bottles of whisky packed in corn shucks. We might be goin' to the Great Lone Lands from the amount of truck we're takin'. Still, once Yellow Feather gits to know of it, there won't be much to bring back. I can see by the look in Miss Wilks's eye she don't like to carry her share of it."

"She's got to like it, Old Man." Ikey, now thoroughly awake, departed to the lean-to which did duty for a stable and brought round the packhorse, a nondescript-coloured animal which, from

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a natural disinclination to the superfluous luxury of grooming, was now trying to imitate Miss Wilks's hue as closely as possible, an effort which she treated with tolerant contempt. Yellow as a body colour was all right, but white and great dirty patches caused by rolling in the clay on the river-bank offended her fastidious taste.

When the animals were laden and they were ready to depart, Ikey looked round with a grin. "Good thing James slep' through it all, Old Man. I'll go and wake him. Dunno as I'd care to go off 'ithout sayin' good-bye to him."

"Better let him sleep. He's still growin' fast," said Old Man gently. "It does seem sorter rough on James as we can't let him come along; but it mightn't be safe to have him with us if we gits into any rows; and we mostly does git into rows when we takes our walks abroad."

"We ain't walkin'. We're ridin', Old Man."

"Oh, shut your mouth, Ikey. When we takes our walks abroad and gits into rows, James 'ud only be in the way. Nice things Lelota 'ud say to us if we were to bring him back damaged. Now, listen to me."

"All right, Old Man. I never does anything else when once you gits started. Hurry, or it 'ill be broad daylight in a minnit."

"We've got to find that Injun squaw Pahne-wuska and git her to show us where the Herb of Healin' grows. I, for one, ain't comin' back 'ithout

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it if it takes me months. It's a question of life and death for more'n Cynthia. If I fails to find thisyer herb, it's brought her a certain amount of happiness to know I was willin' to go in search of it. If I don't go, she'll surely die ; if I do go, I may succeed and she'll surely live. And that's all there is about it. If I don't succeed, I ain't much use for livin' myself. Now do you understand ? ”

“ Course I understand, Old Man. No need to tell me what you've got in your mind. I've known it all the time. I fires when you fires.”

“ Better keep your fire till you make sure whether I hit or miss,” said Old Man grimly, although his lips twitched a little. “ You may want it for yourself. Now, if anything happens to me, you'll do your durndest to find the plant and bring it back to Cynthia. Promise ? Honest Injun ? ”

“ In course, Old Man. Honest Injun ! What d'you take me for ! Now I'll wake James.”

“ You're a little bit late about it, Ikey. I've been awake for the last two hours,” said that young gentleman, briskly putting his head out of his little room. “ Even the Angel Gabriel couldn't have slept through all the bad language you've been using this morning.” He tried to speak jauntily, but was evidently much moved at the prospect of parting from his own familiar friends. “ I'll come down as far as the Judge's, Old Man, and give you a send-off.”

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"All right, James. Come on, then. Go ahead, Ikey, or it 'ill be broad daylight afore we're off."

Ikey went on ahead through the sweet dawn with the packhorse and the roan. Old Man and James and Miss Wilks lingered a little behind. "You'll sorter remember, James," Old Man said earnestly to his young friend, "to see Cynthia as often as you can and keep her spirits up. If any lyin' reports comes in 'bout things happenin' to us, make her b'lieve as there's nothin' in 'em. She's got to be kept free from all trubble. It's a lot to put on your young shoulders," he added a little drearily, "but there ain't no one else as I can trust; and I trust you, James."

"For sure, Old Man." James warmly pressed his hand. "I'll go and see her every day and keep her from thinking. There's no need for you to make a favour of a little thing like that."

They were passing Labois' at the moment, and a green shutter suddenly opened, a little white hand fluttered a handkerchief, and Old Man caught it as it fell. Then the window shut to with a sudden snap as a sweet, sad voice cried: "Good-bye, Old Man. God bless you and keep you and bring you safe home again."

"Amen to that." Old Man took off his hat and sent an answering blessing up to the window. "She didn't orter ha' done it," he said, with a catch in his voice. "She didn't orter ha' done it."

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Shouldn't be s'prised if she's bin sittin' up all night jus' to catch us."

"Don't you fret about her, Old Man," said James earnestly. "You know I'd give my life for you and for her. We'll be brother and sister till you come back. I'll do my best to make the time pass quickly for her. Besides, we can talk about Lelota," he added shyly, "although somehow she always brings the talk back to you again."

"It's a durned shame to worry you," said Old Man, as they passed the little church and went silently down the long, narrow road, with its rock elms on either side, sentinels of the Bush which lay behind them. "And, James?"

"Yes, Old Man?"

"Though you're pretty big and strong and able to take care of yourself now, don't forget to bar the door of the hut from the inside ev'ry night, in case that father of yours has one of his drinkin' fits. Once that bar's up, it 'ud take him a week to git at you. A mad-drunk man's got the strength of the devil in him."

"All right, Old Man, I promise to put the bar up every night." The lad's hand lingered caressingly on Miss Wilks's mane. "My! but I'll be lonesome for you when you've all gone."

"Don't you worry about us, sonny. We'll come back."

"When, Old Man?"

"Maybe a week, maybe a month, maybe two

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months. I dunno for sure. Keep up Cynthia's heart if she begins to fret about us. Here's the ferry. Well, so long, James, and don't forgit to keep an eye on that father of yours."

"So long, Old Man. Be good to yourself."

"You bet, James;" and Old Man pushed on to join Ikey, who, in his anxiety to wake that worthy, had already half-battered down the door of Lajeunesse's cabin.

They heard the sound of shooting bolts, the falling of a bar, and Lajeunesse the ferryman thrust out his head to greet the intruders on his domestic privacy with a volley of curses couched in the choicest habitant *patois*. But when he saw Old Man his anger faded away, he saluted him with elaborate courtesy. "W'at you mak' dis time o' day, Old Man? Eh? Et Mademoiselle ze mu-el? W'at she do?"

"Don't you call her a 'mu-el,' Lajeunesse, or she'll heave you into the river. Come and take us across as soon as you can. We've a long way to go."

"W'ere you go, Old Man? Back o' mountain? Eh?"

Old Man nodded as Lajeunesse drew on his boots, and led the way down the precipitous bank, where a huge flat boat was fastened to a wire rope which lay at the bottom of the river. With a mysterious hooked pole Lajeunesse fished up the wire rope and proceeded to haul the boat along,

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Old Man and Ikey helping him in his arduous task.

A white mist hung over the river. Without the rope to guide them it would have been impossible to find their way, for, in spite of it, the current tried to drag them down to the Falls, whose sullen thunder could be distinctly heard half a mile distant. Men's voices from the saw-mills on the other side sounded only a few yards off. The fleecy white mist settled in drops upon the horses' coats and made them shiver. To Old Man and Ikey, it seemed as if the river wept to see them depart from their accustomed haunts.

"Good thing, this fog. All Four Corners 'ud ha' been down to help us off if we hadn't started so early. We'll git past the saw-mill, and strike the trail over the mountains 'ithout anyone seein' us go," said Old Man briskly, as the boat grounded on the opposite shore, and the perspiring Lajeunesse consulted an old turnip of a watch. "I do heem one minnit less if not for de dam fog," he said proudly.

"That's right, Lajeunesse. In all my days, I've never seen a ferryman jus' like you," declared Old Man; and Lajeunesse, happy to have received such praise from a man whom he adored, again wiped the perspiration from his face. "*Bon voyage*, M'sieu Old Man. *Bon voyage*. You mak' to come back soon, I play you ze fiddle. Now I geev you w'at ze boys call ze send-off."

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He picked up a fiddle from under the seat and was about to strike into a plaintive air when Old Man stopped him. "Not to-day, Lajeunesse. Not to-day. You'll have all the mill-hands swarmin' arter us if they hear your fiddle, and we shan't be able to git a move on us. Here's a couple of dollars to buy suthin' for the *bébé*."

"W'at for you offaire me ze monee, M'sieu Old Man, w'en you my fren' ? "

"It's for the little brown *bébé*," said Old Man, "to git him a red frock for Sundays when you take him to Mass and make Father Berubé stop to call him an infant Samuel and pat his curly head. So long, Lajeunesse. *Mille remercymongs*."

"A tousan' t'anks, M'sieu Old Man. I bring ze leetle *bébé*—Jean Baptiste, not Sam-u-el—to show him w'en you come back. *Sans adieu, M'sieu. Sans adieu, M'sieu Ikey. Sans adieu, Mademoiselle Weelks*. You come back soon, I geev you beeg drink of wiskee *blanc*. You eat up dat dam Millette one day, I mak' to geev you one beeg jugful."

Miss Wilks graciously permitted Lajeunesse to pat her neck, and scrambled after Old Man and Ikey up the steep bank as they noiselessly wound their way over an artificial island of wooden chips and sawdust on which the saw-mill had been built. At intervals of a few hundred yards watchmen were stationed to see that some careless habitant did not let fall a spark from his pipe on the inflammable surface of the narrow road which led

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to the mainland. But, as it was too early for many travellers to be abroad, the guards had shirked the cold morning air and sought shelter in the huts near the mill.

"Reckon we're safely past the lot or they'd ha' made us eat another breakfast," Old Man said, with a relieved air, as they gained the mainland. "That's the wust of bein' so dum pop'lar. We'd ha' had all the girls in Four Corners arter us if they'd known when we were startin'. Hitch up your girths, Ikey, and git on that old contrapshun of yours. We'll do three or four hours easy afore we lays up a bit and gives the hosses a feed."

He mounted Miss Wilks, let the bridle fall on her neck, and with a friendly dig of his heel, motioned to her to lead the way.

They rode silently on, each endeavouring to adapt his saddle to the mountain of encumbrances which had been hitched to it at the last moment. As they ascended from the white mist and gradually left it behind them, the sun shone over the mountain-tops, dewdrops sparkled upon the wet leaves, the birds began to sing in the thickets. Below them this vast white world had a ghostly effect, as if it enshrouded purgatorial souls endeavouring to reach one another through its misty, all-concealing veil.

As the blood began to stir in his numbed veins, Old Man wrung the damp from his moustache with a sigh of relief. The adventure had begun. For

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the moment, Civilization, with all its cares and joys, fell away from him. He was on a trail leading to little-frequented solitudes, vast sterile mountain tracts, untrodden rocky fastnesses, the well-nigh inaccessible haunts of the wolf and the bear. The morning air was sweet, strong, invigorating. He felt himself to be alive again, free from the petty tasks, the cramping routine of Four Corners. There, he knew exactly what would happen to him with every passing hour. So much toil, so much rest, so much sleep. Here, all around him stretched the forest primeval, with its murmuring streams and foam-flecked waterfalls. Beyond this rocky winding road, one side of which bordered a stream dashing gaily down to be swallowed up in the immensity of the river, lay Romance, the Romance of the Unexpected, the Unforeseen, the Romance which had brought him to risk everything for the sake of the dying girl who had so sweetly waved him what might perhaps be her last farewell. He was leaving the haunts of the White Man for those of the Red; and within a hundred miles of Civilization wandered the remnant of Yellow Feather's band, making its last hopeless stand against the White Man, who had stolen its food, its forests, its manhood, its self-respect, and now offered it the somewhat inadequate return of whisky, Bibles, and the corruption of its squaws.

Here, in the old days, the Indian roamed untrammelled, looking up for guidance to the heaven of

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the Great Manitou beyond the cloud-topped hills, that heaven which comprised the Happy Hunting Grounds of a good Indian. Now the Black Robes had taken from him the hope of his Happy Hunting Grounds. The White Men sought to pen him within a little area, to stay the steps of one who thought nothing of roaming fifty or sixty miles a day with unfailing, tireless lope. There was no food in the mountains, no buffalo roamed the prairie, fewer fish lurked within the streams, for the White Men had taken them all. Nothing remained for the Red Man save to accept a dole of food and blankets, to sit with folded hands and watch the invaders' dwellings creep nearer and nearer to the homes of his forefathers!

"Pretty tough." Old Man unconsciously voiced his thoughts.

"You bet it's tough, Old Man." Ikey, thinking that Old Man alluded to the difficulties of the way, wiped his forehead and pulled up the roan. That equine wreck immediately improved the shining hour by endeavouring to gnaw through a bag of provisions carried by Miss Wilks, a proceeding which was instantly punished by a vigorous lunge of her newly-shod heels, which nearly unseated Old Man and caused the roan to emit an anguished squeal.

"Harmony! Harmony! Remember you're on the war-path and don't do that agin," Old Man said sternly to the mule. "Now then, Ikey, we'll

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git to the summit in about two hours if that old doormat of yours can hold out."

"Who are you callin' a doormat? Doormat! Hold out! In course he can hold out, Old Man. You don't offen see a hoss like him when he gits his second wind."

"No, you don't, thank God," piously ejaculated Old Man. "He's bin tryin' to git it ever since you've had him and he ain't done it yet. P'raps he'll succeed some day."

"None of your inspersions, Old Man. None of your inspersions. I like a hoss as you can tell by his—his idiotsyncrasies—from all other hosses."

"See here," said Old Man with mock sternness, "we've left the dickshunary at home, ain't we?"

"I s'pose so." Ikey knew that he had but to use a prodigious word of his own invention to excite Old Man's ire. "I forgot."

"Don't do it agin, Ikey. Don't do it agin. It's takin' a mean advantage, and we'll want all our nerve for what's afore us. Come on."

He once more put the mule in motion, and they slowly rode onward to the summit of the mountain.

At noon they encamped a little below Prophet's Hill, the topmost mountain peak. This bleak hilltop was exposed to the fury of all the winds that blew. In olden days it had been selected by the Indians as a fitting place for the graves of their sachems. With infinite labour, although they shunned the degradation of toil, they had

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hollowed out huge recesses in the rocky soil and buried the great chiefs with their weapons, war paint, and favourite ponies to help them on their way to the Happy Hunting Grounds. Parched corn and pemmican, an earthen jar of water, all accompanied them, so that when they came face to face with the Great Manitou they should be strong, erect, dressed in their costliest robes, fit for the paradise of hunting, of wigwams beside the running streams, of council fires and restful ease which awaited them at the hands of the Mighty One.

There was no vegetation upon this arid mountain peak. No trees grew there ; its desolate summit was barren of flower or weed. The granitic outcrop, warmed by the sun, was almost unbearable to the tread of mocassined feet. From time immemorial wandering bands of Indians, feeling that the rock still contained the accumulated warmth of summer, pitched their winter wigwams there in the belief that fire would make its way upward to meet fire. The surface of the rock was still black with the stains of a thousand camp fires. On a fine day the tin spire of the Catholic church of Four Corners shone like silver in the far distance. Medicine man and warrior, from that sublime height, alike cursed the glittering point which marked the haunt of the Black Robe, shook unavailing spears at it, grasped their now useless tomahawks with itching fingers. Even in the old days there

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had been little credit in killing a Black Robe, for his tonsured head bore no scalp to hang up in the wigwam of a warrior. The Black Robe would not fight, but meekly bent his head, accepted the death-blow, called upon the name of his own Manitou, and passed without a groan. What pleasure was there in slaying one who could not die like an Indian brave !

Old Man, followed by Miss Wilks, freed from her saddle and bridle and pots and pans, climbed slowly to the summit of Prophet's Peak, with a vague idea that the mule on once reaching it would by some mysterious instinct find a way down the other side which might lead to the encampment of Yellow Feather. Only now, as he gazed for miles round, did he realize the hopeless nature of his quest. Civilization lay behind him on the other side of the river. Before him there was a vast expanse of hilly forest, its green tree-tops packed so closely together that it seemed as if he could walk across them. Above him shone a blue sky, clear, cloudless, benign ; here and there, little valleys made a break in the monotony of the tree-tops. A living wall of greenery shut out the world. He might spend the rest of his life in wandering through these densely-grown forests looking for the remnants of Yellow Feather's band. And all the while the fell disease which preyed upon Cynthia would increase day by day until——

“ Until—— ? ”

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With a shiver Old Man turned away. Never before had he felt so hopeless, so dispirited. Then the man's immense force, his indomitable will-power came to his aid, and he crushed back the sorrow in his heart. There was something to be done, no time for dreaming in the presence of a foe which never hasted, but did its work with slow tireless progress. Accustomed to rely on his own resources, Old Man realized for the first time how inadequate they were when forced to cope with a problem such as this. He set his teeth hard, resolved to win through. Here, on this barren mountain-top there was no sign of Civilization, no holy symbol to cheer him on his way, no——! What was that?

He followed the mule as she slowly wandered toward the edge of the hilltop, where something glittered in the sunshine.

On the extreme verge of the summit, with its back turned to the river, a huge cross rose from the granite rock, which shone rosily in the fierce light; and upon the Cross, looking downward into the forests below, as if to call the wandering Red Man to its sheltering arms, was the figure of the White Man's crucified Christ. The glittering crown of thorns upon Its majestic brow caught Old Man's eye. Now it drew him irresistibly toward it.

Reverently doffing his cap and motioning to the mule to remain where she was, Old Man moved

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toward the Cross, went round to the other side of it, fell on his knees and gazed up at the benignant countenance which looked down upon him. For several yards around the foot of the Cross grew a plant with glossy-green, heart-shaped leaves—the Indian snakewort.

Miss Wilks, disregarding Old Man's command to stay behind, followed him, and was about to set her irreverent teeth in the green leaves when he gently checked her.

The mule threw up her head, snuffed the breeze, and turned toward an almost imperceptible trail which led downward into the forest.

Old Man rose from his knees. Surely the way was made clear and Cynthia might yet be saved ! The sad eyes looked down from the Cross—looked down into his own and comforted him.

"Howdy, Old Man?" said a mocking voice, as a beautiful Indian girl came round from the back of the Cross. "Howdy?"

CHAPTER X

PAHNEWUSKA RETURNS

OLD MAN returned to everyday life with a start, and gazed in blank astonishment at the beautiful girl before him.

"Howdy, Old Man?" repeated Pahnewuska's mocking voice. Her eyes travelled with fierce scorn from Old Man to the figure on the Cross, from the figure on the Cross back to Old Man gazing at her in unfeigned astonishment.

"You!" Old Man looked at her in almost stupid bewilderment. "You, Pahnewuska?"

"Why not?" asked Pahnewuska, dropping the conventional idiom of the Indian's address to the White Man, and adopting that of the Indian who has achieved a certain amount of College culture. "Why not, Old Man? The mere sight of me seems to threaten you with another attack of fever. It generally needs something of the sort to remind you of my existence. Isn't it more natural to meet me here on the hunting grounds of my ancestors than in Four Corners?"

"Yes, of course. It's kind of unexpected,

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though. I thought you were a good many miles away from here ; in fact, me and Ikey——” He stopped short.

Pahnewuska’s clear, dark eyes again glanced from Old Man to the figure on the Cross ; from the figure on the Cross to Old Man ; and there was a certain amount of satirical contempt in them as she did so. Though Old Man was unfeignedly glad to see her, she knew instinctively that it was not for the reason for which she wanted him to be glad, and the knowledge inspired her with a fierce scorn for herself.

The squaw was very beautiful, tall, slender, supple as a willow wand, yet full of a wild strength and vigour which made her more than a match for any ordinary man. Her complexion was a little lighter than Yellow Feather’s, of a pure reddish brown, with a deeper colour on the cheeks. Unaccustomed as he was to the vagaries of a woman’s dress, it seemed to Old Man that she had considerably modified her costume since he had last seen her in Four Corners, selling Indian baskets. Then she had worn her black glossy hair *à l’Indienne*, in a long plait which reached more than half-way down her back when her striped Mackinaw blanket permitted it to be seen. Now she did not wear a blanket at all, but a closely-fitting tunic of doeskin embroidered with porcupine quills, so that scarcely an inch of the original surface remained. A short skirt of the same material was also ornamented

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with stained porcupine quills, but not to an equal extent. Doeskin leggings and beaded mocassins completed her costume. She carried a light rifle in her hand.

In the hurried glance which he took at Pahnewuska, Old Man could see that the embroidered pouch at her side held a revolver, and was astonished that an Indian squaw—even one with a veneer of College education—should possess the means to equip herself so expensively. She was an Indian, a mere outcast, who, by some chance, after having been educated by a Paternal Government on a Reservation, had escaped from the trammels of Civilization, to go back to the remnants of her people and become the squaw of Yellow Feather, a man of sixty at least, whereas she could not have been more than nineteen at the most.

Here, in her natural environment, with the clear glow of health in her cheeks, the rich blood coursing freely through her veins, with her beautiful white teeth, her free, untrammelled grace of movement, Pahnewuska was more like a young deer than a girl. Her eyes had the same clear light as a startled fawn's, but, unlike a fawn's, they were remarkably self-possessed, scrutinizing, pierced Old Man's as if to search the inmost recesses of his soul. Some sudden instinct warned him that he was on dangerous ground, that he must be very careful with this creature of the wilds, who added to her native shrewdness a certain keenness brought

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about by her contact with the College authorities. He had no doubt that the training of years instantly vanished with her return to the wigwams of her people. Keep an educated Indian away from his own people, and he has a chance of surviving; but let him get back to the woods and the traditions of his race claim him once more. Though the Indian girl knew why he was there, he did not share her knowledge of the motives which also brought her hither.

Pahnnewuska leaned against the huge rock which formed the base of the Cross, the butt of her rifle resting carelessly on the ground.

She was almost as tall as Old Man, perhaps five years younger. Each movement of her supple body showed the easy grace and perfection of her figure, every trained muscle was ready for instant action. Old Man, though little given to poetic similes, thought as she stood there that she represented all the heroic traditions, all the grace and beauty of a race which at one time had been lords of this barren mountain-top. Better for her had she perished with them than to remain a wandering fugitive, earning a precarious existence by the sale of baskets and dependent upon the caprice of that silent stoic, that impenetrable mystery, known as Yellow Feather. From what Old Man knew of Yellow Feather, he felt sure that it was dangerous to be seen speaking to the squaw. Yet he had ventured thus far for this purpose, and

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this purpose only. He glanced up at the figure on the Cross, then down again to the squaw at the foot of it.

"Yes," she said, pointing to the Cross, "we don't assimilate very well, do we, Old Man. We have our 'Mystery Bags,' our 'Medicine Men,' and you have That. Speaking from an unprejudiced point of view, they seem to me to be equally incomprehensible."

"I don't understand. When you nursed me and when you came to the village you spoke Injun English, pretended you understood me with difficulty. Even when you nursed me, you never spoke English if you could help it. Now——"

"Now I speak with a trifle more correctness and purity of accent than Providence has gifted you with, Old Man. There's a certain originality of speech about you which would have been a great joy to me in my College days."

Old Man nodded. "That's so. I reckons allers to say what I wants to say in my own way, and I don't copy nobody else's way. Nobody ever praised me for my 'c'rectness and purity of accent,' but everybody knows what I means when I do say suthin'. One or two folks has pretended they didn't, but I soon brought 'em round to my way of thinkin'."

"I daresay," she mused. "From what I remember of you, Old Man, you never would allow anyone to think differently from yourself. May

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I ask why you are here? You surely don't contemplate another attack of fever? I'm not as good a nurse as I used to be. Contact with my people has replaced the enthusiasm of youth with the gravity of the Indian."

"I dessay. I'm a good deal graver myself." Old Man remained leaning on his rifle, looking at her with a startled expression and wondering whether she knew how much she was concerned in his coming into the mountains, how much she would help him when she learned what he really wanted. He began to think that he had not acted at all chivalrously toward her, but had taken her good offices very much as a matter of course. Now he began dimly to understand why he had done so. He loved Cynthia, and this wild, free creature of the woods had shown an unmistakable liking for him—a liking which but for his recovery from the fever might have led to embarrassing consequences.

As they stood there confronting one another, they were each typical in their way. One represented the glories of a past race without a future, the other that of a race which set store only by the future, which was intent on discovering all the treasures of this wonderful land, on exploiting its natural resources, digging deep into the bowels of the harmless earth for its minerals, polluting its rivers with mills, choking them with sawdust, scarring, destroying, and maiming its forests until nothing remained but charred tree-stumps amid

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which slowly sprouted the corn destined to feed nations beyond the seas. Although Old Man's aquiline features had something of the Indian in them, there the resemblance ceased. His skin was darker than Pahnewuska's, bronzed and tanned and browned by exposure to all sorts of weathers. But his every movement was, in its way, equally graceful. The muscles rippling beneath his skin were as lithe as those of a panther. Strong and active as she was, Old Man could have choked the life out of Pahnewuska with one sinewy hand.

But as his eyes dwelt appreciatively on the beautiful young squaw, Old Man's thoughts went back to the time when he had first encountered her people in the forest, and she had nursed him through a sharp attack of fever. He told himself that he owed her a great deal already, that if she came to his aid he would owe her still more in the future.

There was something in the Indian girl's natural grace which always pleased him. He had been vaguely conscious that there was more in her than met the eye, that her Indian English had been assumed, for he knew very well that many educated Indians, tired of education, heard the voice of the wild and went back to it, sloughed off their civilization as a snake casts its skin, and once more "turned Injun." He also knew from past experience how little it takes to effect this transformation. The chance sight of an Indian beggar

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loafing round some village store, the smoke of an Indian camp fire, the track of a mocassin on the forest path, caused the vaunted culture and refinement of so many years to disappear as quickly as a leaf blown before the wintry blast. Hence, now that he realized the truth, he was not greatly surprised. This woman, Yellow Feather's squaw as he believed her to be, in spite of her culture, her education, had once more been caught by the lure of the wild. Nothing but her weapons betrayed that she had ever left her people—nothing but the rifle and the revolver and her speech, which was that of a refined and cultured gentlewoman. Her selling baskets had been a mere blind. She had probably come down to Four Corners to obtain information with regard to the Government's desultory attempts to catch Yellow Feather and force him on to a Reservation, there to be experimented upon by ambitious young preachers, whose one desire, with the very best intentions, was to rob the Indian of all that made life dear to him.

The look in the squaw's beautiful eyes became more ironical, even slightly contemptuous, as if she knew all that passed in Old Man's mind. "I see that you 'catch on' to my point of view," she said, and there was a suggestion of laughter in her rippling speech.

"Dunno as I do," said Old Man gravely. "I didn't know as you'd been a College Injun."

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"No, I took good care that you should not know. When I came down to Four Corners, Old Man, you thought I was a mere 'lowdown, ornary Injun.' I believe that is the way you and your friends condescend to speak of a race which has ever been nobler than your own."

"Ever heard me say a word to you as I wouldn't have said to——"

"The Schoolmistress?" she asked mockingly.

"The Schoolmistress," Old Man gravely returned. "Didn't I try to git you to see Parson Black, give up your wild life and turn white?"

"Yes," she said, and her expression changed. "That was all the more creditable to you, because you did not even suspect—I took good care of that—I had once turned white and was equally resolved to 'turn Injun' again by fits and starts as the mood seized me. When I have had enough of this kind of life, I shall probably spend the winter in Toronto or Ottawa."

"No, I didn't know. I was real sorry for you," said Old Man frankly. "I allers thought you too good to sell baskets and to hear tavern talk. I didn't do you no good by talkin' to you at Four Corners. Folks seemed to think as you'd no soul, as I was amusin' myself at your expense. But you knew better."

Pahnewuska's exquisitely beautiful face softened strangely. "Yes, Old Man, I knew; and it was because I knew you to be a chivalrous gentleman

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that I came to take this opportunity of thanking you, of warning you."

"Thankin' me! Why thank me?" Old Man strove to formulate the ideas passing through his mind. It was a real pleasure to talk to such a wild free thing of the forest. "I'd as soon think of harmin' some beautiful bird as hurt you."

"You forget that I'm not a bird, but a woman, Old Man, with all a woman's loves and hates, with all her passions and desires."

"I didn't think of it," said Old Man simply.

It was true. He had not thought of it. He had been interested in the squaw, had tried to save her from the degradation of the life which he imagined to be hers, and that was all. It was only when Ikey and his friends had joked him about Pahnewuska that he had consciously known that she was so beautiful, that hers was a beauty born of murmuring waters, the majesty of the forest, the sweetness of those solitary valleys in which Yellow Feather led so precarious a life. She was young now, lovely as a maple leaf kissed by the first wooing breath of autumn—that kiss which woos but to destroy, yet vanquishes the pallor of death with its brilliancy of colour. It had seemed to Old Man that the hard life, the precarious food, the exposure to all sorts of weather, must quickly destroy Pahnewuska's beauty, that she would assuredly soon become one of those crones who hover unregarded about an Indian

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encampment, seeking wood and bringing water, striking and pitching the tents, labouring the beauty out of their bodies, the life from out their souls. But the girl had smiled entrancingly at him, had glided away into the Bush, and he had thought no more of her until he remembered her prediction concerning the Schoolmistress.

He awoke from his reverie to find Pahnewuska watching him keenly. Had he been a vain man, he would have imagined a certain tenderness in her glance. Then this vague something passed like a ripple on water, her manner became that of the conventional hostess, as if her surroundings were those of a drawing-room. "I forgot something I wanted to say to you," she said somewhat hastily.

"Old Man-n-n! Old Man-n-n!" called Ikey's voice from below.

"Comin', Ikey. Comin'," Old Man shouted back to reassure him.

The squaw suddenly dropped her rifle, for Miss Wilks shuffled noiselessly up behind her and sniffed at her doeskin garb with evident satisfaction. There was a gentleness, a tenderness about this sniffing which surprised Old Man as the mule came slowly toward him, then returned to the Indian squaw, put out her pink tongue and licked Pahnewuska's face with rapturous delight.

"You see, she knows me," said Pahnewuska composedly. "Would you be surprised to hear that this mule belongs to me, Old Man? She

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used to loaf about my father's tents when I was a child. Many's the time I've ridden her bare-backed."

"What!" Old Man was plainly incredulous. "Do you pretend to know her agin?"

"Pretend! I should know her again anywhere. There's an originality about her shape which impresses it on the memory. She had one ear sliced off by my father for fighting with and half killing his favourite pony. I recognized her in Four Corners, and she knew me again. When she left me she was fairly handsome—for a mule. Now she is scarred and maimed and battered. She must have had as hard a fight with Civilization as my people, Old Man. Only, unlike them, she is too tough to be exterminated. As a rule, too, we do our best to hide our scars and the mule doesn't worry about hers."

"You bet," said Old Man briefly, his heart sinking within him at the thought that someone had a better claim to Miss Wilks than himself. With the exception of the Schoolmistress and Ikey, she was more to him than any human being. Life without her was unimaginable. Had they not shared a thousand joys and perils together?

The squaw, conscious of the struggle going on in his mind, watched Old Man sharply. "Of course she's my property. How did you get her?"

"Found her in the Bush when I was a boy. She took to me and I took to her. Nobody wanted

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her 'cept me. Soon, she'd ha' kicked to death anyone who tried to take her away. She and me and Ikey grew up together, and she's kept me busy ever since," Old Man declared. "She'd die if she had to leave me."

"Animals don't die as easily as all that. Their hearts are as tough as their hides. What are you going to do about it, Old Man?"

"Do? What can I do? It's no use askin' me. I can't do nothin'." Old Man cast one glance at the mule, then studiously turned away.

"With the customary high-handedness of your race, you're not prepared to assert that the mule is yours, to keep her by force?"

"No, I'm not. If she is your property, how can I keep her?"

"You don't doubt my word?"

"I've doubted a good many dum liars in my time—allers men," Old Man admitted; "I ain't never yet doubted a woman's word, particklarly the word of a woman who's been good to me and nursed me back to life when I'd nearly passed in my checks."

"But I'm not a woman—a white woman; I'm only a squaw, Old Man. A squaw isn't a woman. She's only a toy, a plaything to be cast aside when her beauty leaves her and she can work no more. Soon I shall become a despised drudge—a wretched, ugly old woman, who will sit by the camp-fires of her people and dream that she once had a certain

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amount of sham refinement and ambition—a woman who lived and slept daintily—a woman who at the voice of Nature had to go back to her own people and forget all that she had ever learned. There's nothing to prevent your keeping the mule. You've had her all these years. Can you bear to part from her? It would be something new to meet a white man who even considered the feelings of a squaw."

Old Man looked up to the figure on the Cross, then turned sadly, hopelessly to the beautiful squaw. "No, I can't bear to part from her, but she's yours——"

Pahnewuska appeared to reflect, and the mocking expression vanished from her fine eyes. There was a tender light in them as she turned from the mule to Old Man. "So far, my life has been all renunciation," she said simply; "and the mule played round my father's tents when I was a little child. Everything we had has been taken from us by the White Man—ponies, furs, food, lands, rivers, mountains—everything. Why should I expect you to be different from the others? I have lived among your people, have been educated by them, and have—left them. It may be that at intervals I shall go back, although I have no assured place among them. It may be that I shall never go back, that some nameless grave in the forest, or perhaps at the foot of this Cross, among the chiefs of my race, will be my portion. It may be.

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I don't know. I can't guess, don't greatly care. But here we stand—you and I. Above us is the crucified Christ, in whose name so much woe has been wrought to my people. In His name, your race has despoiled mine. Be true to your best self, Old Man. Give me back my own. Can't you see the arrow brand on her flank ? ”

“ Oh, yes. I've seen it for a good many years.”

The mule, instinctively knowing that she was the subject of this discussion, that her interests were vitally concerned, shambled toward Old Man, got behind him, leaned her heavy head on his shoulder and gazed tranquilly, approvingly, at the beautiful Indian girl.

“ You see where I stand, Old Man, how natural it is that I should want the mule back again ? ”

“ I know. I've nothing to say 'cept I love the mule.”

“ My fathers loved the land, and it has gone from them.”

“ She's lived in Four Corners ever since I've known her.”

“ My people lived——” A comprehensive wave of Pahnewuska's little brown hand finished the sentence. “ Where are they now ? Even their spirits have no place to roam.”

Old Man gazed up at the sorrowful face on the Cross—that face heavy with the burden of the centuries. A sigh burst from his laden heart as

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he gently disengaged the mule's head from his shoulder. "Reckon I'd better be goin'. There's Ikey callin' me."

"I hear him calling you. He wants you too."

"He's allers wantin' me."

"What would he do if he couldn't get you?"

"If he couldn't git me"—forgetting his woe, Old Man smiled happily into her face—"If Ikey couldn't git me, well, I reckon he'd be a bit dang'rous to anyone as stood in the way."

He took the mule's soft muzzle in his hand. "It's all over," he said dully. "You and me's bin more'n chums. We've lived together, nearly died together, starved together, bin happy together. Now everything's goin' from me and you're goin' with the rest. P'r'aps it's as well. I'd got to think as I could do most things; now I reckon I'm beginnin' to find out as I can't do a dum thing. Be a good mule and you and me may meet agin in the Happy Huntin' Grounds; but it's all finished now. Go to your mistress. We've got to part."

A marvellous change came over the girl's exquisite face. The mockery wholly disappeared; only a smiling tenderness remained. "You say that, Old Man? You are willing to give up the mule to me?"

Old Man cast another glance at the Cross, gently touched the mule's velvet muzzle and turned away his head. "No, I can't say as I'm willin' to give

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her up ; but she'll have to go. At the foot of this Cross, with that Face lookin' down on us, I can't rob you. You'd better take her at once."

" Now ? "

" Yes, now. Don't let me look at her agin. Take her away, or I might be tempted to send a bullet through her head jus' to make things easier for both of us."

Pahnewuska came up to him, put her little brown hands on his shoulders, looked up into his face, and her eyes were very sweet to see. " Why, Old Man ? Why ? "

" It's the only thing to do. The only thing."

" No, no." The squaw shook her head. " I honour you for not trying to rob me, but I'm afraid she wouldn't be happy with me. Suppose we let her decide for herself, Old Man."

" If she's yours, she's yours. I've no right to keep her."

" Oh, yes, you have. She's saved your life as often as you've saved hers. In a way, you belong to each other, and the mere accident of my owning her ought not to count. For once, Old Man, you have shown me that a White Man can be just, even though it hurts him. One would almost think her a woman, from the fuss you make about giving her up."

" She's almost more than any woman to me, 'cept——" Old Man stopped hastily, for the look in his companion's face showed that he was

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treading on dangerous ground. "What are we to do about it?" he asked somewhat lamely, yet with a secret joy in his heart, as if he already knew the mule's decision.

Pahnewuska reflected for a moment. "I have it. Now, you go a few steps that way. Put the mule between us, and I'll call to her to come to me. Only, turn your face the other way, Old Man, so as to give me a little, little chance."

"Very well." The misery in Old Man's voice would have moved a heart of stone, but he turned his face away as she had said.

"Now move as if you were going off without her."

He turned away to go back to the camp. The squaw called to Miss Wilks, cooed to her winningly, talked to her in some soft Indian tongue.

A surprised look dawned in Miss Wilks's one useful eye. "What's the meaning of this tomfoolery?" it seemed to ask. "Some new game Old Man expects me to play? Why does this woman keep calling to me? As if I hadn't had enough of women at my time of life! Old Man ought to know better." She stuck out her legs and stood stock still.

"Come, come to the lodges of my people," said Pahnewuska.

Miss Wilks took a few steps toward her as the squaw prepared to descend into the forest below. Then she halted, hesitated, made as if about to

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turn to Old Man. What did he mean by not calling to her ?

"Come," cooed the squaw, and poured out a torrent of soft vocables.

From mere force of association, Miss Wilks came toward Pahnewuska ; then paused, as if she remembered something, wheeled abruptly, returned to Old Man, put her head on his shoulder again, and stared up at the sky with an air of innocent unconcern. "When you two have finished talking, I'm going back to my friends," her manner implied. "What you have to say to one another passes my comprehension. You've done nothing but talk ever since you've been up here and I'm sick of it."

Pahnewuska coaxed the mule, promised all sorts of comforting things, sweet grasses by the sides of mountain streams, sheltering wigwams through the winter cold, Indian corn galore. But all to no purpose, for Miss Wilks, calmly flicking a fly from one flank with her ratlike tail, listened unmoved. To all intents and purposes, she was alone with Old Man, and took no interest in anything else.

At length, the squaw, convinced of the futility of her efforts, desisted. "There!" she said. "You've won. I knew she wouldn't leave you. I didn't really want her, but I did want to see what you would do. Take her again, Old Man. She's yours for ever, as far as I am concerned."

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"You knew!" Wrath arose within Old Man's breast. For some minutes he had suffered the tortures of the damned. "You've bin playin' with me. You knew!"

"Yes, I knew." The squaw's voice was softer, sweeter even than when it had been addressing Miss Wilks. "I knew, Old Man. In spite of your blindness, when you won't see the things you are wanted to see, I knew you would be true to yourself, and I'm sorry if I've hurt you. You've hurt me a good many times without knowing it, and I wanted to get even with you. And now that I've had my way, womanlike, I am sorry. I ought to have remembered," she added a little bitterly, "that I was bound to fail, that you have a certain charm for anything feminine."

"Have I? I didn't know." The voice of Ikey calling from below sounded like a song of triumph in Old Man's ears. Then he recalled his mission, and once more turned to the squaw. "Thankee, Pahnewuska. You've played with my feelin's, stirred me up as I ain't bin stirred up for years. Guess I'd a real taste of hell whiles this dum mule"—he softly patted Miss Wilks—"was makin' up what she calls her mind. I owes you suthin' for all this. What can I do for you?"

"Go back to Four Corners at once. You're not safe here. The tribe think that you've come to force them into a Reservation. Every step you take down the mountain side will increase

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your danger. Go back, or my brother will kill you."

"Your what?" Old Man stared at her in astonishment.

"My brother."

"Is Yellow Feather your brother?"

"Of course, you stupid Old Man. Surely *you* didn't think he was my husband? I only led people to think he was because he's a dangerous man, and it was safer for me. You didn't really think it?"

"Of course I did. That's jus' what I did think."

"Oh! That accounts for your dignified reserve. I often felt that there must be a reason for it, when you took such evident pleasure in my society yet never made love to me. Good-bye, and think over what I've told you. I fancy that you could be rather nice when you came to woo anyone, Old Man. I've half a mind——" Something in Old Man's face prevented her from finishing the sentence. She threw him a butterfly kiss, and, as Ikey appeared on the summit, suddenly darted down the opposite side of the mountain.

"What are you starin' at down there, Old Man? Thought I heard voices."

"Voices!" Old Man looked vacantly around him. "Voices!" Then his countenance changed. "Take off your cap, Ikey. We're on holy ground."

He looked reverently up at the figure on the

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Cross, knelt amid the snakewort's glossy leaves and pulled Ikey down beside him. " Lord help us," he prayed—" Lord help us—and guide us—and be good to us—give us our heart's desire, O Lord, and bring us back safe and sound to Four Corners ; and—Amen ! ”

“ Amen ! ” echoed Ikey, feeling for Old Man's hand with the same confiding trust and love that he had sought to clasp it when, as little fellows, they had once been lost in the Bush.

Old Man took his hand and, followed by Miss Wilks, the friends returned to their camp.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE FOREST

AS they went back to camp Ikey said little, for he was beginning to grow uneasy at the ultimate consequences of Old Man's story. Although in his dealings with Old Man he laboured under the delusion that nothing but his profound knowledge of the world preserved that worthy from countless pitfalls, he was shrewd enough to see, as Pahnewuska had hinted, the charm which his friend possessed for everything feminine also extended to the Indian maiden. Believing her to be Yellow Feather's squaw, beyond mildly chaffing Old Man with regard to his evident penchant for the girl's society on the occasions of her infrequent visits to Four Corners, Ikey had thought little about Pahnewuska, but accepted her liking for Old Man as an involuntary tribute to his skill in "bringing up" the latter. When, however, he discovered that Old Man's devotion to the school-mistress had become the ruling passion of his life, he promptly forgot all about Pahnewuska. Later, had come Old Man's tidings of the fell disease

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which was destroying Cynthia Hannum, and the news that Pahnewuska and her people alone knew of a remedy for it, a remedy beyond the knowledge of any white man. Consumption, like small-pox and measles, had been unknown among the Indians until the coming of the Paleface. When the latter communicated it to the Indians, its ravages speedily became so frightful that their "Medicine Men" had appealed to the Great Manitou, the Giver of Life, to heal them, and He had sent them a cure—a cure the secret of which was solemnly handed down from generation to generation, and as solemnly guarded from the knowledge of the all-conquering and all-acquisitive Paleface.

And at last Ikey and Old Man were setting out to find Pahnewuska, little knowing that she dogged their footsteps, was aware of every movement they had made since leaving Four Corners. Just as Old Man began confidently to think that he was on the verge of success, that an appeal to her better nature would cause her to reveal the secret of the mysterious herb, the squaw had plunged into the forest depths below them and ruthlessly disappeared, leaving the two friends as far from accomplishing the object of their quest as though they had never met her.

What was to be done next ?

Indians on a Reservation within reach of, and overawed by, military force, were very different

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creatures from these fiercely despairing children of the forest, who recognized allegiance to no law save their own ungovernable passions. Old instincts long dormant would revive at the sight of two of their oppressors—oppressors who would be as far away from the resources of Civilization as themselves. The Indian, even after centuries of superficial civilization, is still an Indian, and his methods of revenging his wrongs upon an enemy have the old reckless ingenuity which made his name a terror to the early pioneers, who, as a last resort, generally killed themselves to avoid falling into his torturing hands. The mere sight of two White Men alone in the forest would inflame their worst passions and set them to work sharpening their almost obsolete scalping knives. Ikey's hair alone was more than enough to tempt the most stoical of Indians.

As the friends began their evening meal, it seemed to the sapient Ikey that if they were to follow Pahnewuska, they might readily become the victims of Yellow Feather's ill-concealed and somewhat primitive lust for scalps—their scalps!—and, although he was no coward, at the mere thought of anything so unpleasant his densely-matted shock of red hair quivered with apprehension in every root as if the fatal knife were already at work on it. His dormant imagination woke to life, made him recall all the pleasing and varied forms of torture of which he had ever heard,

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for he knew that the luxury of present vengeance would far outweigh any dread of ultimate consequences in the hearts of these savage children of Nature. Theirs the gratification of the moment, the sudden shot, the swift circling movement of the scalping knife and dexterous tearing away of the gory trophy. With a sudden involuntary movement, Ikey put his hand to his head. "Ouch!" he said, with an apprehensive shiver. "I'm feelin' kinder lonesome for Four Corners agin, Old Man; there I can wake up 'ithout wond'rin' whether my hair's on or not."

Old Man, sitting on the other side of the fire, with Miss Wilks and the horses grazing near, also recognized the dangers of his quest. On the one side of the river there were Law, Order, Civilization. What was on the other? A handful of half-crazed, despairing savages, maddened by the knowledge of their own unfitness to survive the inroads of a Civilization which must eventually overwhelm and destroy them as it had overwhelmed and destroyed everything else. The Indian's day was over. He was an anachronism, a nuisance, a menace to progress, an impediment to the White Man, who was himself the victim of that equally ruthless law of Nature which compels him to follow his food supply. The Indian must vanish before this locust-like advance; in fact, though carefully nursed and coddled upon the Reservations, had already gone; and nothing remained for the last

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remnants of his race but to draw their blankets over their heads and stoically accept destruction. It seemed to Old Man that it was almost a cruel kindness not to give the Red Man all the whisky he wanted and let him destroy himself.

"What's to be done? I must find Pahnewuska agin. Reckon her people 'ill be pleasant enuff when they see all the beads and things we've brought along for 'em." Old Man awoke from his reverie and threw a handful of crackling fir-cones on the fire.

"Hell an' blazes! don't do that!" Ikey instantly removed them.

"Why not?"

"Why not? Injun country, Old Man. You did orter know better. We don't want to be potted 'ithout gittin' a chance to tell 'em why we're here. Once dead, we're dead for a long time, Old Man."

Old Man stared wide-eyed at Ikey. Even in the bitter knowledge of his own helplessness he was still able to extract a certain amount of amusement from the situation. "One 'ud fancy as we were out on the Plains, with Injuns all round us thirstin' for our scalps," he scoffed. "You're that proud of your hair, you think as there'd be a rush for it."

"So there might be, Old Man," said Ikey fearfully. "Since you came across Pahnewuska, it don't seem to rest cumferably on my head, but stands up all round it. These Injuns have bin

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dodgin' the Reservation folks for years, and if that snaky-eyed Yellow Feather gits it into his thick head as we wants to take him to a Reservation, what's to prevent him from rushin' us? He knows very well he'd soon pine to death on a Reservation, and he'd git a few minnits real enjoyment out of makin' us as uncumferable as possible afore he went there."

"There's heaps of things to prevent him. We're too near Four Corners. 'Sides, why should he harm us? If he did, he knows he'd be hunted down at once and git a bullet through him or be strung up to the nearest tree. An Injun's only got one life, and he takes very good care of his own scalp as a rule."

"I dessay. But that wouldn't bring our scalps back agin, Old Man. Once or twice, when we met him in Four Corners half filled with whisky, I didn't at all like the way he looked at my hair and felt for his knife-handle. Sorter made my flesh creep, Old Man. Sorter made my flesh creep."

"More fool you, Ikey. The scalpin' knife was never made as could raise your hair. Take a scythe at least, it's that thick. I've seen the rain run off it many a time."

"Dessay, Old Man. Dessay. Arter all, it is a bit uncommon. Them Plains squaws allers did go mad about a ginger-coloured man. If I'd stayed with 'em on our last trip, I might ha' bin a great chief by now and raised a fam'ly."

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Old Man surveyed him severely. "Raised a fam'ly! Pretty fam'ly you'd raise, when sometimes you can't even raise dough! Half of its hair 'ud be black, t'other half red! One mornin' you'd wake up to find your squaw'd grown tired of her ginger-coloured warrior, and given away all your property to her fancy buck, and the chiefs was rafflin' for your hair and makin' arrangements to git it. You're enuff to cause Parson Black to turn in his grave with your—your miscegalaneous longin's!"

Ikey shivered. "Don't, Old Man, don't. I knows in a kind of a sort of a way I brought it on myself, but don't. It hurts."

"Don't what?"

"Don't use such profane langwidge when the chances are we may never come out of thisyer place alive. Question is, what are we goin' to do next? I ask you that, Old Man. What are we goin' to do next? I know it ain't no use askin' you to give in, but what are we to do? Think we'll ever come out of it alive? 'Cause I don't. I've got premonertory symptoms at the back of my neck as tells a diff'rent story."

"Course we'll come out of it alive. 'Tain't no use comin' out of it dead."

"We shan't come out of it alive if we follers that confounded squaw, Old Man. She'll never let us wheedle the truth out of her."

Old Man shook his head. "No; there ain't goin'

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to be any wheedlin', Ikey. We'll ha' to tell her the truth."

"Why?"

"She's a woman; that's why. And I can't lie to a woman. It doesn't matter what colour a woman is when her heart's touched. Maybe, she'll be pitiful."

"In spite of her eddicashun, she's an Injun squaw, Old Man."

"Well, what of it?"

"That only makes it more dang'rous. An Injun squaw 'ithout eddicashun's bad enuff. Eddicate her, and she's a dum sight wuss, mixes her drinks more so as to make the most of 'em. If Pahnewuska takes it into her copper-coloured head to git mad at you, she won't help you."

"Why should she git mad at me?"

"You know, Old Man. Maybe she's in love with you herself."

Old Man shook his head. "I ain't never given her any cause to think so."

"That 'ud be reason enuff for a man, but it only makes a woman madder. Oh, I ain't blamin' you, Old Man. Not a mossle. A high and mighty git-out-of-the-way-for-I'm-comin' sort of man like you can't help it. It's the way I've looked arter you, pampered you up with my cookin' so's to make a fine personable, well-fed man of you. No, 'tain't your fault, so to speak. You can't help it. I noticed that squaw never came into Four

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Corners 'ithout gittin' hold of you somehow. You did orter ha' put the Sheriff on the track of the whole lot and let him cart 'em off to the Reservation."

Old Man shook his head. "No, no, Ikey. She trusted me and nursed me when I was sick. A man—a real man—can't go back on a woman like that. 'Tain't her fault she's what she is. It was a mistake to take her away from her people, eddicate her, and then let her go back to share their mis'ry. She ought to ha' bin kept at College or married off to some decent man as 'ud have bin good to her. Her people are bound to die out, and she's got either to break away from 'em or die with 'em. She won't go back on me."

"That's all very fine, Old Man. Dum fine. But s'pose she does go back on you?"

"Well, I can't help it, Ikey. She's nothin' to go back on."

"Not yet; but she may git to thinkin' she has; and then where are you? Answer me that. When a squaw loves a man and he don't love her, she soon gits mad at him and wants to raise his hair."

"You forgit as she's an eddicated woman, Ikey, not a common squaw."

"I forgits nothin', Old Man. Nothin'. You put her back up and she'll knife you soon as look at you; p'r'aps sooner. Eddicashun 'ill only help her to knife you quicker. Now she's among her own people, I reckon she's forgot all her book-

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learnin' and decent ways. Only the Injun in her's left, and that's a tough proposition, I reckon."

"What puzzles me is where she gits her money from," said Old Man musingly. "That gun of hers must ha' cost a small fortune."

"Don't puzzle me a bit, Old Man. Not a bit."

"Why not?" Old Man was genuinely surprised.

"I know."

"How?"

"You thought I didn't see her, but I did. Just afore she turned to run down the mountain, her doeskin shirt flew open at the throat, and there was a string of little yaller beads round it."

"Well, what of that? Yaller beads are cheap enuff. 'Bout a dollar a bushel."

Ikey leaned over impressively. "These warn't no ornary Injun beads, but gold nuggets big as peas, Old Man, jus' strung together same as they'd bin picked up. Now I know how Yellow Feather holds out year arter year and pays folk for lettin' him alone. He's found gold somewheres in thisyer mountain. Gold!"

"So could I any day if I wanted to. But I'll wait till James has to be started in life. Blather-skites though they are at Four Corners, I don't want to turn the place into a minin' camp and spoil it."

"Why not, Old Man? Why not? 'Twouldn't do no manner of harm."

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"That's all you knows about it. If it was to git out that there's gold anywhere near Four Corners, in a month the place would be filled up with the scum of the earth."

"We'd manage 'em, Old Man. We'd manage 'em. I'd like to see the crowd as you couldn't manage."

But Old Man only shook his head and once more relapsed into a gloomy reverie.

Ikey, knowing his every mood, said nothing. More for Old Man's sake than his own, the prospect of finding gold elated him. But still, a gold frying-pan in which to produce masterpieces of culinary skill did appeal to his imagination. "Yes, I could do with it," he said unconsciously. "Might give a finer flavour to sowbelly when I cooked it."

"What would? Do with what?" Old Man absently asked, still gazing into the grey ashes.

"A gold fryin'-pan."

Old Man was touched, and, in spite of his heavy trouble, all the youthfulness in him came to the surface. "That all you want gold for, you dum loony?"

"Course, Old Man. Course. You don't s'pose as I wanted it for myself. I thought as you'd kinder relish things better in a gold——"

"Of all the idgeots!" But the smile came back to Old Man's lips, the light to his eagle eyes. "You shall have your dum fryin'-pan, Ikey, if I has to melt up the gold for it myself."

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"Thankee, Old Man. Thankee. That's real kind of you."

"But you ain't got it yet."

"I know that, Old Man. Course I know that. But if you says you'll git it for me, it's as good as got. Neither the heavens above, nor the yearth below 'em, nor the waters under the yearth, can stop you when you once makes up your mind. Once you gits goin', other folks has to sit on the fence till you've gone by."

At any other time Old Man would have been immensely gratified by this whole-hearted testimony to his acquisitory powers, but now he dismissed the subject with an impatient wave of the hand. "Course I'll git it for you, Ikey. Course I will. Now, we'd better make a move; it's growin' late. But where to?"

"If we stay here, p'r'aps she'll come back agin."

"Who'll come back agin?"

"Pahnewuska."

"Then why did she go away? Maybe you frightened her, and she didn't like to be seen with us in case Yellow Feather was about." Old Man knitted perplexed brows together.

"Wimmin's ways, Old Man. Wimmin's ways. When you knows as much about 'em as I do, you'll never be s'prised at anything they do, but jus' sit down and pity their dum foolishness. If they was as wise as men are, there'd be no need to look arter 'em, and that's why God A'mighty

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made 'em so helpless—jus' to keep the men busy all the time."

"Don't you go labellin' the sect, Ikey. There's more strength in a woman's weakness than there is in a man's muscles. And don't go callin' wimmin names. Don't you do it. They might call back and git the best of it. 'Sides, it's more'n I can stand jus' now."

"Oh, no, I ain't goin' to label 'em, Old Man. I ain't goin' to label 'em. Not me. They can allers do that for themselves. Me bein' a sort of mahoganist, Old Man——"

"What?" Old Man's thrilling whisper filled Ikey with a delighted sense of having scored at last.

"A mahoganist, Old Man."

"Oh, that all? I didn't quite catch on at first. Now I 'members the last time I saw it in the dickshunary I ruther thought it was a nice kind of ornary little word, a word good enuff for ornary people."

"And you ain't caught on yet," almost tearfully remarked the mortified Ikey. "'Tain't offen I makes a break with a fine fat word like that—a fine, upstandin' word; and yet you don't take no more notice of it'n 'sif it was dirt. Don't b'lieve you ever heard it afore in all your life. You're jealous! That's what you are, Old Man. Jealous! I won't have your fryin'-pan now, not if you was to offer to fry me in it yourself."

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Old Man saw that he had gone too far, that Ikey was really mortified and hurt. "Hold hard, Ikey. Hold hard. I was only foolin' you. I can git a rise out of you ev'ry time. Privately, I don't mind tellin' you I was lyin' when I said I'd seen it afore. I don't know where you got it, but it *is* a fine word. A fine fat durn-your-eyes-as-soon-as-look-at-you resposerable sort of a word. Seemed to cling all down my spine. Now you jus' look arter the impedimenta and we'll git a move on us."

"Arter what?" The things fell from Ikey's hands; his jaw fell also. "What's that, Old Man? What's that you said?"

"Oh, you jus' look arter the——"

"Don't say it agin," breathlessly implored Ikey. "If I lives to be a hundred, I'll never git ahead of you. Old Man, you've got me agin."

"In course," said Old Man, but the laughter in his eyes comforted Ikey.

"S'posin' we stays here, Old Man, till Pahne-wuska comes back?"

"No." Old Man shook his head. "She's gone off to warn her brother as we're in the mountains. Guess she's half afraid we'll foller her and half afraid we won't. I don't know much about your mahoganists, Ikey, but that's woman's nature all over. Run arter her and she runs away; don't run arter her and she runs arter you."

"I don't see why all wimmin should be made of such a lot of contrairy things, Old Man."

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"You don't see why, and nobody but God A'mighty knows why, Ikey. Sun and fire and dew ; storm and light and rain ; sweetness, bitterness, heaven and hell ; and a hundred other things all strugglin' in their hearts till some man happens along as is either a god or a devil to 'em. Then the mixture begins to work, and nobody knows what'll come of it, least of all themselves. That's what most wimmin are, bless 'em."

"I shouldn't ha' zackly said 'bless' 'em, Old Man."

"No, you wouldn't, Ikey. You're one of that hopeless band of idgeots as don't know God A'mighty made wimmin to keep us from bein' wuss hogs'n we nat'rally are."

"Why wouldn't I know it, Old Man? I can see as fur as most people. Chuck me that belly band."

"'Cause you've long ago forgotten that if it hadn't bin for a woman you wouldn't be here now argifyin' and wastin' my time when we ought to be startin'. Give me that kettle."

"We can't see in the dark."

"No ; it's only the wimmin you despises so much as can do that, Ikey. When everything's dark, they jus' stretches out their little hands, and——"

"This your blanket? Double it over your saddle and it 'ill be more cumferable. Yes, Old Man? Right you are. Stretches out their little hands, and——?"

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"And if we has the good luck to touch one of them in the dark, it pulls us into the light, Ikey. Here's your fryin'-pan."

"You allers was so dum poetical, Old Man. Allers. But as you ain't a woman, and I ain't one neither, and it *is* dark, I don't know how you're goin' to see to find your way down thisyer mountain unless you stretches out your little hand and gits someone to lead you."

Old Man vouchsafed no answer to the laboured persiflage of his faithful follower and friend, but unbuckled one end of Miss Wilks's bridle and retained it in his hand. "Go ahead," he said to the mule, and turned triumphantly to Ikey. "She can see in the dark."

"She ain't a woman, though," obstinately returned Ikey; "and she's only one eye."

"Her one eye can see further in the dark than your two in the daylight. Come on."

As they crossed the summit, Old Man leading Miss Wilks, the packhorse following her, and the roan bringing up the rear, the figure on the Cross was invisible. All the same, although Miss Wilks snorted and sniffed and wanted to move toward it, Old Man and Ikey reverently doffed their caps. Then the mule, after another remonstrant snort, put her nose to the track and scrambled down the mountain side into the engulfing darkness.

In a few seconds it had swallowed them up, the plateau was deserted.

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Presently the first faint beams of the rising moon silvered the rosy granite of the Cross, played upon a motionless form at its foot, a form which cautiously crawled into the light, stood erect for a moment, gave an uneasy shiver as it cast reluctant eyes upon the White Man's God, then followed after Ikey and Old Man.

The White Man pursued the Red. The Red Man pursued the White. The figure on the Cross looked down upon them both. Looked down and saw them not.

CHAPTER XII

THE ENCAMPMENT

THE spot was but a few days' journey away from that fair river, the Ottawa, with its amber bosom bearing the rough boats of the voyageurs, the timber rafts going down to Quebec, the fussy little steamers ; only a few days' journey from where the Red Man's paddle once guided his birch-bark canoe until it reached the Falls of La Chine, those Falls which adventurous missionary fathers of old believed to be the outposts of civilization ; only a few days' journey away, but guarded from all rash intruders by the Laurentian Mountains. Here, in this tranquil spot, the primeval forest once more asserted itself ; here, no woodman's axe was laid to the trunks of the tall trees ; here, no sacrilegious footsteps trod the fallen needles of the pines. The haunt of the bear and the beaver, and known to the Red Man alone, these solitudes were almost as unbroken as at the birth of the world. In the evening silence they awaited the Red Man's coming, the unhappy Red Man, fallen from his high estate, and ever pursued

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by the descendants of the Palefaces who had crossed the Great Water in their fire canoes to filch from him his home.

The setting sun shone redly through the tree-tops upon a running stream, the shallow waters of which glinted and sparkled in its rays. Twenty yards away from the bank rose a vast, and, to all appearance, impenetrable wall of forest trees. At the head of the stream beavers had cleverly constructed a dam by throwing trees across the narrowest part, and spreading the water into a shallow, lily-filled lake over which hung a fringe of fragrant firs. Occasionally the nose of a beaver showed solemnly upon the surface of the stream, his broad, paddle-shaped tail and water-sleeked fur momentarily visible in the strong, clear light before he sank noiselessly to the bottom. Others were busily engaged grubbing among the lily roots for their evening meal. The younger ones gambolled awkwardly upon the bank or gnawed the bark from willow branches which they had cut down and carried to the dam.

Presently the king of all the beavers, his muzzle age-whitened, rose inquiringly to the top of the water, listened to the crackle of twigs in the distance, then sank like a stone. Although he made no sign or splash as he sank, twenty other beavers abandoned their quest among the lily pads, forsook their willow branches and sank also. The dam seemed deserted, moss-grown, empty, the ruined

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relic of what had once been a flourishing beaver colony. Only an experienced hunter, versed in the habits of these little animals, could have detected "beaver sign" by the margin of the shallow stream. A half-eaten root, a partially peeled bough, the impress of a broad flat tail upon the muddy ooze, would have told him that the dilapidated-looking dam was full of beavers, whose "pelts" would richly repay the vandal base enough to break it open and destroy its ingenious builders.

The water, rippling over the surface of the dam, flowed swiftly along, forming as it went little side-eddies and currents among the moss-grown rocks. Here and there a gorgeous dragon-fly, condemned to an insatiate life-hunger, his gilded wings and brilliant colours masking the pain which gnawed his vitals, hovered above the bending water-weeds or floated hither and thither in ceaseless quest for food. Apart from the ravages of this jewelled tiger of the air, there was a tranquillity, a repose about the little glade, an absence of warring elements broken only by the occasional "e-e-e-e-e-e-ing" of a hapless mosquito fated to be entombed in the dragon-fly's rapacious maw ere he could gorge himself with blood.

Once more the old beaver noiselessly came to the surface, sniffed the tainted air and sank again in silence to warn his people of the impending danger. Had he known that he and his people were Yellow

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Feather's totem, he need not have feared. But he did not know it, and, followed by his family, swam swiftly away into the coming dusk.

The crackling of twigs came nearer, the soft, subdued babble of women's voices, the shrill laughter of children. A squaw's broad face framed itself in the green boughs of the cedars. Behind her drooped the lean head of an Indian pony, its eyes sad with the knowledge of the ever-renewed burdens which awaited it at the camp-striking on the morrow.

More squaws followed the first, some accompanied by many children, owl-eyed, suddenly silent in the last rays of the sunlight. Mongrel dogs, yellow of hue, lean of frame, scarred and battle-torn, slunk noiselessly behind the children, small bundles strapped upon their aching backs. Their woes being beyond the measure of speech, they therefore made no sound, but dropped panting to the earth and waited to be relieved of their burdens.

Twenty Indians appeared, no longer clad in the bravery of war-paint or carrying flashing weapons, but dirty, listless, sad. They wore shabby deer-skin trousers and mocassins, faded blankets, rain-washed, tattered, with greasy fur caps upon their heads—caps from which most of the fur had been rubbed off against the forest boughs. Some of them carried rusty guns. They were grave, silent, sullen, apparently oblivious to all around them,

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deaf to the music of the stream, the cheery bustle of the squaws.

As soon as the last of the braves had reached the little clearing, they withdrew apart under a spreading cedar, gravely seated themselves, did not even deign to notice the labour of the women, help them put up the tent poles or collect wood for the fires. All that was squaw's work. They sat apart and smoked with the stolidity of warriors silently contending with an inevitable fate. Their dignity elevated laziness to a fine art, made dirt decorous, justified their right to live. Now that there was so little to hunt, the whole encampment often went hungry. Not for them the fat steers of the Reservations, the warm blankets, the sacks of flour, the substantial little houses and yellow-wheeled buggies. They had scorned to give up their birthright for these material comforts. Hungry and tired and badly clad, they accepted their sad plight as the will of the Great Manitou, who, for some unimaginable reason, was displeased with His Red children and had doomed them to perpetual wanderings within these sylvan recesses.

Yellow Feather, as befitting a chief, sat alone, moodily eyeing a white canvas tent of much superior build and cleanliness to the tattered, bepatched and dirty skin-covered wigwams slowly raising their smoke-stained heads upon the margin of the stream. It struck an incongruous note of

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modernity, was out of place ; and yet it was his sister's tent, and she defied him to suppress it. Without her aid, he could not continue to roam the forests in isolated pride, but must come into a Reservation, humbly draw Government rations like any other degenerate Red Man who scorned to work. He would not work. No Indian chief ever had worked, and it ill became him to set so unworthy an example to the remnants of his once-powerful band. His sister supplied him with tobacco, occasional whisky—far too occasional, he thought bitterly, for he had an irrepressible longing for the firewater of the Paleface—money when he wanted it. Without her his life of freedom, inglorious though it was, must speedily come to an end. Do what he would, he was unable to wrest from Pahnewuska the secret of the hidden gold, that gold which gave her the power to defy him, to buy food for his shivering followers when the winter's icy grip was upon the land and the papooses starved within the smoky wigwams. He knew very well that without her he could not continue his present nomadic life. Years ago, when quite a young girl, she had discovered the secret of the gold, had disappeared, from time to time sending him the wherewithal to support his band. Then one day she had come back, resumed her old life, and practically superseded him.

It was very humiliating to be thus ruled and governed by a squaw. Very ! In the old days,

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Yellow Feather would have brained Pahnewuska with his tomahawk, thrown her body to the dogs, and thought no more of the matter. Unhappily, owing to the meddling Black Robes and Palefaces, those times were past. He was almost the last free Indian in Canada, and his freedom depended on his sister. If he discovered the secret of the gold mine, he could do without her. But although he watched Pahnewuska, spied upon her movements, followed her by night and day when she left the camp, he could not discover it. It was all very disquieting, very annoying to a chief whose dignity demanded an absolute subservience and respect from his followers. For the present they accorded him outward homage. But he knew very well that they could not live by hunting and fishing, and then when the supplies of food failed they would probably first tomahawk him as a peace-offering to the Canadian Government, and then make their submission.

So long as the braves were well fed, had plenty of tobacco to smoke, an occasional supply of "firewater," they experienced a sullen satisfaction in setting the Government at defiance. All the papooses and squaws were plump and in good health. The sudden need of putting fifty miles between them and their last camping-place, lest they should be captured, gave them something for which to live, a certain amount of pleasurable excitement. They could almost imagine them-

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selves on the war-path, although it was but a poor pretence to lift the White Man's chickens where their ancestors had lifted his hair. They knew that, to a certain extent, they must behave themselves, that a murder, a robbery on too big a scale, would recall them to the remembrance of a paternal Government, in all probability seal their doom; and, hard as their life was, it was comparative freedom when contrasted with the monotonous daily round on a Reservation, where intrusive Black Robes preached to them the gospel of the necessity of so degrading a thing as work.

But, regardless of the taciturnity of the men, the squaws collected fuel, lit the camp-fires, put up the tents, threw mysterious-looking objects into big iron pots suspended on crossed sticks, and satisfied the children's hunger with furtive bones. Soon a savoury odour filled the glade, penetrated the gloom of the swiftly-coming night, and reached even the sensitive nostrils of Yellow Feather himself.

The squaws meekly withdrew into the shadows as the braves stalked majestically forward to the fires, ranged themselves in circles round them, and ate all they wanted. When they had filled themselves to repletion from the savoury mess within the pots, they got up, yawned, stalked solemnly to another fire which the patient squaws had just kindled, sat round it, and began to smoke in stolid silence.

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Presently the squaws and papooses stole out from the shadows to feast upon the food magnanimously left for them by the men. Then, tired with the day's journey, they heaped more wood upon the fires, drew their blankets over their heads, and drifted into the tents whilst the yellow dogs fought and snarled over the scanty remnants of the meal. For two days the band had travelled unceasingly into the heart of the forest by little-known trails, and the tired squaws, with uncomplaining patience, seized the opportunity to rest until the first rays of the dawn should once more wake them to their heavy and monotonous tasks.

They would not have slept so much at their ease had they known that, little more than a couple of miles away, a carefully hidden camp-fire glimmered upon the right bank of the same stream. Ikey and Old Man, bronzed, vigorous, lean and hardy, sat by it, whilst Miss Wilks browsed uneasily beside them, from time to time lifting her head to sniff the tainted wind blowing directly toward her. Ikey's roan and the packhorse, more philosophical than the gifted hybrid, continued to graze upon the succulent grass with the consciousness that they had earned their evening meal. Though a thousand Indians were to come upon them in all the glory of full war-paint, they would not abate one mouthful.

The night was chilly but not disagreeably cold. Hence, Old Man and Ikey had not considered it necessary to put up their tent. In such a locality,

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where they might be surprised at any moment, the tent was unsafe with so wily a foe as Yellow Feather. They had an ample supply of robes and blankets, and after drawing an improvised screen of canvas round three sides of the fire to shield it from prying eyes, sat smoking in that restful content which comes only to those who have spent the day vigorously combating the obtrusive forces of Nature.

With very little effort, the two cronies had swung back into their old habits, a buffalo robe as a covering, the stars which glimmered down upon them through the gloomy forest for their canopy. In spite of his anxiety, his maddening desire to catch up with that elusive squaw, Pahnewuska, Old Man knew very well that his real troubles would begin when he once found her. Aided by the keen nose of the mule, they had struck her trail at once and followed after. Owing to the rough nature of the way, up to the present they had not succeeded in overtaking her, for their mounts were useless in these matted, fallen-tree encumbered forest paths. If Pahnewuska really wanted to see him again, Old Man knew that she would retrace her steps when the Indians were wrapped in slumber.

As he glanced at the mule from time to time, Old Man felt that the end of their quest was very near. She "scented Injuns." Yellow Feather's band could not be far off. Should the elusive

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Pahnewuska condescend to appear and come to terms, well and good ; if not, although he well knew the danger of such a course, Old Man decided that he must " bluff " Yellow Feather into revealing the secret which was to rescue the Schoolmistress from the jaws of death. He thought of the latter's helplessness, her fear of the grim grey shadow which lurked behind her ever ready to strike. She could not indefinitely continue to struggle against a foe who slowly but surely marked her for his own and waited with an irresistible patience for the final hour.

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe with a sigh, and once more resumed his gloomy contemplation of the carefully screened fire.

The mule threw up her head and listened. All at once her aggressive attitude changed, she whinnied softly.

" Told you so, Old Man," cried Ikey. " Here she is. You don't see that mule look so pleased 'less it's a friend as is comin' along."

" I dunno," Old Man said heavily. " Maybe she's a friend ; maybe she ain't. She may have bin thinkin' things over and made up her mind as she won't help us."

" I know her better'n that. Course she's a friend. She nursed you well enuff when you was down with fever, Old Man."

But Old Man was in a strangely pessimistic mood. Shut up within their canvas screen as

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they were, it was almost impossible for him to see beyond it, so carefully had the fire been veiled by the dexterous Ikey. For a few yards behind them the inky black shadows enveloped everything, the boughs of the cedars swept down in long funereal layers. Above them the stars faintly began to shine. The silence was broken only by the mournful hoot of an owl and the sound of the horses cropping the grass.

"Don't sound like a real owl. S'pose that's her signal to the others." Old Man placed his rifle ready to his hand. "Nice thing if they're tryin' to git us unawares and workin' up towards us."

"They dussent do it, Old Man. You know as well as I do, Injuns don't like fightin' in the dark. 'Member what you said jus' now 'bout the Sheriff comin' arter 'em if they was to try any tricks?" Ikey endeavoured to speak reassuringly, fumbled for his revolver, and cheered up at its welcoming touch. "We're good for at least a dozen of 'em if they shows their teeth."

"That's the wust of Injuns: they don't show nothin', Ikey. Though we can't see them, they can see us. 'Sides, an Injun don't reason when he sees suthin' he can lay his hands on. He's bound to have it, even if it costs him his scalp arterwards."

"Don't talk about scalps. Makes me feel mighty uncumferable, Old Man."

"Hist! What's that, Ikey?"

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"Only the mule talkin' to someone."

The next moment the mule put her head over the canvas screen and sent her long tongue out exploringly until it touched Old Man's face. A low ripple of laughter came from the other side of the canvas, and Ikey, ashamed of his fears, sat up. "Howdy, Pahnewuska?" he said. "It's real nice of you to drop in permiskus-like for a chat. Maybe I'd better take down the screen."

"Maybe you had, Mr. Marston," said Pahnewuska, as she composedly assisted in the demolition of the frail barrier. "Haven't you the politeness to offer me something to sit down on? Good evening, Old Man."

Old Man rose and silently motioned to Pahnewuska to sit down on the log he had just vacated. "We've bin expectin' you for the last two days. I was hopin' you'd drop in long afore now. Why you should ha' kept us on the run all this time I dunno."

Pahnewuska nonchalantly took the seat offered her. "We always value the things which are most difficult of attainment," she said philosophically. "Don't we, Mr. Marston?"

"Geewhiz!" said the bewildered Ikey, "you never used them tall words afore, Pahnewuska. You must ha' swallowed Old Man's dickshunary."

She looked at him mockingly, a thousand mirthful devils dancing in her fine eyes as she blew away the ashes from the fire until it blazed up. "I do

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a great many things now which I never used to do, Mr. Marston."

"It used to be Ikey, not 'Mr. Marston.'"

"I daresay, but I am not quite sure whether we are in a position to resume the old familiar terms," she said mockingly. "If you will excuse me for a little while, I came for a chat with Old Man about one or two rather important matters."

At a nod from Old Man, the discomfited Ikey wandered away to the side of the brook and sat down out of earshot, but sufficiently near to reach his friend in case of any sudden necessity.

"Now that Ikey has gone, we can talk," said Pahnewuska composedly. "Hadn't you better take his seat? He should keep that wonderful head of hair covered up, or if my brother catches sight of it I won't answer for the consequences."

As Old Man sat down, her mirthful mood suddenly changed. "Why did you disregard my warning? You are utterly foolish to follow me like this. Do you know that my brother and his band are barely two miles away?"

"I guessed as much," said Old Man dryly. "Maybe he'll be nearer'n that. I don't s'pose he'll let you out of his sight offener'n he can help."

"Why not?" She seemed honestly surprised.

"Ikey's told me 'bout that necklace you wear."

"Impossible! How could he see it? And what has that to do with my brother?" She

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put up her hand as if to feel for the necklace, then, reassured, let it fall again.

"Oh, your dress flew open when you ran away, and he saw the gold nuggets. Ikey's no fool at puttin' two and two together."

"I was going to tell you," she said eagerly. "You are the only person I would trust with the secret, Old Man. I am impossibly rich, for I know where gold is to be had for the picking up. How else do you imagine I could have gone to College, have paid people to let my brother alone."

"I guessed it all when Ikey told me about the necklace."

She put her hand to her throat, drew the necklace from its hiding-place and placed it in his hand. The contact with the precious metal, warm from her throat, was electrical. "It's gold, sure enuff," Old Man agreed.

"Of course it's gold. You have only to say the word and I'll take you to it. Even now you don't know how near you have been to the identical spot."

Old Man shook his head dully. "Gold doesn't matter to me. I've more important things to think about."

Pahnewuska laid one hand eagerly upon his arm. "Tell me, Old Man. Tell me. What are they? Have I ever failed you when you needed me?"

Old Man drew back, for since his lips had met

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those of the Schoolmistress, it was repugnant to him to be touched by another woman. There was a warm pressure in the Indian girl's touch which almost amounted to a caress. Pahnewuska noticed his involuntary shrinking from it and drew back in her turn.

"In matters of life and death it's no good beatin' about the bush." Old Man roused himself with an effort. "Thought I heard a rustlin' in the trees."

"Very likely," said Pahnewuska. "I shouldn't be at all surprised if my brother has followed me here. I always have a good deal of difficulty in getting away from him when I want to return to Civilization."

"You do go back?"

"Oh, yes, sometimes. You don't suppose I am foolish enough to believe that this wandering life can go on for ever. I live in Toronto, where I have a large sum of money invested and am looked upon as a person of some importance. There, they draw the line at the negro, but the Indian is another matter, especially the educated Indian. So many philanthropists want to the philanthropic at my expense."

"I don't understand how you can be two persons at once. Don't you git mixed up sometimes?"

"Occasionally. But I am not here to talk about myself, Old Man. I want to know why you came over the mountains. It surely wasn't to find me?"

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" Oh, yes, it was—to find you."

" To find me ! " Pahnewuska's incredulity gave way to manifest delight. " And I ran away from you when——" She checked herself. " Old Man, I will never run away from you again. To think that for three days I have been leading you this dance out of mere 'cussedness,' when you had taken all this trouble to come to find me. You must feel a very keen interest in me to give yourself so much bother. I'm sorry I didn't appreciate it properly."

In his absorption, Old Man failed to notice the impression that Pahnewuska had gathered from his statement, that she believed his journey to be inspired solely by a desire to see her again. She came a little nearer to him, as if eager to hear more. Her fine lips were tremulous, eager. The firelight shone upon a singularly prepossessing face, the expression of which was sweet, gentle, confiding. A certain hardness had disappeared from the somewhat stern setting of the mouth, her colour came and went, her breast heaved. She believed herself to be on the eve of hearing from Old Man that he loved her, that he had followed the tedious path over the mountains to tell her so. And he, in his eagerness to attain his journey's aim, failed to notice her agitation, or, at the best, ascribed it to her interest in himself and his fortunes, a friendly interest which would aid his quest.

" I came here for a woman's sake," he said slowly.

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" Yes, Old Man ? Yes ? " She drew still nearer to him, her face became radiant. " Why don't you go on ? "

" A dyin' woman's sake ; and you're the only person I know of as can help me and her."

The expression of Pahnewuska's mobile countenance suddenly changed, became contorted with fury, a hopeless agony which would have touched Old Man to the heart had he realized that he, and he alone, was the cause of it. All her castles in the air—castles which had soared up as at the touch of a magician's wand—suddenly crumbled and disappeared. She knew now that nothing but dust and ashes remained for her. Her dreams had never borne any real, tangible form, were as unsubstantial as the mirage which mocks the dying traveller in the Desert.

A blind rage took possession of the Indian girl's suffering heart, her face became distorted with passion, for she remembered the Schoolmistress whom she had pointed out to Old Man as dying of consumption, and guessed everything. Old Man loved the Schoolmistress and, in his despair, had set out to discover the healing herb which would bring back the roses to her cheeks, the strength to her step, until she recovered sufficiently to become his wife.

Old Man, noticing the passionate tumult of Pahnewuska's heaving breast, the sparkle of her eyes, felt that she was warmly interested in the

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object of his quest, that he had but to ask for the precious secret to learn where the Herb of Healing was to be found.

With marvellous self-control Pahnewuska regained her composure, although her first impulse had been to thrust her hunting knife to the hilt in Old Man's heart, to dabble her fingers in his blood, to steep herself in it. But there was the watchful Ikey to be considered. Even the mule would trample the life out of her if she were to attack Old Man. He was so near, leaned to her so confidently, that the temptation to deal him a deadly blow was well-nigh irresistible.

While she still hesitated, Ikey sauntered back to the fire with the mien of a man who is instinctively conscious of something in the air. He had told her once, although she had not believed him, that he was always instantly aware of any danger which threatened Old Man. Now she had proof positive of the truth of his statement, as he unobtrusively sauntered up and placed himself at her side. For the moment she was powerless to harm. But only for the moment. There was blood in her eyes. She saw everything red. Then Ikey, inwardly congratulating himself on his intuition, stooped down, carefully covered the fire with dead ashes, and drew the screen round it again. "Now," he drawled, "if anyone's gittin' ready for a pot shot, guess they'll have to fire at the whole fam'ly."

Pahnewuska laughed, but there was no music

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in her mirth. "You had better come to my brother's camp and make friends with him. Although it will be a little difficult, I will prepare him for your visit, and assure him that you will not give him away to the Reservation people. He will be delighted to see you, especially if you have any whisky with you."

Old Man explained that he had half a dozen bottles of whisky and plenty of gifts for the squaws. He was a little confused at Pahnewuska's evident desire to change the conversation, and half inclined to blame Ikey for interrupting it. But one glance at the latter's warning face, as he stood behind the Indian girl, showed him that there was danger somewhere, and he instinctively prepared to meet it.

Pahnewuska, after reiterating her intention of receiving them at her brother's camp the next day, melted into the blackness of the cedars and the two friends were once more alone.

"What was up? Why'd you come back, Ikey?"

"If I hadn't, she'd ha' knifed you, Old Man. You've had many close shaves in your time, but that was the closest. I saw her hand go to her knife and in another moment I'd ha' bin too late. We'll lie low for an hour and then git out of here's fast as we can or we'll never have another chance."

Old Man shook his head. Notwithstanding that Ikey had voiced his own feeling, he knew that he could not go back without obtaining the secret. "You clear out while you've got the chance, Ikey,"

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he said affectionately. "Don't you bother 'bout me. I'll worry through all right."

"Shut your fool mouth, Old Man. 'Sif I'd leave you to the tender mercies of Pahnewuska! She's goin' to do jus' what I thought she would."

"And that is?"

"She's goin' to raise hell all round, Old Man."

"Then you'd better git out of it."

"Had I? You go to sleep while you can do it with your hair on, Old Man," and Ikey, disdain-
ing to make any further reply, curled himself up
in his blankets and went to sleep, for he was perfectly aware that no Indian ever likes to risk a night attack.

But Old Man, feeling himself the sport of the Gods, sat motionless by the fire, every sense on the alert, until the rising sun began to gild the tree-tops and sparkle upon the running waters. Then he lay down in his turn and Ikey took his place, regarding the dawn with the glance of a man who is anxious to make the most of an experience which he may not be in a position to repeat.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FRACAS

KEY, who had no time to waste on imaginary perils when there was work for his hands to do, resolved that, as his future operations might be limited, breakfast on this particular occasion should be a memorable meal. Nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to barbecue the redoubtable Yellow Feather, provided someone else had the temerity to eat that seasoned warrior. Failing Yellow Feather, however, he had recourse to certain tinned stores, supplemented by a salad which he gathered from the shallows of the streamlet, although he was afraid that Old Man's share of what he contemptuously called "green meat" would be handed over to Miss Wilks. When he had got the coffee well in hand and the frying-pan at work, the cheerful odours from each temporarily banished his depression, and he was delighted to see that Old Man had in some measure recovered his spirits. But the more Old Man's spirits went up, the quicker his own fell again, for he suddenly remembered that the greater the danger the more

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cheerful would his companion become. Old Man, though gentleness itself to women and children and animals, was a born fighter, more perhaps owing to the strategical qualities required for the putting out of action or capture of an enemy than from any actual desire to slay his fellow-creatures. Once he had secured his foe, he took little further interest in him.

Although secretly delighted with Old Man's unconscious tribute to his cookery, Ikey hid his satisfaction. "Seem to think it's a durned Sunday-school picnic as we're lettin' ourselves in for," he growled, when Old Man held out his tin pannikin for more coffee.

"So 'tis. Splendid coffee you makes, Ikey. I disremembers since when I've had such a load off my mind and such a load into my stummick. Gimme another turkey leg."

"Turkey leg! You're dreamin', Old Man. That's what you are—dreamin'! Set you up with turkey legs! You'll just have another slice of fried pork and be dum thankful to git that."

"All right. Pass it along, Ikey," contentedly acquiesced Old Man. "Anything for a quiet life whiles we've got any life left in us."

"Turkey leg, when you know we ain't sighted a turkey for weeks! You're crazy, Old Man! Plum crazy! That's what you are."

Old Man, not knowing whether he might ever get another chance, resolved to make Ikey happy

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for the moment. "Sorry, but you're such a mighty fine cook, Ikey, I can't tell the diff'rence atween it and turkey. You did orter have a bear-claw necklace set in dimon's as well as your gold fryin'-pan, and if I had my way I'd git it for you."

"You means it? You really means it, Old Man? You ain't pokin' fun at me?" queried the incredulous Ikey.

"Is thisyer breakfast a thing to be poked fun at? Course I means it. Give us another leg—slice, I mean."

"Well, I'm gormed! Here's two slices. I'm not denyin' 'twas allers a real pleasure to cook for you, Old Man." Ikey, resolved to be equally complimentary, made the effort of a lifetime. "You're allers so depreciative when you're feelin' well;" and he continued to heap culinary wrong upon wrong on Old Man's tin plate, unwitting that the latter, knowing how easy it was to please his simple-hearted friend, feigned an abnormal appetite in order to prevent him from thinking of the very real dangers which might possibly await them at Yellow Feather's camp.

But when Old Man's fictitious appetite was appeased (to Ikey's great delight he more than once expressed a sudden yearning for "one of them cakes of yours with icin' on 'em as used to stick in my stummick closer'n a brother") and the animals were saddled ready to start, Ikey was surprised to see that Old Man lingered a little,

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proffered him a pipeful of his choicest tobacco and threw round his neck a blazing crimson handkerchief bright enough "to set the woods afire."

"What's all this for, Old Man?" Ikey looked at his friend with affectionate eyes. "Ain't known you so painful polite since you shot that Cree as tried to steal the mule."

"She'd given him a sockdologizer with both heels first, Ikey; I had to shoot him to put him out of his mis'ry." He stroked the mule's velvet muzzle, the only soft thing about her except her big heart, and lifting up Miss Wilks's one drooping ear whispered into it. From the expression of his face, it almost seemed as if he were taking a provisional farewell of his faithful four-footed follower.

These preliminaries adjusted and the packhorse laden with the customary pots and pans, the cavalcade started, Old Man casually calling Ikey's attention to the beauties of earth and sky as they plunged into the aromatic fragrance of the early dawn through the semi-gloom of long arcades of sentinel pines knee-deep in their own dead needles.

Presently, Ikey, who had been keeping a keen lookout for imaginary enemies, linked his arm in Old Man's, and they continued to stroll carelessly along, each perfectly aware that their every movement was watched by unseen foes held in leash by Pahnewuska's restraining hand. If Old Man fell from some coward shot, Ikey had no wish to survive, for next to the pleasure of living with Old Man

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he esteemed almost as much the honour of dying with him. He felt that the Indian girl was bent upon mischief. But Old Man had burst into such eloquent praises of his cookery that, if need be, Ikey was prepared to follow him cheerfully

“To the Land of the Ponemah, to the Land of the Hereafter.”

Perhaps things were not really as bad as they seemed, and a night's reflection would have convinced Pahnewuska of the hopeless folly of her passion for Old Man, make her present him with the Herb of Healing, and enact the part of fairy godmother generally.

Old Man, whose knowledge of human nature—especially feminine human nature—left him freer from such optimistic delusions, did not share in Ikey's belief that their afflictions would have a happy issue. “Better keep a tight hold on that little gun of yours, Ikey,” he suggested. “Maybe you'll want it; maybe not. We must be near Yellow Feather's camp by this time. Jus' look at the way that durned old mule's ear's goin' up and down like a windmill. She smells Injun sure enuff.”

“Needn't be a mule to do that, Old Man. That Injun girl ain't far off, and I can smell t'others myself. It's most as bad as a Chinaman—sorter dryin'-up swamp kind of a smell, with a mixture of stinkweed and poison ivy thrown in.”

There was a slight rustling in the bushes, and the object of Ikey's animadversions rose up before them.

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Ikey nodded to her affably. "Just talkin' 'bout you, Pahnewuska, and up you comes. It's a dum fine mornin', ain't it."

Pahnewuska put her finger to her lips and motioned to Ikey to remain where he was.

"Guess it's you she wants to talk to," said that worthy, turning in bewilderment to Old Man. "Don't you go into the bushes, Old Man. There may be a dozen Injuns waitin' for you."

Pahnewuska smiled contemptuously. "I didn't know you were such a coward that the mere sight of my people's camp-fires makes your knees knock together like that."

"They ain't knockin', Pahnewuska, and you knows it. But I don't let Old Man out of my sight. I'll plug up my ears if you don't want me to know what you've got to say to him, but where he goes, I goes. He's so used to havin' me look arter him, he's bound to git into trubble if I don't."

"Oh, very well," said Pahnewuska resignedly. Then she smiled. "You don't look nearly as much at your ease as you did at Four Corners."

Ikey was about to make some scathing rejoinder in reply to this assertion when Old Man intervened. "It's all right, Ikey. Keep your hair on and jus' wait here a minnit."

He followed Pahnewuska a few yards away between the long, straight stems of the pines, where the morning sun filtered down through the branches and made golden patches on the dull

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red-brown of the dead needles. A deer bounded away in the distance and disappeared. Just in front of them a jay cocked his bright eye out of a hole in the junction of two boughs and peered inquisitively at Pahnewuska's rifle barrel, then emitted a discordant scream and flew a few yards away.

Old Man followed Pahnewuska in silence. His manner betokened an easy unconcern, although he was conscious that a crisis in his relations with the Indian girl had arrived. That she was Yellow Feather's sister instead of his squaw did not make any difference in the situation. The mere fact of her being seen with Old Man would afford the Indian ample pretext for any violence he had in his mind.

But as he mechanically followed the graceful figure of the Indian girl, Old Man was not thinking of Yellow Feather. He wondered dully whether Pahnewuska had decided to help him. If she had, well and good; if she had not, he must trust to Chance to guide his footsteps aright. Chance! And every moment was precious, every moment which passed so lightly with the splendidly vigorous woman before him was fraught with pain and suffering to Cynthia.

"Well?" Pahnewuska watched him keenly.
"Well, Old Man? Well?"

"I'm waitin' for that."

"Waiting for what?"

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"To see if it is well."

"It all depends upon yourself."

Old Man shook his head. "It depends upon you, Pahnewuska."

"Well?" The monotonous reiteration of the word appeared to afford her a certain satisfaction.

"I'm waiting to hear what you have to say?"

"You know 'swell as I do what I have to say, why I'm here; and I want to know what you've got to say to me in reply."

"Only this," she said composedly, "that you've fallen in love with that puling schoolmarm at Four Corners; she's dying by inches; and you want me to save her, to lead you to where the Herb of Healing grows, that herb which will make her strong and well again. That's it, isn't it, Old Man?"

"Yes; that's it."

"And suppose I won't help you?"

"Suppose you don't help me, the girl dies."

"But what is that to you, Old Man, while I live?"

"It's everything," said Old Man gently, noticing that she kept down her rising passion with difficulty. "Everything."

"And where do I come in, Old Man?"

"You come in as the good fairy."

"That's what they always say to the children. But I am a woman, with all a woman's wants and needs and passions, and I am not to be treated as

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a child. I suppose, Old Man, you would give a good deal to save this girl's life ? ”

Old Man nodded mechanically. “ In course.” He had not much hope as to the result of this interview, but was resolved to do nothing which might precipitate matters, for he knew the Indian nature when roused, how fiercely it blazes out and sticks at nothing.

Pahnewuska faced him squarely, although her lips quivered a little. “ You say you would do much for this girl's sake, Old Man. If I lead you to the Herb of Healing, and it brings her back to life, are you prepared to pay the price ? ”

“ Anything.”

“ Very well.” He saw the tide of passion surging in her cheeks. “ But you haven't yet heard what that price is.”

“ Name it.”

“ If I save this girl's life, you must give her up and marry me.” Her tone softened a little. “ They tell me I'm not bad looking ; I can find you any amount of gold ; and—and——”

“ And—— ? ”

“ I—love—you, Old Man.”

With a shamed gesture, Pahnewuska flung herself on her knees before him, clasped his hands and hid her face.

Old Man bent down to the Indian girl, gently unclasped her long, slim hands, and raised her up again. “ You don't know what you're sayin',”

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he sorrowfully declared. "P'r'aps it's only to test me, that's why you're askin' this. Any way, it's the greatest thing I've ever had said to me by a woman."

"You don't know what it has cost me to say it," she protested, her downcast eyes following the patterns of the dancing sunlight on the ground. "I can make you rich and powerful, find for you all the things of life which men waste so many years in struggling to get. Give me your word that you will marry me, and this girl shall be cured. If not!" She made an expressive gesture as if she flung Cynthia Hannum to the winds.

"If not?" queried Old Man.

"If not, you must seek out for yourself where the Herb of Healing grows, and you might look for a hundred years without finding it."

"I see." Old Man nodded. "I s'pose 'tain't nothin' to you that a girl lies waitin' day by day for the comin' of Death, ev'ry time she sees the sunshine knows as she'll soon see it no more. I s'pose you don't care if she does die, providin' you can git your fancy gratified by marryin' me?"

"No, I don't care what becomes of her, Old Man. She's my enemy, and an Indian doesn't weep when her enemy dies."

Old Man shook his head. "S'pose I tell you, not from any stupid vanity but because it's true, that it 'ud kill the girl just as surely for me to marry you? If I went back to her, took her the

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leaves, told her on what terms I'd got 'em, d'you think she'd accept life on those terms ? ”

“ I give you your chance, Old Man. If you don't take it, look out for yourself ; that's all.”

“ I was afraid it 'ud come to that,” Old Man mournfully declared. “ You're only actin' accordin' to your lights. I've had too many kindnesses from you to look upon you as my enemy. God knows I don't want to do that. Whatever you feel you've got to do, you can't help doin', and we'll part friends all the same.”

He held out his hand, but the girl did not see it, for her eyes were blinded by passionate tears. “ You don't know what you are giving up just for the sake of this passing fancy,” she said bitterly. “ With your power of ruling men and circumstance, once you got away from Four Corners you might be anything. There, you'll never be anything except the man who is called in to put things right when they go wrong ; and where you are, Old Man, someone will always make things go wrong to give you the pleasure of setting them right.”

“ In other words, I'm a meddlin' idgeot,” Old Man interposed. “ I know that well enuff, but I've allers lived up to helpin' folks as is weaker'n myself and I can't go back on it.”

“ I am weaker than you are, Old Man. Help me ! Help to make me happy. Take me away from my people.” She waved her hand with a

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despairing gesture to where the encampment was hidden. "Take me away from all this. Give me a little happiness in my miserable life. Help to repair the wrongs which your people have done mine, by teaching me to forget. If you will only do that, I will go to this girl, nurse her back to life, cure her of all her ills. She doesn't love you as I love you. She's weak; I'm strong. In a little while that clinging weakness which seems so sweet to you now would worry the life out of you. You're a strong man, and your woman should be strong too, a woman who would bear you mighty children to carry on the glories of your race. If you leave me where I am, if you don't lift a finger to save me, you will be as guilty of my death as I shall be of hers. Think, Old Man, think."

She sprang at him, took him in her arms, pressed her lips to his again and again.

Old Man gently disengaged himself from her passionate embrace. "I'm sorry," he said simply. "I'm sorry. If you can't help me, and I ain't blamin' you, I'll just have to hoe along as best I can. If I fail and the girl dies, Four Corners 'ill know me no more. Somehow the shadows are stealin' over us both. I can feel them comin'. But, whatever happens, I ain't goin' to think hardly of you. Whatever happens, think of me as kindly as you can. If there's anything I can ever do for you, I'd go to the ends of the earth and——"

"If there is anything you can do for me!" she

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passionately interrupted. "I have told you what you can do for me, Old Man. If you don't, you mustn't blame me. I'm torn a dozen different ways. This matter will be the death of one of us—perhaps of both."

"Yes," Old Man dully repeated, "it will be the death of one of us, p'r'aps of both." He took both her hands in his, drew her to him, kissed her on the lips. "You and me are only carryin' out what we've got to do, the things God A'mighty, in His wisdom, has set us to do. You can't help yourself and I can't help myself. Whatever happens, I'll never forgit as you've done a good deal for me. I was a fool to expect you to do more."

"Yes," she said fiercely, "you were a fool, Old Man, to expect me to do more. It's your last chance and you haven't taken it. Your blood be on your own head."

Bitterly weeping she turned away, and Old Man went back to Ikey. Pahnewuska had declared her inability to control herself and he feared the worst.

He found Ikey anxiously awaiting him. "Time we was movin'," he said briskly. "We're goin' to have a lively day, Ikey. Can you see where the camp is?"

"Reckon 'tain't fur off, Old Man. 'Sides, there's smoke a-curlin' up through the cedars;" and he pointed to a column slowly dissolving over the tops of the tall trees.

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"It's them, sure enuff. Keep your eyes skinned, Ikey. They might be nasty. If so, we'll do our best to stand 'em off. Arter all, 'tain't such a long way from Four Corners."

"Maybe it 'ill seem longer to us afore we gits out of this, Old Man. I didn't like the way Pahnewuska went off last night. And I don't like the way she went off jus' now. Seemed to me she'd suthin' on her mind. Don't you trust her, Old Man. You can't trust a woman as pretends she didn't know English all the time we've knowed her and then lets fly at us 'sif she was Parson Black in the pulpit."

Old Man shook his head at this ominous reference to their dead friend, and recalled his last words. Until now they had had little meaning for him, had been but the distempered fancy of a dying man. Now he dimly began to see that they hinted at lasting sorrow, predicted the weight of the burden which was crushing him to the earth. With a resigned shrug of his shoulders, he dismissed the past in the necessity for present action, and motioned to Ikey to lead the way.

They emerged from the forest, half blinded by the brilliant sunshine. What struck Old Man as strange was that the Indians had not prepared to depart, and that their wigwams were scattered about just as they had been put up by the squaws on the previous evening.

At the noise made by their entrance into this

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sunny glade, the camp dogs, wolf-snouted, long and lank and lean of aspect, rushed forward, snarling and wrinkling back their upper lips over sharp-pointed fangs.

Miss Wilks, who was not feeling particularly amiable, summarily disposed of one by picking it up as if it were a rat and flinging it against a tree. After a long, anguished howl on the part of this particular dog, the rest was silence.

A squaw seized a blazing brand from her fire and, rushing in among the pack, dealt out such shrewd blows that they slunk back to the wigwams, where the papooses, affrighted at the presence of strangers, noiselessly followed them. The men, still stoically smoking under a tree a little apart from the camp, made no sign. Indian etiquette required that they should first be approached by the new-comers. Ikey noticed that their blankets were draped around their greasy forms, although the sun shone hotly down upon them. "Got their knives ready for us, durn 'em," was his unspoken comment.

"Howdy?" said Old Man cheerfully, and at the same time laid a restraining hand upon Miss Wilks, whose yellow teeth were parted with anger as she glimpsed her hereditary foes the Indian ponies.

"Howdy!" the men grunted in chorus.

Old Man carelessly tossed a brilliant blue handkerchief to a passing squaw, who caught it, stood

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looking at him with a delighted grin, and hastily darted off with her prize.

Roused by the commotion, Yellow Feather and Pahnewuska emerged from the latter's tent and greeted them stiffly. It was evident that Pahnewuska struggled with some all-compelling fear, for after one look of agonized entreaty at Old Man—a look in which remorse and passion were equally blended—she drew a little way back behind her brother and waited for them to speak.

Old Man had occasionally met Yellow Feather lounging about Four Corners in quest of law-forbidden whisky during the Sheriff's absence. Then he had been broken, dispirited, his whole soul and body consumed by the craving for strong drink. Now, his enforced absence from "tangle-foot," his long marches, and the simple food of the forest, had made a man of him. He walked erect with that unconscious dignity which enables an Indian, no matter how degraded, to stalk through a crowd of jeering spectators without seeing one of them. In spite of drink, disease, and starvation, the Indian is naturally the most self-possessed being in the world, and has the finest manner. Admitting no superior, he is unabashed in the presence of a king; and Yellow Feather's air as he extended an exceedingly dirty hand might have been that of a monarch giving it to a suppliant to kiss.

Old Man wrung it heartily, so did Ikey. Not so

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Miss Wilks. She looked as though she would like to savage Yellow Feather, but changed her mind and whinnied to Pahnewuska.

Yellow Feather turned to his sister and spoke rapidly.

"What does he say?" Old Man trusted to Pahnewuska's good offices as interpreter, for he could not catch the meaning of the hurriedly spoken words.

"He says what do you want here? Have you come to try to take him and his people to a Reservation, because, if so, he will kill you both and divide your property among his braves."

"I thought you told him why we came here." Old Man could not conceal his astonishment.

Pahnewuska indifferently shook her head. Her rich colour had faded. If an Indian could be said to be pale, she was pale.

"Won't you tell him why I'm here, Pahnewuska?"

"He says he won't talk to you till you give him some whisky."

"Business first and whisky arterwards."

"Then he won't talk to you at all, and you will have had your journey for nothing." It was difficult to believe that the woman who now spoke so indifferently was the passionate girl of a few minutes ago.

The men under the trees had put off their stoical manner, their snaky black eyes glanced angrily at

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the intruders, they seemed to be preparing for actual hostilities. When, however, Old Man unfastened his saddle-bags and produced a couple of bottles of whisky, the anger in them died down; they grunted approvingly. But to their great disappointment, Yellow Feather unceremoniously seized the bottles and hid them in his blanket. Then he again held out his dirty paw.

"He wants a drink now," Pahnewuska explained. If she were ashamed of her brother's savagery, she did not show it.

"Not another drop," firmly declared Old Man.

"Better give him some from your flask," she suggested. "He won't talk till whisky loosens his tongue."

Old Man reluctantly produced his flask, and poured out a stiff "horn" for Yellow Feather, who swallowed it at a gulp.

"Gosh! He's got the stummick of an alligator for sure," murmured the admiring Ikey.

Old Man took another bottle of whisky from his saddle-bags and tossed it to the waiting crowd under the cedar. Yellow Feather's eyes twinkled angrily. He turned to his sister again and snarled something.

"What's he want now?"

"He says you'd better unpack the things you've brought to give to the squaws and camp here for the day. There's plenty of grass by the stream. Then you can give him the rest of the whisky."

"What d'you think, Pahnewuska?"

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"I don't think anything about it. Do as you like," she said listlessly. Yellow Feather unceremoniously went back to his tent.

Ikey, seeing that Old Man wished to talk to her, dropped back a little.

"What's become of your friendship?" asked Old Man. "I thought you were goin' to help me, Pahnewuska."

"And I thought you had come because you wanted to see me, Old Man. All you want is the secret of the healing herb which will cure that puling Schoolmistress. Faugh! I tell you again I will not help you." She shivered.

Old Man momentarily relaxed his vigilance. It was on his lips to reproach her with her treachery. His face flushed. But something in the forlornness of Pahnewuska's attitude checked his angry words. He remembered that she had suffered much and must be forgiven much also. As he turned away with a shrug of his shoulders, he and Ikey were suddenly seized by the remainder of the band, who had treacherously crept up behind them.

The next moment, with a squeal of rage, her eye darting fire, the mule dashed in among them, striking with her fore-feet and upsetting Old Man and Ikey's assailants all over the place. Then she came back to her master and began again.

The bottle of whisky had been broken during the mule's fierce charge. Heedless of her plunging hoofs, the demoralized wretches threw themselves

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on the ground and endeavoured to lap up the precious liquid. Some of them even dug at the saturated earth and chewed it eagerly.

Old Man, seeing that the danger was past, put his pistol back in his pocket, but Ikey kept his finger on the trigger. "That cowardly skunk, Yellow Feather's gone into his tent so's he can say he didn't know nothin' about it," he declared. "I've a good mind to send a bullet arter him to fetch him out agin."

Pahnewuska, very quiet, very sad, seemed utterly broken. "Do it and the secret of the Herb of Healing dies with him."

Ikey shook his head. "You'd be only too thankful to me for gittin' rid of him. Hope he'll live long to plague you—you treach'rous Isabel. Old Man, we'd better git out and go back. This squaw here is just about as vile as they make 'em. She's purposely led us into this."

Old Man only shook his head. "Once we'd made up our minds to come, you couldn't help it. Better tell them to strike their tents and go ahead," he said to Pahnewuska.

She turned round and gave the word to pull down her tent, despite a growl from Yellow Feather, who objected to being discovered there with a whisky bottle at his lips. Soon the squaws came crowding out from the reeking wigwams, and Old Man tossed them the bright-coloured trinkets and beads and handkerchiefs which he had brought with him.

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In a moment they were laughing and talking, ready to do anything for him. But the bruised and wounded braves held aloof, snarling at the squaws to be quick.

"I want just another word with you," Old Man said to Pahnewuska, when the tent poles had been fastened to the ponies' sides and Yellow Feather, to all appearances stupidly drunk, helped upon his dejected steed by a couple of squaws.

With shrill cries the women drove the ponies forward, the children and the dogs followed after, and the men, rather than face the dangerous proximity of Miss Wilks, slunk off behind the cedars. For a few minutes the sound of breaking branches, the crackling of twigs, the shrill neigh of a pony stallion broke the forest stillness. Save for the marks of the recent struggle, the odds and ends of bones and offal littered about, nothing but the still blazing fires remained to show that the Indians had been there.

"Now"—Old Man gravely turned to Pahnewuska—"Now for our last pow-wow."

He motioned to Ikey to fall back out of earshot.

Ikey withdrew to one of the fires and economically put out the others, so that he might save himself the trouble of collecting more wood. In a little while Miss Wilks and the horses, freed from their saddles, were eagerly drinking at the sweet waters of the little stream.

Old Man motioned to the girl to sit down.

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"Now," he said gravely, "we can talk. Me and Ikey could ha' killed the whole lot of those poor critters; but arter what you said a few minnits ago, I wanted to see what you'd do."

"If you want to keep me as a hostage," Pahnewuska said defiantly, "there's nothing to prevent you." She cast a glance of measureless contempt after the retreating nomads. "I didn't think they'd go so crazy for whisky. My brother promised to behave himself, to hear what you had to say; but the Indian in him got the upper hand, and he couldn't help showing off, especially when it came to a question of who was to have the whisky."

"I s'pose if I'd come 'ithout it, they'd equally ha' done their best to make things uncumferable for us."

She nodded dully. "They hate the Reservation so. I thought I could depend upon them."

"I could ha' told you better'n that. They're like children. Once they wants a thing badly enuff, they'll do anything to git it."

"Can you blame them?" she asked, with a momentary spark of her old fire.

Old Man shook his head. "You've put me in a hole. Why?"

"Why?" she blazed out. "You stick, you stock, you stone! You ask me that!"

"Yes. Why? Was it to even up things because you nursed me through that fever?"

Pahnewuska's eyes glittered. "I thought just now you didn't know whom you were speaking to."

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I'm two creatures, one of the drawing-room, the other of the woods. It's easy to see"—she glanced round with ineffable contempt—"it's easy to see which is uppermost just now."

"I'm not so sure of that. I've bin to blame all the time and I'm real sorry for you, Pahnewuska."

"Sorry! For me!"

"Yes. You're worn out with our talk. Won't you sit down?"

She staggered a little, then sat down. Old Man produced his flask and put it to her lips. Pahnewuska drank for a moment, then turned away with an exclamation of disgust.

"I know," said Old Man soothingly. "But you'll be the better for it." He went toward Miss Wilks and gave her a liberal allowance of the fiery liquid—an allowance which she received with the air of a warrior who has comported himself bravely upon the battlefield.

Pahnewuska put her hand to her throat as if the whisky burned it. "I thought I'd made things clear to you just now, but you must listen to me," she said feverishly, "or you won't understand."

"Of course," said Old Man simply. "You and me are too old friends to quarrel over a matter of life and death. Had any breakfast yet?"

She shook her head impatiently. "Breakfast! Oh, no, I couldn't eat."

"Thought so. Ikey"—he raised his voice—"git breakfast ready agin."

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But when Ikey had prepared a sumptuous repast for the second time that day, it was with difficulty that Pahnewuska could be prevailed upon to taste it. Only after Old Man had pointed out to her that the fact of her not eating would wound Ikey's susceptibilities did she manage to swallow a few morsels. The time occupied in this manner, however, enabled her to recover her composure, which was exactly what Old Man had in view, for he recognized that the issue between them was fraught with too grave a result to be lightly entered upon when Pahnewuska was not in a condition fully to realize it.

When Pahnewuska had made an end of eating and Ikey had departed to wash the tin plates in the little stream, Old Man resumed his place beside her, his eyes burning with a terrible earnestness. Now, however, he encountered a different woman from the wild, despairing creature of an hour ago. With the vanishing of her sordid surroundings, Pahnewuska was herself again, cultured, refined, with nothing of the suggestion of a squaw about her except the colour.

"Now, tell me all you're feelin'," Old Man suggested, seeing that she was at a loss how to begin.

She looked up at him composedly. "Oh, but I'm rather ashamed to talk about myself. If you hadn't been so absolutely ignorant of my feeling for you after I nursed you through that fever, Old

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Man, the probability is that I should soon have grown tired of caring for you."

"P'r'aps so," he said gently. "When a woman does care for a man in that way and he don't see it, it's usually his fault. I was grateful to you, but you wouldn't let me help you. You never let on as you knew more'n a few words of broken English. I didn't know you were so far above me in everything. I took you for a squaw, kind-hearted, gentle and good. When I offered to git Parson Black to baptize you and look arter you (he'd ha' taken you into his own home for my sake), you only shook your head and went away. I lost track of you for months. And then one day you came into Four Corners with your baskets and let on about that cure for consumption."

"It was the way you looked at that white girl," angrily broke in Pahnewuska.

"I wouldn't knowingly ha' looked at her in that way if I'd thought it was unpleasant to you. When you flared out like that, I didn't half b'lieve your words till I thought 'em over arterwards—that there might be suthin' in them. You never told me a lie yet, and I don't b'lieve you'll tell me one now. Was what you said about knowin' that plant true?"

"Will you believe me now if I say it wasn't?"

"Yes," said Old Man steadily, "I'll b'lieve you now if you say it wasn't, and never look upon your face agin."

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"It was true, Old Man. Perfectly true. I could take you to the plant not far from——" She checked herself hastily. "But you have spoiled my life and I won't do it."

"Is it nothin' to you that my life and the life of the Schoolmistress may be spoiled too?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing. There's nothing at all left for me since you do not love me. Why should I save her life, give her back to you, when Death has already laid his hand upon her?"

"Why?" said Old Man a little unsteadily. "Why? If I hadn't bin concerned about her in any way, would that ha' bin your answer still?"

"I might have helped her," Pahnewuska reluctantly admitted. "She's very young to die. If you didn't love her, I would have said that she was too sweet to die."

"If I didn't love her! An innocent young thing, whose life's openin' like a flower's, got to die just acause of me?"

"Just that, Old Man. You're the real cause of her death, although you've done your best to save her."

"Nothin' 'ill make you change your mind?"

"Nothing," she said quietly. "I told you so under the trees yonder, and you believed or seemed to believe me then. You may kill me, Old Man, but the secret will never pass my lips."

"There is no way by which the Schoolmistress may live?"

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"There is one." Pahnewuska appeared to reflect.

"Yes?"

"It's the same way as before. If you will give her up—your word's quite sufficient—and promise to marry me *when I claim you*, I will save her."

"I s'pose you know what you're askin'?" Old Man slowly demanded. "You're crushin' out the hopes of two lives. She's bound to git ill agin when she knows."

"We were so excited, we didn't think of this before. I said, 'when I claim you.' I should not claim you until Miss Hannum's health became sufficiently re-established to bear the shock of parting from you, Old Man. Once she has eaten regularly, or drunk an infusion of, the Herb of Healing, she will never be troubled with consumption again in any form. There's no particular reason for this plant's virtues; the discovery that it cures consumption was made by an old squaw who had sunk down weary and nearly dead and chewed some of the leaves to assuage her thirst."

"The Schoolmistress might die of grief!"

"She might! But I have never yet met a woman who died of grief, Old Man."

"I have, and it wasn't a pleasant sight, neither. Let's see where we are."

"It's easy to see," she interrupted impatiently. "If you will give me your word, Old Man, that you will marry me when I claim you, I will cure

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Cynthia Hannum. If I don't cure her, she won't outlive next winter."

"No," said Old Man meditatively, "I s'pose not. If you don't cure her, she won't outlive next winter. In course, you has to cure her thoroughly afore she knows of our agreement. I didn't think of that afore when I said I wouldn't marry you."

Pahnewuska bent her head to escape the look in Old Man's eyes. Had he broken out into a violent tirade against her selfish folly and wickedness, she could have the better endured it; but he looked at her briefly, raised his right hand and let it fall again. "I've changed my mind. Rather'n let her die, I promise to marry you when you claim me, if you restore Cynthia Hannum to health. If it weren't for that, I a'most wish you hadn't bin quite so good a nurse."

Pahnewuska got up, laid her hand gently on his arm. "Much as you must despise, scorn, and hate me, Old Man, I will be true to my part of the bargain, come back to Four Corners with you, and cure Cynthia Hannum. Only be a little gentle with me. Though it may be hard for a man to give up all his hopes, it is harder for a woman. Sometimes hope doesn't enter much into her life, Old Man."

Ikey came sunnily toward them. "There's no need for him to know—yet?" anxiously asked Old Man.

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"Not the slightest. It will be time enough for him to know *when I claim you.*"

"Then that's settled," said Old Man quietly, "and you'll go back with us to Four Corners as fast as we can."

"There's only one thing more." She hesitated.

Old Man waited patiently. "Yes?"

"Your forgiveness, Old Man? All my life, the world has been against me; all my life, I have had to fight for my own hand. I am fighting for it now. How earnestly, you don't know, you never will know. You do forgive me?"

The vision of Parson Black upon his death-bed once more returned to Old Man, and he knew himself to be the man kneeling at the foot of the Cross. "Oh, yes," he said a little wearily. "I forgives you as I hopes to be forgiven." He turned to Ikey. "We've cleared away all our little misunderstandin's, and Pahnewuska's goin' to find the Herb of Healin' and I'll help you saddle up agin."

He followed Ikey to assist in saddling the pack-horse, which was luxuriously rolling in the lush grass.

Pahnewuska looked after him. "You have never lied to me yet. I must have been mad for the moment to think that you could return my love. But some day, Old Man, we will really clear up all 'our little misunderstandings'—*when I claim you.*"

CHAPTER XIV

THE ATTACK

AFTER Pahnewuska had gone, Ikey and Old Man, tacitly assisted by Miss Wilks, held a Council of War, for the situation was still fraught with very serious danger. The Indians, having received so many gifts from Old Man, would not rest without the remaining contents of his saddle-bags. Their braves, too, had cast avid eyes on his weapons. Ikey's were not so up-to-date as Old Man's, but that worthy bristled with all the latest toys for the summary destruction of his fellow-creatures.

"Seems to me," said Old Man irresolutely, "as we did orter ha' kept Pahnewuska in our party. Then they'd have waited till she quitted us. Now she's tryin' to find out what they're goin' to do so's to warn us."

"Sure you can trust her, Old Man ? "

"Sure ! I'd trust her just as much as I would you, Ikey."

"Well, Old Man, you can't say hansumer'n that." Ikey was visibly gratified. "I'm beginnin' to hope as we may, if the luck's with us, git back

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to Four Corners safe and sound. Mind, if the luck's with us. For all that, we'd better not have let that squaw go. Then she wouldn't have had a chance of changing her mind."

"She won't change her mind, Ikey. The poor girl's gone through too much to want to do that. Yellow Feather's sure to make trouble for her if she stops with the tribe, and she'll have to hike off to Civilization agin, whether she likes it or not. I'm main sorry for her. Why didn't she take it into her head to fall in love with you, Ikey? You're allers braggin' about you bein' a ginger-coloured man and how the squaws takes to you."

"I dunno, Old Man. Course I'm a hansumer man'n you are—more uncommon-lookin', so to speak. Maybe she was afraid of t'others puttin' her out of the way when she'd got me."

"Maybe," said Old Man dryly. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Well, Old Man, you can't help it, and she can't help it, and there's no needcessity to git mad about it," grinned Ikey. "What are we goin' to do now?"

"We're goin' to git out of here in double-quick time afore Yellow Feather sobers off. If he'd any sense, he'd have sent on a party ahead to cut us off 'ithout lettin' his sister know. He thinks as we've still got some whisky left; and he's crazy about it—plum crazy!"

"You'd better ha' let me blow his head off, Old

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Man. A man can't do much thinkin' when he's lost the top of his knowledge box."

"I know, Ikey, I know. If he hadn't been Pahnewuska's brother, don't know as I wouldn't ha' helped you to blow it off. We'll send Miss Wilks ahead to scout. They won't touch her, 'cause it would give the alarm. If they do try to git us, they'll lie in ambush and do it as we comes along. Maybe, arter all, they're too much afraid of gittin' into trubble to touch us."

"Maybe they ain't nothin' of the sort, Old Man. Injuns is just like children; they can't look ahead. If they wants a thing, they must have it right away."

"Well, they ain't the only people like that." Old Man stole a satirical glance at his follower. "I've known you be pretty keen 'bout some things you wanted as you didn't orter ha' wanted."

"Don't you go a-throwin' things up in my teeth, Old Man. I ain't never said nothin' to you about your little etceteras."

"Course not, Ikey. They ain't wuth mentionin', when you come to think of it. Now then, Wilkie, put up that ear of yours for a sail and go ahead."

The mule whinnied a little, as if fully comprehending her master's wishes, and set off through the long colonnades of pines, Old Man and Ikey following her at a distance of some thirty or forty yards, at the same time leading the horses and carefully keeping the tree-trunks between them and any

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invisible foe. Though the trees were not of sufficient girth to cover them completely, they were bulky enough to disconcert the aim of any but extraordinarily good marksmen.

As they emerged from the pines without having been shot at, Old Man's face cleared a little. Pahnewuska had promised to rejoin them during the coming night if by any possibility she could escape her brother's vigilance. Then she would lead them to the Herb of Healing and all would be well.

Unfortunately, the way lay through a long, narrow ravine with cover on the top and sides—cover thick enough to hide an army of Indians intent on plunder. Old Man, however, trusted to the mule's extraordinary power of scent, for she knew that with the exception of Pahnewuska the Indians were enemies, and, as she scouted along with her nose to the ground, occasionally lifted her muzzle to sniff around. If there were any taint in the air, she would surely detect it.

Miss Wilks suddenly stopped dead, snuffed the air, then backed toward Old Man in a slanting direction, carefully covering him with her angular body as she did so.

"Smells danger," said Old Man briefly. "Thought it was comin'; Pahnewuska ain't bin able to hold 'em back, and here it is."

He pulled the mule down on her knees in the shelter of the thicket, and Ikey, with equal expedition, put his own horse and the pack animal behind

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a big maple. "Now," he said with a grin, his eyes lighting up with the lust for battle, "dunno when I've had such a chance of enjoyin' myself since—Gosh! See that, Old Man?"

"That" was an arrow which passed through Ikey's cap and took a lock of his hair with it.

"Ouch!" Ikey said delightedly, as he felt the twinge. "Told you them squaws wanted a lock of my hair, Old Man."

"They'll have more'n a lock of your hair if you don't git down under cover, you dum idgeot." Old Man forcibly pulled Ikey to his knees, then lifted his rifle and aimed at a branch which quivered a little on the other side of the ravine. "Got him," he said, with a satisfied air. "Could ha' put it through his eye, but his shoulder 'ill do."

"Whaffor, Old Man?"

"Don't aim to kill the poor devils," Old Man rejoined. "S'long as they can't do us any harm, 'tain't no use killin' em; they're dyin' off quite fast enuff."

"But they're tryin' to kill us, Old Man. Blood for blood, say I."

"Then you say nonsense. Aim just t'other side of that silver birch—a bit low down—and you'll git him."

Ikey, who was a crack shot, followed Old Man's directions. There was a horrible yell, and a copper-coloured body sprang into the air, rolled

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down the slope, clutching the grass as it went, and then lay still.

"Just a bit too low down," said Old Man grimly. "Those guns of theirs can't shoot—Whew-w-w! That nearly got me." A bullet buried itself in a tree-trunk just above him.

After two or three hours of desultory firing, Ikey complained of thirst. "Looks 'sif they'd git us that way, Old Man. My tongue's hangin' out."

"Then tuck it in agin. You make me tired, Ikey. There's plenty of leaves to chew. 'Sides, look at that spring runnin' under the birch roots. Jus' clear the grass away, then fill your cap and give the hosses a drink. They want it more'n you do."

Carefully clearing away the grass from the base of the tree, Ikey excavated the sandy soil and soon had a quart of water in the hole. As soon as he had satisfied his own thirst, he filled his cap, crept up to the horses and Miss Wilks, and watered them in turns, but had scarcely done so, when he gave a yell and tumbled backward, with an arrow sticking through his arm. "Got me this time, Old Man," he said dolefully as he sat up again.

Old Man pulled him under cover and carefully examined the wound. Then he grinned. "'Tain't nothin' but a toy arrow, Ikey. Looks 'sif Pahnewuska fired it as a hint to us to dry up. If t'others had the sense to git on top of the ridge and fire down on us, they'd wipe us out in five minnits."

"Dessay, Old Man. How'm I to git this dum

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thing out? It may be a toy arrow, but it hurts like a real one."

Old Man cut off the point of the slender arrow and drew the weapon out of Ikey's arm. "It's her way of gittin' even with you for all the things you've said to her. Now I'll tie a white handkerchief on the top of my rifle and make terms with 'em."

"Don't you do it, Old Man. They'll git you for sure."

"Not much, Ikey. Not much. Now they've had time to cool down, they're a bit frightened. If we lays an information agin 'em, the Government 'ill have to hunt 'em down and they know it."

He tied his handkerchief to the gun and waved it three times in the air. "Ah, I thought so. Here's Pahnewuska comin' to talk to us."

Pahnewuska, holding a white handkerchief in her hand, came out of the bushes on the top of the ravine and walked slowly toward Old Man, keeping her body between him and the attacking party. "They want to know if you will make peace," she said mournfully. "You've wounded three of them and killed their Medicine Man. Now they fear you mean to set the Sheriff after them and they're desperate. If you won't agree to their terms, they'll make a last charge. Though you may kill some of them, they're pretty certain to kill both of you."

"That's true," Old Man admitted thoughtfully. "Gospel true. What do they want?"

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"They want all the whisky you've got, and some powder and ammunition; and they'll give you some furs in exchange and get away into the forest as fast as they can. They also want your word that you won't put the Sheriff on to them."

"That's easy enuff, Pahnewuska. But we must have you as a hostage. Tell them that. Then you can come along and they won't dare touch us."

"Yes," said Pahnewuska, "I'd thought of that too. Can they take away the Medicine Man? I'll send the squaws for the body. You won't fire on women, Ikey?"

"Seems to me there's a woman bin firin' on me," said Ikey. "Why did you do that, Pahnewuska?"

"Just to show you, in spite of your cleverness, that I could have killed you both had I wanted to," she said indifferently. "Now I'll go back to Yellow Feather and say that you agree to his terms, provided that I remain with you as a hostage for the next three days. We can do all that we have to do in that time," she added bitterly.

"Of course," said Old Man, and with lagging step Pahnewuska rejoined her people. All the spirit had gone out of her.

"Now," said Old Man briskly, "there's only two bottles of whisky left. Pack 'em up with the powder and bullets, Ikey, and we'll leave 'em mid-way for the squaws to fetch. Here they come."

Ikey hastily ran out and deposited the bundle on the ground as half a dozen squaws emerged

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from the thicket, cutting themselves with knives and howling with all that extravagance of grief which is considered fitting by the people of his tribe when a great Medicine Man passes away.

"Don't see why they want to make such a fuss about it," said the dissatisfied Ikey. "We've left him his scalp. They'd ha' had mine long ago if I'd bin in his place."

Old Man shook his head as Pahnewuska came toward them, and the keening squaws lifted the dead body of the Medicine Man and carried it off.

After a brief interval, Yellow Feather boldly emerged from the thicket, picked up the bundle, and, with a wave of his hand to Pahnewuska, walked crookedly away.

"Still got about as much as he can carry," said Ikey. "Look at the way he's weavin' in and out of them bushes, Old Man, jus' like Fiske when he's in the middle of a jag."

For nearly an hour Pahnewuska remained standing in the middle of the ravine, with slightly bent head, as if listening for the retreating voices of her people. When the last sound had died away, a shrill call sounded from the top of the ravine, and she came tiredly toward Old Man. "They've gone now," she said wearily. "For his people's sake, my brother has had to agree to let me stay with you, but he vows to kill me the very first chance he gets."

Old Man, pitying Pahnewuska's evident suffer-

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ing, took her gently by the hand. "He's not goin' to git a chance. Me and Ikey 'ill take care of that. Ain't that so, Ikey?"

"You bet, Old Man. In course I don't bear no malice for this skewer through my arm."

Pahnewuska smiled faintly. "I could have driven it between your shoulders had I wanted to."

"Then thank goodness you didn't want to."

"No, you can thank Old Man," she returned indifferently. "In an hour or two we'll start on our way back to Four Corners."

Old Man looked at her questioningly. "Did we pass the Herb of Healing on our way here?"

"Yes, Old Man, you passed it, and I said never a word. When we come to it again, I will keep my promise."

Old Man made the Indian girl sit down and eat, at the same time keeping a sharp look out for the possible return of Yellow Feather and his braves. After she had swallowed a few mouthfuls of food, he spread a bearskin on the ground and kept watch over her while she slept for an hour.

Pahnewuska awoke refreshed and strengthened. From time to time her eyes sought Old Man's, as if she were looking on a face which in a little while she would never see again. "Come," she said at length, "we had better start," and led the way.

CHAPTER XV

THE HERB OF HEALING

AS they slowly retraced their steps toward Four Corners, with the exception of Miss Wilks, Ikey, in spite of his wound, was the only jubilant one of the party, for he imagined Old Man to have attained the object of his quest. They had happily escaped what might have been a very serious adventure. Yellow Feather, for the time being at least, was satisfactorily disposed of, and Pahnewuska was leading them to the spot where grew the magical Herb of Healing. Already he saw the roses of health return to Cynthia Hannum's pretty cheeks and a load was lifted from his heart. He felt that he had misjudged Pahnewuska, had not made sufficient allowance for her Indian blood. But, apparently, she had conquered her jealousy of the Schoolmistress, had renounced any imaginary claim to the possession of Old Man's affections, and was prepared to assist him by every means in her power. Looking at it from a practical point of view, in spite of a few minor drawbacks, the expedition was an

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eminently successful one; and as they silently rode along, Ikey busied himself with the concoction of a menu for a dinner to celebrate their homecoming with due pomp and circumstance—a menu which should become a tradition and live for ever in the hearts and stomachs of less gifted Four Cornerites.

In a few hours, when she had recovered from the shock of what looked like a final separation from the members of her tribe, Pahnewuska made a determined effort to throw off the lethargy into which she had fallen. She bestrode Miss Wilks, and Old Man, having got rid of his stock of Indian presents, made shift to ride the packhorse, a promotion which caused that naturally timorous animal to keep as far as possible from Miss Wilks's hoofs.

The mule, however, in the most seraphic of tempers, covered the ground with long, shambling strides which severely taxed the energies of the others to keep up with her. Having once traversed a track, she knew it by heart and never hesitated for a moment. Toward sundown it occurred to her that she had done enough for one day. On reflection, she was sure of it, and suddenly came to a standstill, thus bringing the whole of the party to an unpremeditated halt. Had she been Canute defying the waves, she could not more emphatically have intimated her wishes that the party should go no further.

Knowing the utter futility of attempting to

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dictate to Miss Wilks when she had once made up her mind, both Ikey and Old Man unhesitatingly accepted her decision. Besides, the position chosen by her for the evening camp was against a vast perpendicular rock, the slippery sides of which not even a mountain goat could have climbed. There was abundant grass, a spring of fresh water gushed from a fissure in the rock. No one could approach the camp without being seen. On the whole, both from the points of strategy and comfort, the position was impossible to better, and Old Man mutely signified to the mule his acquiescence in her choice.

The darkness fell so suddenly that it was upon them ere they had finished their evening meal. Pahnewuska, pleading weariness, retired to the tent, and Old Man took the first watch, whilst Ikey, in spite of the pain from his wounded arm, unconsciously poured out a nasal invocation to the unseen Spirits of the Night.

At midnight, Ikey awoke automatically and relieved Old Man. Though the night was very still, there was a slight rustling in the tree-tops, the faint sound of water falling into its bed at the foot of the rock. The indeterminate hue of the packhorse, as he contentedly lay in the soft grass, gave him the appearance of a miniature mountain ridge, serrated along the top. The roan rubbed his scraggy shoulder against a tree, whilst Miss Wilks, a few feet away from Old Man, who

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had already cast himself down in his blankets, surveyed his recumbent form with a ludicrously sentimental air.

Half an hour later Miss Wilks (she possessed the rare faculty of being able to keep watch though seemingly asleep) opened her one eye and looked inquiringly toward the tent.

An anguished face appeared at the opening, a little brown hand beckoned to her.

Miss Wilks (at times she could move as noiselessly as any snake) went toward the opening, put her head in the tent and felt a hot forehead against her own, heard Pahnewuska's moving sobs as the girl threw both arms round her, and in muffled tones babbled of the happy childish days when they had played together. When her grief had exhausted itself, she pushed the mule away, and Miss Wilks returned to keep watch and ward over Old Man until the first grey streaks of dawn peered down through the tree-tops.

At sundown on the third day after leaving Yellow Feather's camp, they arrived without misadventure at the foot of the Laurentian Mountains. During the previous night a windstorm had played havoc among the pines and cedars, the maples alone escaping its ravages. Uprooted trees across the track had greatly impeded their progress during the day. Occasionally the whole party had been forced to make an elaborate *détour* in order to avoid the risk of breaking the horses' legs between

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the giant trunks. Miss Wilks, who was as sure-footed as a cat and could climb like a goat, viewed these delays with impatient scorn, for she seemed to have consulted a mental diary of her social engagements in Four Corners, and was evidently anxious to be back in time to enjoy them. Old Man attributed her eagerness on the homeward track to a desire to see Lajeunesse the ferryman, and partake of his promised hospitality in the shape of "wiskee blanc." There, however, he did her an injustice. Knowing as he did her every mood and thought, he should have understood that the mule was uneasy, had an overpowering desire to get out of the forest. Contrary to his usual habit, for the last few hours Old Man had but half-heartedly concerned himself with what Ikey called her "whims and whamsies." Ordinarily, they were a source of constant interest and amusement to him; but now, in the face of the great renunciation, the sacrifice which he had made for the sake of the dying Schoolmistress, he was so constantly occupied with the effort to master himself, that for the first time in his life he avoided the companionship of his faithful friend. Ikey, thoroughly happy at being allowed to give his culinary genius full play, cooked "for all he was worth," and when his companions failed to do justice to his efforts appreciatively consumed the food himself.

Ikey could not fail to observe Pahnewuska's

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taciturnity, the anxious care with which Old Man did his best to lighten for her the fatigues of the journey. For the most part the girl rode straight ahead, her beautiful eyes seeing nothing. Only when Old Man came to her side with a few words of kindly inquiry did she smile faintly back at him. Even to the unobservant Ikey it seemed as though the hand of Fate were on her, that she awaited the coming of some great catastrophe which she was powerless to avert. Had she been mounted on a less sure-footed animal than Miss Wilks, the catastrophe would not have been long delayed, but whenever they encountered an obstacle in the path, the mule, conscious of her rider's silent suffering, stayed her steps until Old Man came to the rescue and roused Pahnewuska from a melancholy indifference to her surroundings. She seemed to shrink from Old Man's kindness and yet to like it, for she knew that never again, however much he might suffer, would she hear a reproachful word from his lips. Once he had made up his mind, there were no half measures with Old Man. It was evident that he regarded their compact as absolutely binding, a thing to be "worried through," because the High Fates had shuffled up the lives of women and men to amuse themselves rather than to please the victims of their caprice. Manlike, he hid his suffering ; womanlike, she could not conceal from him that she suffered equally.

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As they neared the foot of the mountains, Ikey gave a joyous shout and urged his dilapidated steed to fresh efforts. To his surprise, he found, in the characteristic slang of Four Corners, that the roan "wasn't taking any," but had stopped short in his tracks. "If," his injured expression implied, "you think I'm going to struggle up this mountain to-night when we can do it so much better to-morrow morning, you're greatly mistaken. I won't move another step, even though you get Miss Wilks to kick me up." The tired animal gave a shake which set all Ikey's pots and pans rattling, and awaited events.

"He's right, Ikey." Old Man pityingly surveyed the ancient roan's distended flanks, his drooping head and general air of acute misery. "You forgit as he's most old enuff to be your father."

"Good thing he ain't a jackass 'stead of a hoss or you wouldn't ha' said that, Old Man."

"Dunno so much about that, Ikey." Old Man smiled faintly. "I'd better give him a dose of corpse reviver."

Greatly to Miss Wilks's indignation, Old Man lifted the roan's hammer head and poured some whisky down his throat. "That 'ill warm the cockles of your ancient heart," he said kindly, "if anything could arter carrying Ikey's kitchen about all day. Spite of your age, you've done

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your damdest, and angels could do no more, as they wrote on the cowboy's tomb. Let up on him, Ikey; it's 'most supper-time."

"All right, Old Man. All right." Ikey eagerly scrambled out of the saddle. "I've got a s'prise for you to-night."

In his efforts to produce a meal worthy of the occasion, Ikey did wonders. His *chef-d'œuvre*, one which ever after inspired him with the tenderest recollections, was a misanthropic porcupine baked in clay. Being perfectly aware that, owing to its impenetrable armament of pointed quills, he could not capture it in any other way, he had blown the porcupine's head off, as, knowing its invulnerability to all the ordinary ills which flesh is heir to, it superciliously climbed a tree. After singeing off the quills, Ikey enveloped the body in a shroud of clay and buried it in warm wood ashes. The result haunted his dreams for that and many succeeding nights, and his only drawback to the enjoyment of it was Old Man's remark that had he, Ikey, thought of "icin' the quills," the result would have been perfect. Seeing, however, that the sensitive Ikey was sorely wounded by this "sarcasism," he hastily asked for another helping of the succulent "pig with spines," and did his best to swallow it.

After the meal was over, the animals made comfortable for the night, and Ikey, pipe in mouth and full of stomach, sleepily meditating on his own

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achievements, Pahnewuska made an almost imperceptible sign to Old Man.

“What is it?” he asked, lowering his voice in order not to attract Ikey’s attention.

“As soon as the moon rises over the tree-tops we will climb to the summit of the mountain. The Herb of Healing grows there, Old Man. Would that it could cure our aching hearts also.”

A great tenderness and pity for this strange being overcame Old Man. As he looked at her, it seemed to him that he had been conscious only of his own suffering and had not given a thought to hers. To-night her abruptness of speech vanished. She was sad, tender, confiding; and he began to see that, equally with himself, she was the sport of Circumstance. Even then, despite her hint about the Herb of Healing growing on the top of the mountain, he had no suspicion of where it was really to be found. She had promised to take him to it; he, in return, had promised to pay the price she demanded from him, and Cynthia was not to know of that price until the roses of health once more bloomed in her cheeks.

When the first faint rays of the crescent moon shone whitely over the tree-tops and silvered the birches growing among the boulders at the foot of the mountain, Old Man softly called to Pahnewuska to come out of her tent.

With the exception of Miss Wilks, the whole camp was wrapped in slumber. She made no

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sign when Pahnewuska appeared, but patiently waited until Old Man motioned to her to follow them. It was not the first time that she had scouted for Old Man and Ikey when braving the adventure perilous. Now, with a gleam in her eye which boded no good to anyone who should presume to attack the sacred person of Old Man, she followed them at a little distance, her careless demeanour conveying the impression that before retiring to rest she was going for an idle stroll in the moonlight.

Old Man would have liked to take Ikey as well, but, in answer to his questioning look, Pahnewuska shook her head. Seeing that she preferred to leave him behind, Old Man did not press the point, and they slowly began to climb the encumbering boulders at the foot of the mountains until they struck the narrow trail down which they had made their descent into the forest. Owing to some strange freak of her own, the mule chose a more difficult and well-nigh inaccessible path a little to their right, and they occasionally stopped to rest and watch the noiseless dexterity with which she made her way through the rough undergrowth.

It was a long and arduous climb to the summit. As they toiled wearily upward, Old Man could not refrain from contrasting his companion's lagging steps with the eager way in which she had previously bounded down the mountain-side. All the life appeared to have gone out of her, she moved with

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difficulty, he felt her heart beat feebly against his encircling arm as he drew her up the uneven pathway. At this enforced contact with Old Man—a contact necessitated by the narrowness of the way—Pahnewuska revived a little, the light came back to her eyes, a smile of happiness played about her lips. She looked like some dusky night-flower which requires the moonlight to bring it to full perfection and bloom.

Old Man had never before warred with a woman, and her helplessness touched him. He tried to put himself in her place, to imagine how he would have acted had the choice rested with him. Pahnewuska's life had been one constant struggle with the primeval forces within her; the veneer of Civilization was so thin, so recent, that he could not judge her by any ordinary standards. Her great and misguided passion for himself had wiped it all away. She demanded her pound of flesh and, for the sake of the girl who lay dying in Four Corners, he had promised to pay it. His eyes softened, he looked kindly down upon her, resolving that no act or deed of his in the future should add to her misery, that, at whatever cost to himself, he would keep his promise, not only in the letter, but in the spirit also.

And Pahnewuska, looking up into his kind, sad eyes, gave a little shuddering breath. "Kiss me, Old Man. I shall never ask you again." She put up her lips to him—lips sweet and fresh as a child's.

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Old Man hesitated, then bent down and kissed her. What did she mean? Had he not promised to give himself to her when she should claim him!

For a moment, Pahnewuska lay back in his arms in measureless content. "There was nothing else to do. It makes the way clear," she said almost inaudibly. "I seem to be waking from a horrid dream, Old Man, to have been someone else and not my real self at all. Such strange dreams have come to me, such sad dreams, dreams of death and misfortune, dreams of going down into darkness without a hand to strew a flower upon me or bless me as I went. There was a screech-owl, that omen of ill, last night called to me from the forest depths until my heart grew chill with fear."

Old Man sought to reassure Pahnewuska, combat her fears; but his heart was heavy within him, for he knew that by that kiss he was irretrievably committed to the future which lay before him. He seemed to see himself fleeing from the Schoolmistress's horror-stricken eyes when she learned the truth; and he resolved that she never should learn it, but that as soon as she had recovered he would flee away with Pahnewuska and the mule and Four Corners should know him no more. He would elaborately arrange for the discovery of some accident which had overtaken and swept him away, then wander off into the Great Lone Lands until——

He awoke from his reverie with a shiver, and,

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Pahnewuska clinging happily to his arm, they came unto the summit of the mountain.

The sightless eyes of the Crucified Christ shone down upon them, appeared to become alive. It seemed to Old Man that the pain-distorted lips relaxed, smiled with ineffable benignity as they knelt at the foot of the Cross.

"Come," said Pahnewuska, rising from her knees. "No one but myself knows the treasure-house of my race. Come."

Wonderingly, Old Man followed her to the back of the Cross.

Pahnewuska put Old Man's hand to a hidden spring in the base of the rock, and part of it slid back. Within was a hollow chamber filled with heaps of gold, on which the moonbeams rippled and played until the whole place was filled with light.

"See, Old Man," she said unsmilingly; "it is all yours. Do with it what you will. I have no further need of it. The feet of men's idols are generally of clay. I bring you to the golden feet of the Christ."

"But the Herb of Healing—where is it, Pahnewuska? Where is it?"

"Doesn't this tempt you more than the Herb of Healing, Old Man? Every White Man loves gold. I have brought you to this and you will not even look upon it. See how it shines, how yellowly the light falls over it. Many would give

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their souls to stand where you stand, to see it as you see it now. Put your hands in it, feel it ripple through them, then draw them back all yellowed over with golden dust and plunge them in again."

Old Man mechanically lifted up a handful of nuggets, then allowed them to drop unheeded through his fingers. "I see it, touch it, feel it; and all it can do, all the joy and mis'ry it can bring into the lives of wimmin and men, ain't wuth one little leaf of the Herb of Healing. That can drive back Death from Life—send him back into the shadows; this can only tempt from Life to Death."

"But see, Old Man, see! How it shines, how it glistens, how it speaks to you of all that men do for its sake, how they live for it, die for it! Do you wonder now why I have brought you here?"

"Yes, I wondered, Pahnewuska, I wondered."

"Why, Old Man? Why?"

"I wondered at the sad smile on the face of the Christ. Now I wonder no more, for He knew that the White Men who set His image here, the White Men who came to save the Red Man's soul and win it to the White Man's God, stole the Red Man's gold and hid it beneath His feet."

"But it has been there so long, Old Man, so long that it has become purified, free from all dross; it will not serve the lusts of men, but minister to holy aims and deeds of love. Take it, Old Man. Take it. I give you back your promise. Dearly

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as I love you, I could not live to wake beside you and hear your lips utter another's name. I could not see you struggling with your load of care and trying to forget, when every moment my coming brought your sorrow back again. I have been very, very wicked, Old Man. From the first time I looked upon your face I sought to win your love, stopped at nothing, cared for nothing so that I gained you. That poor girl's sorrow and misery were as nothing to me. I prayed that she might die, that the Death Angel would smite her and spare not. I prayed that you might be mine, that I might become the mother of your children, pass my life beside you, grow so dear to you that you could not live without me. And now my desire has all passed like some evil dream, faded away into the blackness of the grave. I am going to die soon. I know it, I feel it, for the shadow of Death is behind me. But before he comes to take me away from you, before I go down into the darkness, forgive me, Old Man, for all the sorrow I have caused you. Even then, when I am dead and the grass grows greenly over me, I shall hear your pitying footsteps as you stand beside me and know that I am forgiven."

Old Man could not trust himself to speak as Pahnewuska clung to him, the tears streaming from her eyes.

"You forgive me, Old Man? You forgive me?"

"As I hope to be forgiven," Old Man said

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solemnly. " 'Forgive us all our trespasses as we forgive them as trespass agin us.' I've sinned agin you, Pahnewuska. Agin you. I thought only of Cynthia and myself. Now that trubble has lent me eyes, I see all you've suffered. May the Lord ha' mercy on us both and help us in His own good time."

"Help us in His own good time, Old Man?"

"Help us in His own good time to bear one another's burdens, to deal gently and kindly with one another, to look beyond the mis'ries of earth and——"

"Oh-h-h! Oh-h-h! Old Man, save me! Save me! Something's—— Oh-h-h! I'm dying! Save——!"

A knife gleamed in the moonlight as Old Man again touched the spring and the rock slid back into its old place, shutting out the wondrous heap of dust and nuggets. Pahnewuska's warm blood spurted over his arm.

There came a sudden rending and crashing in the bushes behind them, a loud yell, the thud-thud of infuriate hoofs. Miss Wilks's head showed momentarily above the branches, dragging and tearing at the body of an Indian in full war-paint, a yellow feather falling from out his snaky black hair as she dragged him over the rough ground.

Old Man staggered back into the moonlight with Pahnewuska's body lying limply in his arms, laid her upon the ground, and, in his despair,

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plucking up the Indian snakewort growing at the foot of the Cross, strove with its glossy leaves to staunch the blood which flowed from her wound. At the very moment of success, when the secret was about to be revealed to him, it had been ruthlessly hidden for ever. Pahnewuska had given her life in vain, and he had been the unconscious cause of her death.

He half-raised the dying girl in his arms, pressed his lips to hers, called her to come back from the Kingdom of Dreams and Shadows, to take her place beside him, to forget all the anguish he had brought upon her. But she made no sign, and still the red blood oozed and welled up on the glossy leaves lying between her rounded breasts.

At the touch of Old Man's lips, the sound of his despairing voice, a shudder ran through the limbs of the dying girl. "The Red Canoe is waiting. Who—calls? Who calls? I, Pahnewuska, go to the—Spirit Land—I—I——"

Pahnewuska's hands sought her breasts, seized the bloodstained leaves, pressed them to her lips. "The—herb—of—healing! Yours! Yours!—yours at last! Hold me, Old Man! Hold me—keep me—fast. Within your arms—I—I——"

Her head fell back, a shudder ran through the beautiful limbs, and she was dead. The saving of one life demanded the sacrifice of another. Pahnewuska had paid the price.

Old Man laid her at the foot of the Cross, covered

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her exquisite face with the Herb of Healing, as the maddened mule tore and trampled the murderer's shapeless body. For the moment he was powerless to restrain her fierce anger, her blind, irresistible fury. In truth, he did not greatly care to interfere with the righteous retribution which had overtaken Yellow Feather. But at last, when the Indian had been battered and bitten and kicked beyond all recognition, he called to Miss Wilks, who came reluctantly, halted midway between him and Pahnewuska, sniffing at the dead girl's body in piteous distress and making melancholy moan over the mistress of so long ago.

The night grew very hushed and still, only the gentle rustling of the pines below breaking the silence as the wind sighed among them. There was blood upon Old Man's breast—the blood of the murdered girl; blood upon Miss Wilks's muzzle—the blood of Yellow Feather. A crescent moon possessed the sky, a serene quietude, an eternal peace, pervaded the plateau. The pitiful passions of man, his joys and sorrows, had no place upon this mountain-top. The form on the Cross, silvered by the moonbeams, no longer looked upon the things of earth, saw not the dead girl at Its feet,

“ The loveliness in death
That parts not quite with parting breath.”

The agitated heaving of Miss Wilks's flanks gave place to quiet breathing. Old Man had

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attained to the object of his quest, had unwittingly received Death's quittance to his promise. But there was no joy in his heart, no sense of freedom from the sorrow which had so persistently troubled him ; for there, her sightless eyes upturned to heaven—that heaven which seemed very far away and unattainable to Old Man's anguished spirit—lay the dead girl, so calm, so still, that he might well have deemed her sleeping had he not known of the gaping wound hidden beneath the snakewort's glossy leaves.

As one in a dream, Old Man presently arose and searched for the Indian's tomahawk. He picked it up in the trampled thicket and slowly returned to the other side of the summit, where the trees grew thickly. For some time he wandered round its edge until he came to an outcropping ledge of rock, the earth upon which was fully five feet deep. Unconsciously measuring it with his eye, he stepped back and knew that he had found that which he sought. Here should be Pahnewuska's last resting-place, where never a step disturbed the silence, where the spirits of her ancestors hovered over the rounded hillocks now sinking to the level of one common grave.

He went a few steps down the mountain side, cut fragrant spruce boughs and dragged them back to the rocky ledge. Soon he had mounted upon the site of the grave and proceeded to scoop out the earth with the shining tomahawk. When,

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after an hour's strenuous toil, the mule never stirring the while from Pahnewuska's side, he had almost reached the bottom of the outcropping rock, he lined it with the aromatic branches of the spruce, went back to the dead girl and waited. Surely Ikey would grow uneasy and come soon?

It was thus Ikey found him, saw at a glance all that had happened.

With rapid comprehension, he came to Old Man's side, laid his hand upon the shoulder of his sorrowing friend. "I'm ready, Old Man. I'm ready," he said simply, and went to the dead girl's feet.

Between them they carried Pahnewuska to her mountain grave, laid her gently within it, covered her face with flowers. "Say suthin', Old Man," Ikey whispered. "For God's sake, say suthin'."

Old Man leaned over the open grave and took one of Pahnewuska's little brown hands in his, whilst Ikey reverently held the other. "Good-bye, Pahnewuska. Good-bye," he said brokenly. "Sleep in peace safe from life's storms, the freezin' cold, the burnin' summer heat. Sleep safe from the hopes and fears and sorrows of us all till the Christ comes down from yonder Cross and bids you wake agin. Your tiny feet have travelled far upon a weary road. No hand was stretched to help you, there was no arm to save. Sleep till the daylight dawns and the shadders flee away—sleep safe and weep no more. The days of your affliction were brief; you had no place with White Man or

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with Red. We didn't guess, we didn't know, we didn't try to understand your troubled heart and soul. May the God who understandeth all things be merciful unto you and bless you. May He make His face to shine upon you and take you to His abidin' rest and peace for evermore. Amen."

"Amen, Old Man. Amen." Ikey crossed tired hands on tired breast and softly spread the sweet, cool earth over the lovely face.

They left the dead girl on the lonely mountain-top, where the whispering pines made music to the breeze, with the anguished figure of the Christ to keep watch and ward over her until the coming of the Eternal Dawn.

CHAPTER XVI

LELOTA'S LETTER

JAMES went tremblingly into the Post Office, where the village elders sat patiently waiting for letters they never expected to receive. From mere force of habit they inquired after every mail if there were anything waiting for them, and the Postmistress, diplomatically affecting to search in the little glass-backed pigeon-holes where the letters were deposited when she had sorted them, invariably replied in surprised tones that there wasn't "anything." Then the loafers gradually reconciled themselves to the effort of departure and reluctantly stumped away.

James waited in an agony of impatience, as he had waited many times before, on the chance of there being a letter from Lelota. The Postmistress, who was nothing if not sympathetic, understood the reason for his waiting. Now she hastened to put him out of his misery. "It has come at last," she said. "I thought you'd rather wait for it till they'd all gone."

James thanked her gravely. "It's really from

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Miss Lunn ? ” he asked, as the Postmistress took a letter from the shelf and handed it to him with a smile.

“ Unless her handwriting’s changed very much since she went away,” retorted the Postmistress. “ I think it’s wicked of anyone to part young people like you, but the time will soon pass if you get on with your examinations, and then even Peter Lunn will be proud of you.”

“ Thank you so much. You think he’ll really give way some day, Miss Tulse ? ”

“ I’m sure of it,” said Miss Tulse, delighted to see the happiness in James’s handsome face, for he was a great favourite of hers. “ I’m sure of it. Now, don’t you want to run away and read your letter ? It looks a pretty long one.”

“ You’re so kind and I don’t want to seem rude, but if you will excuse me——”

“ Of course I will excuse you,” laughed the Postmistress. “ Now, run away and be happy. If Peter Lunn doesn’t behave himself, I’ll lose all his letters for him.”

James hastened away with his treasure, found a secluded spot on the shore beneath the old wharf, and reverently opened it. Miss Tulse had been right ; it was a long letter :

“ MY DEAREST JAMES,” Lelota began, “ it’s no use ; I don’t want to be ‘ polished.’ Everyone here is so frightfully polished that I feel as rough

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as the boulders on the river-shore. Isn't there any way out of it? It's horrid to be cooped up in this place without a friend. They seem to think I'm a freshly-caught savage, who has to be taught what they call 'deportment.' Isn't my 'deportment' good enough for you? Why should I be tied up in clothes I don't like, taught that freckles are vulgar, and that my hands ought not to be tanned? I've always thought tan was a protection against dirt. Won't you come with a rope-ladder or fire-escape, or something, and take me away from this horrible school?

"I can't even catch a glimpse of the river. And I have to do lessons at fixed hours and go for walks at a certain pace and move slowly with my head up, and if there is a good-looking boy on the other side of the road (I haven't seen a Montrealler yet who could give you points, James dear) I must pretend not to see him, but stick out my chin and stare at the houses. Some of the 'boys' look so much more interesting than the houses that I want to go over to them and tell them about you and ask them to ask you down to Montreal.

"A few of the girls have brothers, beautiful young men with tightly-fitting clothes and nice little moustaches that they cover with dark stain so that you can see them (the moustaches, I mean, not the young men), and yellow gloves. Why do all the young men in Montreal, James dear, wear yellow gloves and yellow socks and yellow ties to

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match? The dark ones are all right, but the fair ones look like yellow birds 'on a jag.' There's a nice 'polished' sentence for you, but I couldn't help it.

"Dad has been once to see me, but I think most of the pupils were taken away out of town for the day, so that they shouldn't see him when he blew in carrying his coat on his arm and breezily remarking that it was a 'dodgasted kind of day, Miss. Sorter day as makes you want to take off your pants and wade into the river.' Can you imagine the scene, and my trying to head him off, and Dad repeating his remark so that there should be no mistake about it? Then, when he saw (Dad, I mean) that he'd put his foot into it as well as his pants, he got redder in the face than Nature intended him to be, and, taking me on one side, asked me if I hadn't had enough of 'thisyer polishin' business.' He's real lonesome for me, James, though he won't say so.

"Of course I've had enough of all this. I'm full up to the brim with culture and polish. But when I asked Dad if he meant that he was going to climb down about you, he said not a naughty-word climb. If I weren't so full of polish, I'd put in that naughty word. It slipped out from Dad before he knew what he'd said, and it was like a fresh breeze from the river.

"Please find out from Old Man at what age he thinks we shall be old enough to be married. I've

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lived about fourteen thousand years already since I got here. At least, it seems as much.

"This is altogether a new world to me, and I don't like it. The French mistress says I am 'farouche,' and I wish I could turn Labois on her and see who'd get the best of the argument. You know the frightful mixture of Labois' French and English when he grows excited.

"Can't you charge Dad with a flag of truce and come to terms? He says that without me he's more 'mis'erable'n a woodchuck as ain't got any wood to chuck'; but that, of course, is only his figurative way of putting it. He won't go as far as saying that he likes you, although I'm pretty sure he does. He objects to your surroundings, Ikey and Old Man and 'the dum mule.' As if Miss Wilks couldn't make noise enough when she chose to. When I tried to cry and said that my heart was breaking and I couldn't eat any food, he was on the point of giving in. But, unfortunately, it was lunch-time, and I was so hungry that I had to have two helpings of everything. We have dinner at seven and never get any supper at all. I call it supper, but they won't give me tea with it, and I have to have tea in the drawing-room at nine, when I'm so sleepy I could yawn my head off. Of course the tea keeps me awake half the night, and I get as lonesome as a chipmunk without a woodpile to hide under. Dad only wants an excuse to give way about you, so that

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he can get me back again. He's really fretting over my absence and is much thinner than he used to be. Do go and see him. Let him get used to you, James, dearest, or I shall fade away and die with words of sweet forgiveness on my lips and all that sort of thing, and then where will you be ?

"Go and see him, dearest, and try to love him. You've found it so easy loving one member of the family that you oughtn't to have any trouble with Dad. Swop fishing stories with him, and be careful to let him win. He's had more experience in fishing stories than you have and would win any way ; but even if you think you're getting ahead of him, suddenly give him something to lay hold of and crumple you up. Then he'll offer you some whisky, which you mustn't take, and get quite sociable, that is, if he ever lets you make a beginning.

"Now, dearest, darling one, do make an effort. For my sake, though he may growl and talk big, he won't hurt you. The other girls look up to me with great reverence because I'm engaged and know so much more about real life than they do. Some of them are very handsome, and I won't have you come to the school. But, no, dear, I don't mean that. Go and see Daddy, and don't forget to say your prayers regularly with my blue ribbon in your hand. Dear Old Man sent me a lock of your hair which he cut off in your sleep, and all the girls, in spite of their polish, are crazy to know what colour

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it is, but I won't show it to anyone. Good-night, dearest. Good-night, good-night, from your loving
"LELOTA."

James read Lelota's letter with the greatest satisfaction, and, when he had finished it, hastened off to Labois' to tell Cynthia all about it. "It's a tough job to go to see Peter Lunn," he explained to the Schoolmistress. "'Tisn't easy to love anyone like that, who repulses your love with the butt-end of his rifle. What am I to do?"

"If you really love Lelota," languidly returned the Schoolmistress, "you will do as she wishes you, James. When you're a little older, you will know how sorry people get if they care for someone very much and the day comes——"

"I know," said the sympathetic James. "It's no good my wanting to be a lawyer if I can't tackle a simple thing like this."

"That's right." Cynthia beamed approval at him. "How will you set about it?"

"It won't do to burst in upon him all at once," James suggested dubiously. "It might overwhelm him. How would it be if I wrote him a letter 'without prejudice,' as the lawyers say?"

"I don't think I'd put that on the letter. Peter Lunn doesn't know legal terms, and he may think you're saying he's prejudiced."

"Suppose I present my compliments to him and request the honour of an interview?"

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"That might do," said Cynthia, and returned to the topic of Old Man. "He always does what he sets out to do, but this time I am afraid he has undertaken too big a task. The doctor gets graver and graver every time he comes to see me, and even suggests my going away to Colorado."

"Where the potato-bugs come from? Why does he want you to go there?"

"He says that the air is drier, and that people with only half a lung live there for years when all the doctors have given them up."

"But what am I to say to Old Man if he comes back and finds you gone? If you go, I must go with you. He left you in my charge, you know."

"I am not going," said Cynthia tiredly. "I am just going to lie in this rocker on the verandah and wait."

"What for? Old Man?"

"No; a mightier than Old Man, wonderful as he is. It would break Old Man's heart if I were to go away now."

"But if it gave you a chance," said the boy seriously. "Oughtn't you, for Old Man's sake, as well as your own, to go?"

Cynthia only shook her head. "I should die before I got to Colorado. I am too weak to travel. No, no, James. I want Old Man to find me here when he comes back. He would never have left me, if he had known how really desperate my case is."

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"I see." The boy got up as if reluctant to leave her. "I wish I could be more of a comfort to you," he said sorrowfully, as he gazed from the verandah at the broad expanse of the Ottawa, with the Laurentians showing greenly in the distance. "I want to do so much and I can do so little."

"You are a dear boy, and Lelota is a very fortunate girl," said Cynthia brightly. "Now run away and write your letter to Peter Lunn while I try to sleep a little."

James paused irresolutely on the verandah and watched an emerald-green humming-bird thrust its beak into the fuchsias. Its wings moved so rapidly that it was impossible to see them. "Ah, if it would only fly off to Old Man and bring him back," Cynthia said and closed her eyes.

Seeing that she slept, the boy stole silently away and sent a messenger to Peter Lunn with a beautifully written letter, in which he presented his compliments to Peter and begged for the honour of a personal interview.

The messenger came back in a little while and reported that he had found Peter sitting moodily on the verandah, his unused fishing-rod beside him.

"What did he say?" eagerly asked James.

"He said as he didn't want any of your presents, but that if you'd heard from Lelota—I mean Miss Lunn—he'd try to put up with you, but he'd keep his gun handy in case you upset him."

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"It's not very encouraging, but it's really more than I had any right to expect," James thought to himself, striding away beneath the rock-elms and listening to a bobolink which sang to him from a lofty bough.

Somehow, as James hurried through the sunshine, his spirits rose. It was impossible that Cynthia could die and leave all the beauty about her, the children she loved, the wonderful river, the exquisite sky and trees and flowers. Even the robins which had built their nests in the bushes by the verandah came to her to be fed. All birds and animals shun the presence of imminent death, and the fearlessness of the robins inspired James with hope. He paused for a moment to admire the wonderful metallic plumage of a little blue bird, then followed it as it flew down the path leading to Peter Lunn's hut.

Peter evidently expected him from the river-side, and James had time to catch a glimpse of his disconsolate countenance as he sat there, gazing with unseeing eyes at the river and sorrowing for Lelota. "I ain't goin' to give in," he muttered irresolutely. "I ain't goin' to give in and let Old Man and Ikey have the laugh on me, but if I could only git Lelota back I'd—I'd try to put up with James, though I wouldn't let on to Old Man as I'm weakenin'. 'Sides, I ain't had a decent meal since Lelota went away. It's nigh dinner-time and I'm that empty!" He put his hand on his capacious

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stomach with a sigh so forlorn that it roused a deep pity in James's breast as he shyly came forward.

"Good day, Mr. Lunn," James said brightly. "I've had a letter from Lelota, and I thought you'd be kind enough to let me come and have a chat with you. But I haven't had any dinner yet, and you don't seem to have had yours, either."

"Ain't anyone to cook for me now Lelota's gone," growled Peter, starting from his reverie and looking suspiciously at James. "I've got into a kind of a way of talkin' to myself, but I ain't responserable for what I say when I'm doin' it. If you'd like to git yourself suthin' to eat (you can't be a worse cook'n me), I'll try a bite. That dum fool Ikey 'lows he's taught you to cook. Can you cook?"

"Can I cook? Why, of course I can, Mr. Lunn. Don't you worry, but just sit there till I'm ready for you, and I'll see what I can find."

"There's a heap of truck in the kitchen," Peter Lunn gruffly observed. "I don't mind givin' you a chance. If you kills me off with your cookery, then I shan't be in yours and Lelota's way any more."

"Oh, you're not in our way," James said briskly, taking off his coat and rolling up his shirt-sleeves. "I've been trying to put myself in your place, Mr. Lunn, and I'd tomahawk anyone who wanted to take my daughter away from me."

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"Don't you proticerpate," said Peter, but his smile was a little less grim. "You jus' go into that kitchen and cook for all you're worth. If you git over it when you've finished, maybe you can tell me about Lelota's letter."

James strode into the house and made his way joyously to the kitchen, first kissing the door of Lelota's room as he did so. "You darling!" he observed to her. "You darling! If this sort of thing goes on, we'll soon have you back again. Now, I'll try to remember all Ikey's taught me in the way of cooking and win your father's heart."

He set to work, feeling happier than he had done since Lelota's departure, for every inch of the house was sacred to her. She seemed to be with him all the time, and beads of perspiration rolled down him as he stood over the stove and grilled some cold meat.

When James came back to Peter Lunn, his tie was under one ear, there was a smudge across his handsome face, but his eyes beamed with triumph. "It's all ready," he said. "Shall I bring it out here? It's almost worthy of Lelota."

Though Peter nodded with unabated surliness, when James appeared with a rude table and the dishes and waited on him, he began to feel better. James, thanks to Ikey's fostering care, really could cook, and he had made the most of the opportunity.

"Ain't you goin' to sit down with me?" asked

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Peter, after passing his plate to James for the third time.

James shook his head. "I've just got the batter ready for the pancakes, and I daren't leave them," he explained modestly. "Lelota once told me you liked pancakes, and I've found some flour and lemons and think I can do it."

"Thankee," said Peter brokenly. "Pancakes!" A little child could lead him with pancakes, and, by sheer good luck, James had remembered. If the pancakes were a success, Peter mentally promised to revise his opinion of James.

They were.

"I'm makin' a blamed hog of myself, Ja—I mean Fiske," said Peter, as the delicate morsels disappeared with startling rapidity down his capacious throat.

"I'll make you half a dozen more if you'll call me 'James,'" said the youth modestly. "It's a pleasure to be able to do a little thing like this for you, Mr. Lunn."

"And you won't presoom on it when Old Man and Ikey comes back?" asked Peter Lunn dubiously.

"Course I won't. We'll go on just as usual. Excuse me a moment." And James hurried back to the kitchen, whence he speedily returned with more pancakes.

"Now it's 'bout time you had suthin'," said Peter, as he unbuttoned his vest and got out his pipe.

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James's high spirits gave way suddenly. The tension had been too great. He sat down, put his head on the table, and could not trust himself to speak.

Peter was moved. He went back and brought James the remnants of the feast, and, with rough kindness, insisted on his making a satisfactory meal. "That's the way I feel too," he vouchsafed to James. "Look here, James, I take back all I've said 'bout you."

"I don't mind, as far as I'm concerned," James admitted; "and I'm sorry I've made such an ass of myself."

"You're not to let on to Old Man and Ikey as we're friends. Old Man's started this polishin' business, and we'll have to go through with it to save my face. I must keep kickin' or he'll git the laugh on me. You'll promise not to give me away?"

James promised fervently, and spent the rest of the afternoon in reading out judiciously edited fragments of Lelota's letter. It was difficult to decide who talked the more about her, Peter Lunn or himself.

Peter was surprised when the shadows began to fall, and parted from James with unfeigned reluctance. "Come down agin in a day or two and make me some cookies," he said heartily. "We'll go fishin' arterwards. There's an old pick'ril down by that blasted elm as I've bin arter for years. Maybe, atween us, we might git him."

LELOTA'S LETTER

“ If we do, I'll send him to Ottawa to be stuffed, and we'll hang him up in the cabin to surprise Lelota when she comes back,” said James. “ Good-night, Mr.—”

“ —Peter,” said Peter Lunn shyly, and his lonely heart warmed to the young fellow. “ You won't let on to Ikey and Old Man ? ” he called out after him.

James gaily promised, and set off home through the shadows. He seemed to feel Lelota's beautiful arm around his shoulders all the way home, and did not rest until he had written her a glowing account of his day's work. “ I think, dearest,” he wrote, “ the ‘ polishing ’ will soon be over. If only Old Man and Ikey will come back and bring the Herb of Healing with them, after a show of kicking on your father's part we shall all be happy ever after. Good-night, my dearest, sweet——”

But the rest of the letter was meant for Lelota's eyes alone.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MIRACLE

AS Lajeunesse welcomed them at the ferry, it seemed to Old Man, although the whole period was little more than a week, that centuries had elapsed since his departure from Four Corners. Lajeunesse, observing his wearied air, concluded that things had not gone well with him, asked no questions, but silently proffered the "wiskee blanc" to his friend and hero. Old Man, however, as one in a troubled dream, passed on his share of the liquid refreshment to Ikey and Miss Wilks, who did ample justice to it, and, followed by the ferryman's hearty farewells, they climbed up the riverbank, Old Man tottering once or twice by the way, and only saving himself by catching at the heavily laden Miss Wilks. Then, to Ikey's great surprise, the ferryman called him back. "Old Man he not well ; he vaire ill. You go queek for M'sieu le Doc. Higgins," he said anxiously.

In his own mind, though scarcely in a condition to formulate it to himself, Old Man also knew that he was going to be ill. His head ached, his

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face and hands burned ; when he gained the level of the road, he staggered like a drunken man. The suffering he had undergone in watching the woman he loved slowly fade away before his eyes, knowing all the time that he could do nothing to save her from a premature grave, had told heavily upon his iron frame. No one but the stars had witnessed his terrible sorrow, his passionate appeals to heaven to spare the Schoolmistress. Torn and distracted by alternate hopes and fears, he had been compelled to hide his trouble from Cynthia Hannum for fear it might prejudicially affect her, cut short the tiny span of her allotted days. Not even Ikey or James had guessed at the intensity of his sufferings. It seemed to them that he was exactly the same as usual, went about his customary pursuits and was keenly interested in Four Cornerites generally. Perhaps he had a little more frequently gone with Miss Wilks " way back into the Bush." But still, his most intimate friends failed to notice that he was preyed upon by a consuming anxiety which ate the life out of him.

Now, however, warned by the discriminating Lajeunesse, Ikey resolved to get Old Man home as soon as possible. Although the death of the Indian girl had also affected him, the impression was not nearly so deep. Ikey told himself that a few days rest and quiet in the Schoolmistress's society would soon put Old Man right again ; but,

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for all that, he resolved that "M'sieu le Doc. Higgins" should drop in to supper that very evening to find out what was really the matter with his hero. He left the packhorse to look after itself, and, with a rather overdone and elaborate carelessness, casually supported Old Man when he failed to see a rock in the road. Ordinarily Old Man would have repulsed such assistance with kindly scorn. Now he did not even notice it, a symptom which filled Ikey with alarm, and he bitterly blamed himself that he had insisted upon bringing a considerable portion of the treasure away with him, since the delay caused by so doing had evidently made Old Man worse.

Near Four Corners they were met by the exultant James, full of delight at their return. He had just passed his Intermediate examination for the Bar at an age when most youngsters are thinking of baseball. James was greatly surprised that Old Man absently rejected his offer to help unload the mule, who could scarcely stumble along beneath her heavy burden. He would have been still more surprised had he known that the two big sacks slung across her back were filled with nuggets of the purest gold. In addition to the sacks, Miss Wilks also carried a great bundle of glossy, heart-shaped leaves, which Old Man removed from her back before he touched the sacks, and deposited in his bunk with peculiar care. The sacks of gold he thrust beneath the bunk, well knowing that no

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one would ever dream of looking for treasure in so unlikely a place. Despite Ikey's entreaties for him to take a rest, he filled a kettle with water, thrust a handful of the snakewort into it, and impatiently waited for the water to boil.

As soon as the evening shadows began to fall, Old Man performed his simple ablutions in the shed at the back of the hut, and, after exhorting Miss Wilks to keep a diligent lookout for strangers, slowly made his way towards Labois' little lavender-coloured house. Carefully thrust into his breast was a bottle containing an infusion of the glossy leaves which had excited James's wonder. From time to time he felt it to see if it were still there, and then continued his uncertain way, answering with an effort the salutations of the numerous friends delighted to see him back again.

"Don't seem nat'ral not to have you and the mule round," said the shoemaker, coming to the door in his shirt-sleeves and waving a welcoming pipe at Old Man. "Come in and tell us what you've bin doin' way back of the mountains. Seems a hell of a time since you put out yonder, Old Man."

But Old Man, rousing himself with an effort, declined the shoemaker's proffered hospitality and continued his way. Already he had caught sight of a white skirt on the Labois verandah. He stopped for a moment, as if to find out where he was, quite unaware that the shoemaker watched him with affectionate solicitude. "I can't rightly

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tell what's come to Old Man," said that worthy, going back to his doorstep. "Hardly seemed to know me or to be able to walk. Don't look himself at all. If it wasn't Old Man, I'd say as he'd bin scared to death by suthin'. P'r'aps that durned mule's bin gittin' him into trubble agin."

But heedless alike of conjecture or surmise, Old Man continued his way to Labois, hardly believing it possible that he was a messenger of life and not of death. Success had been dearly bought by the shedding of innocent blood. The horror of Pahnewuska's death haunted him, would continue to haunt him to his dying day. He had seen many men die, had looked upon it as the natural order of things that they should sometimes come to violent ends; but he had never yet seen a woman slain before his eyes ere he could interpose to save her. It seemed to him that Nature was inexorable in her unconscious, or was it conscious, brutality? If she gave one life, she took another to preserve the balance. Again the moonlight shone on the dead girl's face; again the figure on the Cross looked down upon it; again he knelt beside her rocky tomb. "If it had bin myself!" he groaned. "If it had bin myself! By and large, I've had a lot of life, bin in many places, done many things. But that poor Injun girl's never had any peace till now. She's given me her heart, her gold, her life. What love could do more!"

Seeing Old Man approach with faltering steps

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along the village street, pausing as one who bears ill tidings, the Schoolmistress gave a cry, put her hand to her heart, then came forward with colourless cheeks to meet him, at the same time trying to persuade herself that she had never really believed in a successful issue to his quest. She was doomed, had little time to stay upon the glad-some earth; and Fate had cruelly robbed her of Old Man for a whole week when he might have been at her side, soothing her pain, lessening her fears. With him to hold her hand, the Great Darkness was not so dark. His strength and courage bore her up to face the inevitable. But in the joy of seeing him once more, of knowing that he had come back to her, Cynthia Hannum forgave him for having left Four Corners. She had counted the days, hours, minutes, until he should return; and now that she saw him coming in the distance she did not run to meet him, but stood dazed also, for his steps were weak and feeble, he walked like a man who has had some terrible shock, who gropes his way through sunlight, deeming it to be the night. Perhaps he was hurt, ill? She could bear the uncertainty no more, but hastened to meet him, and drew him behind the sheltering vines. "You're safe? You're safe? Old Man, you've come back?"

"Yes," said Old Man dully, and there was little gladness in his voice. "I've come back. And I—I'm safe. Yes, I'm safe."

Though Cynthia heard her death-warrant in his

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words, she bore them unflinchingly. "You mustn't grieve for me, Old Man," she said softly. "I have missed you so sorely that now you're here again nothing else matters. You have come back. With you here, I've nothing to be afraid of, not even of—I—I knew it wouldn't be any use, Old Man. Don't grieve. Don't grieve."

At the sound of her voice a great light broke across Old Man's troubled face. She had waited for his coming, to know whether he was the bearer of life or death; and she had thought only of him, did not ask anything about herself. He drew her to his breast, could not speak.

"You're trembling, Old Man. How your heart beats! My dearest, my dearest, you must not grieve for me. Don't grieve for me. You did all you could. I am sure you did all you could, but even you could not accomplish the impossible. I ought not to have let you go. Now that you are back again I feel better already," and she smiled a piteous smile—a smile with Death in it.

Old Man took a cup from the little table on the verandah, poured part of the contents of his bottle into it, and held it to Cynthia's lips. "Drink," he said simply. "Drink."

The Schoolmistress put it down untasted. "Not until you let me know what troubles you, Old Man. You are deceiving me. Your kind heart won't let you tell me you have failed. You have given me this water to drink so that I may go to my death

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without knowing it." She smiled so sweetly and yet so sadly, that Old Man, dimly knowing that there was something of supreme importance which he must accomplish before his senses left him, his hand shaking, spilled a drop or two of the precious liquid on the floor as he again held it to her lips.

Something in his eyes moved Cynthia almost to tears. She smiled back at him with an heroic attempt to be brave, and swallowed the contents of the cup with the air of one drinking of the waters of eternal life.

Old Man, standing back a little, made a final effort to collect his wandering wits in order to see what effect, if any, the potion had on her.

For the moment nothing happened. Suddenly the light returned to Cynthia's eyes, the bloom to her cheeks. She came toward him with springy, elastic step and fell into his arms. "You have found it, Old Man, you have found it. I feel it; it runs like fire through my veins. Now I know that I shall soon be well again."

"Yes," said Old Man, in a strained, far-away voice, "I have found it. You will soon be well again. I—I——"

"But what's the matter, Old Man? What's the matter? Why do you eye me so strangely?"

"I—I—oh, I dunno." Old Man put his hand to his head, fell into the rocker by her side. "I—I——" And he tore at his throat as if someone were strangling him.

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At the sound of Cynthia's despairing cry Labois came running out, and between them they carried Old Man into the house. "I guess I mak' to run for Doc. Higgins," said Labois. "Old Man heem heap malade, vaire ill. Eef we not tak' care, he die—die dam queek."

He went off at a run for "Doc. Higgins," and speedily returned with that worthy, who at once put Old Man to bed and ordered that, with the exception of Ikey, no one was to come near him. "He's had some terrible shock," he explained. "Anything been troubling him lately besides poor old Black's death? What were you two doing on the other side of the mountains, Ikey?"

Ikey was about to explain what they had been doing on the other side of the mountains, when he remembered that the secret was not his to reveal. Fortunately the Doctor knew of the sorrow Old Man felt at the death of Parson Black and attributed his present illness to that. "Though I thought he was as tough as Millette's billy goat," he said, as he felt Old Man's pulse, "I always knew he'd break down some day. Any man who tries to run the show and keep things straight in Four Corners is bound to come to grief."

"Dessay you're right, Doc." Ikey left the Doctor labouring under this delusion, and at once proceeded to instal himself as nurse.

Scarcely had the Doctor taken his departure,

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before there came a timid knock at the door and Cynthia entered the room.

Ikey shook his head in answer to her questioning look. "No ladies 'lowed here," he said sternly. "Reckon as me and Old Man's got to wrassle this out atween us."

"Oh, no, you haven't. I heard what the doctor told you," Cynthia said composedly, "and I am going to carry out his instructions myself, Ikey. You can help me, but I mean to do all the nursing. And please don't say anything about your adventures to anybody. I want to hear the story from Old Man's lips when he is well enough to tell it to me."

"But Doc. Higgins said——"

"I don't care what he said, Ikey. There is no one in this world who has a better right to nurse Old Man than I have and I am going to do it. If you know of anyone, tell me, and I will give place to her." She paused with flushed cheeks and shining eyes.

"Reckon there ain't nobody," Ikey admitted, as he watched Cynthia's skill in making Old Man comfortable; "and I was a dum fool to think I could nurse him as well as you can. I'll go back to the hut and git ready some more of that stuff for you. If you're goin' to nurse Old Man, you'll want it. You've just got to take it ev'ry day for some time to mend up them wasted lungs of yours."

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"Never mind my lungs now. You're not angry with me?" Cynthia pleaded. "You and Old Man must have gone through grievous hardships to come back in so battle-scarred a state."

"Oh, take it by and large, we've had a bully time. Guess I'm all right," Ikey said forlornly; "but Old Man's kind of delicate. You dunno the trubble I've had bringing of him up to man's estate. How'm I to break it to Miss Wilks? I wonder she ain't found out afore this as suthin's wrong."

"She has, Ikey. Don't you see her head hanging over the verandah? I'll tell her all about it presently, unless you can persuade her to go back to the hut with you."

Ikey shook his head. "She's that dum obstinit," he said despairingly, "I can't do nothin' with her. She won't go and I can't make her. 'Tain't a mossle of use tryin' to argify with a mule. She'll only listen to all I have to say and then let fly at me."

"Very well. I'll try what I can do. Let her come up on the verandah so that she can put her head in at the window and see that I'm looking after Old Man. Now please go home and rest. You can take your own turn at nursing to-morrow, when you have had a good night's sleep."

Ikey gently called the mule, and Miss Wilks came, like Agag, walking delicately, lest she should disturb her master. Once she had put her head

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through the open window, it remained there, and, fond as she was of Ikey, she seemed, in her absorbing anxiety about Old Man, to have forgotten his existence.

"That's all right. You stop here till I come back," Ikey explained to her, "and take your orders from Miss Hannum. Old Man's a bit under the weather and wants you two to look arter him. See?"

Miss Wilks saw, and, with a nod of her huge head, signified that she was content with her present surroundings.

For many days after that, Old Man was vaguely conscious of people standing by his bed—a wide comfortable bed, unlike his own narrow bunk. Then he was on the top of the plateau, adjuring the Crucified Christ to descend from the Cross and bring Pahnewuska back to life. In his delirium he fought many battles over again, only at last one blessed morning to awake, weak as a rat, to find the Schoolmistress sitting beside him and the mule's great head thrust through the open window. For once, Miss Wilks had deserted James and left him to Ikey. Her business in life or death was by Old Man's side, and, as she was not allowed to come in at the door, she thrust as much as possible of her ungainly head and neck through the window.

The terrible look of strain and tension vanished from Old Man's eyes. Despite the fact of her nursing him through a long and tedious illness,

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the Schoolmistress looked years younger, for Ikey brought her doses of the snakewort every day until she declared that she needed no more, that the Herb of Healing was rapidly doing its work. Her only anxiety was lest Old Man should be taken from her, and she told Ikey as much.

"Taken from you! Whaffor! You don't know Old Man 'swell as we do," Ikey retorted. "Him leave Four Corners for good! Why, where'd he go to? Not much. You won't catch Old Man goin' anywheres 'ithout me and the mule helpin' him along to the Happy Huntin' Grounds. Heaven's all very well, but 'tain't Four Corners." Whereupon the Schoolmistress said that he ought to know better and smilingly rebuked him for being such a pagan.

Ikey thought that she had called him a Piegan, a tribe of Indians for whom he had the greatest contempt. Knowing also, however, that no one in Four Corners except himself had ever seen a Piegan, he attributed the Schoolmistress's expression to a lack of knowledge with regard to the different varieties of Indian tribes and promptly forgave her.

* * * * *

Shortly after he had sufficiently recovered to return to the cabin, Old Man sent Ikey as his plenipotentiary to fetch Peter Lunn to see him. Ikey was further charged to inform Peter that if he

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wished to make any show, it would be necessary to bring all his spare cash along with him.

Ikey delivered the message to Peter Lunn, who was smoking on his verandah, with an air which goaded that irascible worthy almost to madness.

"You tell Old Man," said Peter, swelling with wrath as Lelota, who had just returned from Montreal for her holidays (she was looking more beautiful than ever and carried herself with a grace and majesty which filled Ikey with the profoundest admiration), came out and greeted him with a warmth which added fuel to the flame—"You tell Old Man I'll go down to Hawklesville this arternoon, draw out my balance from the bank, and bring Lelota with me to-morrow just to show her what a windbag he is. You tell him that, Ikey Marston; and don't you forgit it."

"All right, Peter. All right. Keep your hair on." He paused significantly. "Better——"

"Better what, you red-headed blatherskite?" angrily demanded Peter Lunn.

"Oh, nothin', Peter. Nothin'. Only if I was you——"

"Thank goodness you ain't. That 'ud be the last straw. What was it you was tryin' to git out of that ugly mouth of yours? There's allers more good things goes into it'n ever comes out."

"I was only wantin' to tell you if I was you," continued the unmoved Ikey, "I'd draw out all the dum balances I could lay my hands on—I'm

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told you've laid hold of a good many folks' cash in your time. But it won't make a mossle of diff'rence to me and Old Man what you do, s'long as you ain't afraid to show up with the few dollars you can manage to bring along. We'll let you down as easy as possible."

"Afraid to show up, you tomarter-headed outrage," foamed Peter, now fairly beside himself. "I'll match him dollar for dollar ;" and he vainly tried to appear unimpressed by Ikey's lordly indifference.

"No, no, Peter. Keep your hair on. You can't do that." Ikey shook his head.

"Why not ?"

"A bargain's a bargain. Your bargain with Old Man was for every dollar you put down, he'll put down five. If he puts down more'n you, you're not to interfere 'tween James and Lelota when they're old enuff to connubialize. Wasn't that it, Lelota ?"

"Of course, Ikey dear. Never mind what Daddy says about your mouth. I only wish his teeth were as good as yours." Lelota had received a private hint from James that she need not fear that Old Man would fail to keep his part of the bargain. As if to show her contempt for the "polishing" process, she had discarded her city frock and, just because the adoring James had expressed a wish to see her in it, was wearing the dress in which she left home. She was more

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bewitchingly beautiful than ever, a woman grown in spite of her age.

She went back to the gate arm in arm with Ikey, after affectionately requesting "Dear Papa," an evidence of culture which nearly gave Peter a fit, not to break a blood-vessel. "Will James be there too, Ikey?"

"If he ain't, I'll take him by the scruff of his neck," said Ikey. "I guess 'bout another year of polishin' ought to satisfy you and James," he added slyly. "He's that uppish, he's already talkin' 'bout gittin' a home."

"If it doesn't, I reckon we'll do without it and polish each other in a little home of our own," retorted Lelota, with unabated spirit. "And you can have the benefit of any polish left over. Give my love to Old Man, and——"

"How 'ill James like that?"

"Never mind how he likes it. While I'm being polished, James will have to learn to walk Spanish."*

"'Sif," said Ikey, with mock mournfulness, and with an accuracy worthy of Old Man himself, "Man as is born of woman as the sparks fly upward ever did anything else'n walk Spanish all his days when there was any woman round."

"Never you mind, Ikey dear, but do as I tell you. Give my love to Old Man, and tell James that if

* Take heed to his ways. A familiar expression in the Ottawa Valley.

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he isn't there, I'll—I'll polish him," gaily replied Lelota, and went back to the verandah to soothe the injured feelings of her sire.

But, apparently, the violent measures proposed by Ikey were not at all necessary to ensure James's attendance at the fateful meeting which was to decide his future, for he was there in his "lawyer clothes," waiting to receive Lelota and Peter with a courtesy which showed that he, at all events, had no need of "polishing." The deal table in the centre of the cabin was somewhat ostentatiously bare. Apart from that, Old Man, who, looking very white and thin, sat on his favourite log, did not appear to have made any extraordinary preparations to receive his visitors. Though he was somewhat tired and absent-minded, he rewarded Miss Wilks with a grin when she put her head in at the door with an anxious "Where is my wandering child to-night?" kind of look. "You bet I'm here," he said affably. "Jus' go round to the shed for a bit, old lady, till I whistles. Your bein' here might hurt Peter's feelin's. I'm told he ain't by no manner of means forgot the way you slammed him about that night."

When the mule had unwillingly withdrawn, Old Man turned to Peter as if with difficulty recalling the object of his visit. "First time me and Ikey's had the pleasure of seein' you here, Peter. Hope 'twon't be the last."

"All depends on you," growled Peter, lugging

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out a tremendous wallet tightly stuffed with hundred-dollar bills. Then, overcome with a tardy sense of politeness, and conscious that the polishing process ought not to be confined to Lelota, he inquired after the health of the Schoolmistress.

"Oh, she's fine," returned Old Man, with a little more colour in his cheeks. "Real fine! She's gone on a visit to Ottawa gittin' what she calls her 'true-so' ready."

"There you've got me, Old Man," Peter, conscious of his coming triumph, affably admitted. "Never heard tell of anything of the sort."

"Just a few lots of clothes to git married in, that's all," said Old Man. "Seems to be the usual kind of thing. Oh, that reminds me"—A sudden thought appeared to strike him. "About thisyer little business of Lelota and James."

"Well, what about it?"

"That all the money you've brought with you?" Old Man pointed to the wallet with languid curiosity.

"That's all; and enuff, too. Quit your foolin', Old Man."

"How much may there be,"—Old Man weighed the wallet thoughtfully in his hand—"roughly of course, in thisyer little parcel of yours, Peter?"

"Little parcel! Twenty-five thousand dollars, Old Man. Neither more nor less. Twenty-five-thou-sand-dol-lars!"

"That all, for sure?"

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"And enuff too."

"Maybe 'tis; maybe 'tain't. Ikey, if you're strong enuff, haul out one of them sacks from under my bunk."

With a prodigious effort, Ikey, aided by James and Lelota, hauled out a heavy sack from under the bunk.

"Open the mouth of it and shake out some of the stuff on the table," commanded Old Man, leisurely filling his pipe.

A nugget weighing about ten ounces rolled out, then a stream of gold dust, then a monster of at least six pounds.

Peter, with widely-opened eyes and distended mouth, watched the golden stream in speechless admiration. His tongue hung out as Lelota clapped her hands. He could not utter a word.

"Oh, that ain't nothin', Peter." Ikey paused to wipe the perspiration from his forehead. "There's another sack bigger'n this one; and Old Man can git a dozen more if you ain't satisfied."

"Satisfied!" Peter could not bring back his eyes to their normal size. "Satisfied! You bet I'm satisfied. I allers did like James," he added, with the air of one admitting a carefully concealed affection. "Future son-in-law, shake hands on it;" and James shook hands on it.

Old Man picked out a nugget weighing about a pound and a half. "Here you are, Peter, jus' to bind the bargain and make friends agin. Now,

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Lelota, child, fill your pockets. This bit with the streaks of quartz in it 'ill do for a brooch."

But Peter, after carefully wrapping up Old Man's gift to him in a handkerchief, pointed out the rashness of keeping this golden store with so little precaution. "Me and Ikey 'ill take it down to the Bank of Montreal for you," he suggested. "'Twould be the ruin of this place if it was to git out you'd found a gold mine, Old Man. You'd never have another moment's peace."

Old Man appeared to reflect. "That's right," he admitted. "Better git it valued, and I'll settle half of it on James. He's the millionaire of Four Corners as far as we're concerned. He'll want it some day when he's the biggest lawyer in Canady. Me and Ikey 'ill keep the rest of it in our own names. Now, if you'll 'scuse me, I'll leave you and Ikey and the young people to talk things over."

He went out, whistled to the mule, and, one arm thrown carelessly round her neck, disappeared into the depths of the Bush, there, in the joy of his newly-found happiness, to commune with Nature and with Nature's God.

"He's great." Ikey looked after the vanishing couple with affectionate eyes. "Real great, James; and don't you forgit it, or I'll 'polish' you off the face of thisyer earth."

"You bet I won't forget it, Ikey," said the joyous James. "And now, if you'll excuse us, Lelota and myself are going fishing."

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"They've caught each other sure enuff," said Peter approvingly. "A hansumer young couple I ain't never come across. Afore we shove this stuff back into the sack, exhausted nature demands a drink 'tween drinks, Ikey."

"Never go agin Nature, Peter, or you'll git exhausted too." Ikey promptly produced his flask.

"You did orter have your pants pockets made big enuff to hold quarts," said Peter, putting forth his huge and hairy hand for the flask. "Pints don't go no distance this weather."

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