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PO-NO-KAH

AN INDIAN TALE OF LONG AGO

By Mary Mapes Dodge

1903

PO-NO-KAH.

AN INDIAN STORY OF LONG AGO.

I.

THE HEDDEN FAMILY.

We who live in comfortable country homes, secure from every invader, find it difficult to conceive the trials that beset the hardy pioneers who settled our Western country during the last century.

In those days, and for many a year afterward, hostile Indians swarmed in every direction, wherever the white man had made a clearing, or started a home for himself in the wilderness. Sometimes the pioneer would be unmolested, but oftener his days were full of anxiety and danger. Indeed, history tells of many a time when the settler, after leaving home in the morning in search of game for his happy household would return at night to find his family murdered or carried away and his cabin a mass of smoking ruins. Only in the comparatively crowded settlements, where strength was in numbers, could the white inhabitants hope for security—though bought at the price of constant vigilance and precaution.

In one of these settlements, where a few neatly whitewashed cabins, and rougher log huts, clustered on the banks of a bend in the Ohio River, dwelt a man named Hedden, with his wife and three children. His farm

stretched further into the wilderness than his neighbors', for his had been one of the first cabins built there, and his axe, ringing merrily through the long days, had hewn down an opening in the forest, afterward famous in that locality as "Neighbor Hedden's Clearing." Here he had planted and gathered his crops year after year, and in spite of annoyances from the Indians, who robbed his fields, and from bears, who sometimes visited his farm stock, his family had lived in security so long that, as the settlement grew, his wife sang at her work, and his little ones shouted at their play as merrily as though New York or Boston were within a stone's throw. To be sure, the children were bidden never to stray far from home, especially at nightfall; and the crack of rifles ringing now and then through the forest paled their cheeks for an instant, as the thought of some shaggy bear, furious in his death agony, crossed their minds.

Sometimes, too, the children would whisper together of the fate of poor Annie Green, who, a few years before had been found killed in the forest; or their mother would tell them with pale lips of the night when their father and neighbor Freeman encountered two painted Indians near the cabin. The tomahawk of the Indian who tried to kill their father was still hanging upon the cabin wall.

But all this had happened twelve years earlier—before Bessie, the oldest girl, was born—and seemed to the children's minds like a bit of ancient history—almost as far off as the exploits of Hannibal or Julius Caesar appear to us. So, as I have said, the girls and boys of the settlement shouted joyously at their play, or ran in merry groups to the rough log hut, called "The School-House," little dreaming of the cares and anxieties of their elders.

Bessie Hedden was a merry-hearted creature, and so pretty that, had she been an Indian maiden, she would have been known as "Wild Rose," or "Singing Bird," or "Water Lily," or some such name. As it was, many of the villagers called her "Little Sunshine," for her joyous spirit could light up the darkest corner. She was faithful at school, affectionate and industrious at home, and joyous and honorable among her playmates. What wonder, then, that everybody loved her, or that she was happiest among the happy? Her brother Rudolph was much younger than she,—a rosy-checked, strong-armed little urchin of seven years; and Kitty, the youngest of the Hedden children, was but three years of age at the date at which my story opens.

There was one other individual belonging to the family circle, larger even than Bessie, stronger and saucier even than Rudolph, and but little older than Kitty. He had no hands, yet once did, as all admitted, the best day's work ever performed by any member of the family. This individual's name was Bouncer, and he had a way of walking about on all-fours, and barking—probably in consequence of his having been created a dog.

Bouncer loved all the children dearly; but, stout-hearted fellow that he was, he loved the weakest one best; and, therefore, little Kitty was never without a friend and protector. Ever since a certain day in the summer, when she had fallen into the stream, and had been carried home insensible by Bouncer, Kitty had loved the huge mastiff dearly, and nightly added to her simple prayer, "Please, God, bless dear Bouncer, too!"

And Bouncer *was* blessed beyond most dogs. Gentle as a baby when Kitty's arm was about his neck, he was fierce as a lion when fierceness was required. His great white teeth were a terror to evil-doers, and his bark in the dead of night would make venturesome bears sneak back into the forest like kittens.

Often would Mrs. Hedden say to her neighbors, that with "husband's rifle and Bouncer's teeth, she felt that she lived in a fortress. As for the children," she would add, laughingly, "I scarcely ever feel any anxiety about them, when I know that Bouncer has joined their little expeditions. He is a regiment in himself."

II.

EXPLORING THE STREAM.

One of the favorite holiday resorts of Bessie and Rudolph was a lovely spot in the forest, not a quarter of a mile from the house. Shaded by giant oaks, whose gnarled roots lay like serpents, half hidden in the moss, ran a streamlet, covered with sunny speckles, where parted leaves admitted the sunshine. Flowers grew along its banks in wild profusion, and it held its wayward course with many a rippling fall and fantastic turn, until it was lost in the shades of the forest.

"Where does it go to, I wonder?" the children often would say to each other, longing for permission to follow its windings farther than the limits prescribed by their parents would allow.

"To the ocean, of course," Rudolph would answer, triumphantly; while Bessie, looking at its golden ripple, and listening to its musical song, half believed that it carried its wealth of sparkling jewels to Fairyland itself.

Sometimes, when Bouncer was with them, they lingered so long by the mysterious streamlet, sending chip boats adrift upon its surface, or trying to adjust troublesome little water-wheels under some of its tiny cascades, that Mrs. Hedden would blow the big horn as a signal for their return; and as they ran home, playing with Bouncer by the way, or scolding him for shaking his wet sides under their very faces, they would inwardly resolve to coax father to take them up the stream on the very first pleasant Saturday.

Accordingly, on one bright Friday in June, as Bessie and Rudolph were returning from school together, they ran toward their father, who was working in the clearing.

"Father! father!" they shouted, "will you take us down the stream to-morrow?—we want to see where it goes to."

"Goes to?" laughed back the father. "Why, it goes to the moon; didn't Kitty say so last night?"

"Now, father," returned Bessie, pouting just a little, "you *know* we don't believe that. We want you so much to take us in the boat; it doesn't leak at all now—oh! do." And both children fairly capered in their excitement.

Mr. Hedden smiled; but, after wiping his forehead with a red and yellow handkerchief, went on thoughtfully with his work without returning any answer.

The children, looking wistfully at him a moment, turned toward the house, wondering among themselves, "what father meant to do about it."

That evening, at the supper-table (where they didn't have napkin rings or silver salt-cellars, I can assure you), Mr. Hedden asked his wife whether Tom Hennessy was back from "up river" yet?

"I think he came home yesterday," returned his wife. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I thought, as to-morrow'll be a holiday, I'd get him to take the youngsters down the stream in the scow."

"Oh! husband," rejoined Mrs. Hedden, looking up anxiously, "do you think it's safe?"

"Why not, Betsey?—the scow doesn't leak; and even if it did, the water isn't above Tom's waist anywhere."

"I don't mean anything of that kind," pursued the wife, smiling in spite of herself at the joyful faces of the young folks. "I—I mean the Indians."

"Oh, never fear about them; I'll give Tom every necessary caution," was the answer. "The boat won't be gone more than two hours altogether; and, to my mind, there wouldn't be the slightest danger in letting even little Kitty join the party."

"Oh! tanky, Poppy, tanky!" shouted Kitty, clapping her chubby hands in great glee. Every one at the table laughed heartily at her unexpected response.

Bright and early the next morning, the children stood in the door-way, eagerly looking out for Tom. Big Tom, the village boys called him; and well they might, for he was a staunch, burly fellow, who looked as if he could crush an Indian in each hand—not that he had ever had an opportunity to perform that remarkable feat, for Tom Hennessy had but recently arrived from a large town in the East; but he *looked* as if he could do it; and, therefore, had credit for any amount of prowess and strength.

After sundry directions given by Mr. Hedden to Tom, and a command from their mother for the little folks to be home at dinner-time, they set forth amid shouts of laughter and merriment. Kitty was there in all her glory, for, after what "Poppy" had said, she had insisted upon joining the party. Even Bouncer, in spite of many a "Go back, sir!" "Call him, mother!" had quietly insinuated himself into the group, and neither threats nor coaxing could force him away.

It was a glorious day; and, as they neared the stream, it seemed to sparkle into joyous welcome at their approach.

Soon, comfortably seated in the scow, they were pushed and rowed laboriously along by the good-natured Tom, while Bouncer panted along the bank, or dashed into the water, splashing the boat in fine style. In passing the accustomed "limits," the delight of the children knew no bounds.

"Now for it!" cried Bessie, clapping her hands. "Now we shall find out where the stream goes to!"

And so they sailed along, following its graceful windings—sometimes touching bottom, and sometimes skimming smoothly over deep water, where Kitty could no longer clutch for the tall, bright grass that here and there had reared itself above the surface. Often Big Tom would sing out, "Lie low!" as some great bough, hanging over the stream, seemed stretching out its arms to catch them; and often they were nearly checked in their course by a fallen trunk, or the shallowness of the water. At last, upon reaching a very troublesome spot, Tom cried good-naturedly—

"Now, youngsters, you must all get out while I turn the scow over this 'ere log, and then you can jump in again on t'other side."

With merry shouts they leaped out, one after the other, Tom holding Kitty in his arms, as he stood knee-deep in the water.

"What is the matter with Bouncer?" cried Bessie.

There was no time for a reply. Looking up, the frightened party saw three hideous faces peering at them over the bushes!

"The Indians! the Indians!" screamed Bessie.

Springing to the shore, and catching Rudolph with one arm, while he held Kitty tightly in the other, Tom Hennessy dashed into the forest, calling upon Bessie to follow. Poor Bessie! What could she do? With a thrill of horror she saw two fierce savages bounding after them with fearful yells, while a third, with upraised club, and tomahawk and scalping-knife in his belt, was rushing toward her.

Uttering one long piercing scream, the poor girl knelt to await her doom. A prolonged roar of fury caused her to raise her head. Bouncer, brave, noble Bouncer, and the Indian had fallen together in a deadly struggle! Now was her time! With new energy and hope, she sprang to her feet, and darted through the forest, rending the air with cries for help, and unconscious of whither she was flying.

"Rudolph! Kitty!" she cried, frantically. "God in heaven help us! Oh! help us!"

III.

WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN?

It was nearly dinner-time in the Hedden cottage. Farmer Hedden sat in the doorway, equipped in his hunting dress—for he usually spent Saturday afternoons in the forest; and it was only at his wife's solicitation that he had consented to wait and "take a bite of dinner" before starting. Every now and then he raised his head from the almanac, over which he was bending, to listen to the whirr of his wife's spinning-wheel, and her merry song issuing from the cottage, or to cast an impatient glance in the direction of the streamlet.

Within, all was neatness and cheerfulness; the clean deal table was arranged with its row of yellow platters and shining pewter-mugs—even the stools were standing round it, ready for the hungry household that usually assembled at noon, eager for dinner.

"Father's" and "mother's" places were at either end of the table; Rudolph's and Kitty's at one side (Kitty had a high chair made by "father" out of young oak branches); Bessie's opposite; and, beside hers, the prettiest plate; and the brightest mug for Big Tom—for, of course, he must be asked to stay.

Everything was ready. Far back in the open fireplace the fagots were blazing and snapping. Hanging above them, the great iron pot threw forth a circle of noisy steam around the loosely fitted lid, while the potatoes within were in a high state of commotion—little ones tumbling pell-mell over big ones, and big ones rocking dolefully backward and forward in the boiling water as though they felt sure their end was approaching.

"Blow the horn again, John," called out Mrs. Hedden, as she cut another slice from the big brown loaf that had rapidly been growing less under her shining knife. "Ha! ha! they can't help hearing *that*," she laughed, as her husband blew a blast even louder than usual.

After waiting a moment, Mr. Hedden came in, throwing the almanac on a low wooden settee as he entered.

"No use waiting any longer, wifey—let's sit by. I don't see a sign of the youngsters; though it did seem to me I heard some of 'em screaming and laughing in the distance a bit ago. 'Twon't do, though," he continued, shaking his head; "we must make the crazy little cubs mind the horn closer. Play's play, and all well enough in its way, but you must teach children regularity from the very outset, or they'll never be good for much."

"That's true enough, John," answered his wife, as she "dished" some of the steaming potatoes—leaving a goodly number in the pot for the little folk—"that's true enough; but you know this is a day of extra frolic for the children. They're having such fun, likely, they've no notion how the time is passing. As for the horn, who could expect mortal ears to hear *that*—with Bessie and Big Tom laughing and singing, and Rudolph screaming with fun—as I know he is; and little Kit, bless her! just frantic with delight; I think I can see them now, the merry madcaps!"

Ah! happy, unconscious mother, if you *could* have seen them—if their cries of terror could but have reached your ears!

Finally, neighbor Hedden arose, shoving back his stool on the sanded floor.

"Well, well, wifey, you're right enough, no doubt; but I tell you it isn't best to be too easy with youngsters, though ours are the best going, if I *do* say it. A good trouncing all around, when they come in, wouldn't be a bit too much for them for being so late;" and, half in fun, half in earnest, he shook his head rather fiercely at his wife, and stalked out of the cottage.

Presently she laughed outright to hear the loud, impatient tones issuing from the great tin horn. "That'll fetch them, I reckon," said neighbor Hedden, showing a smiling face at the window.

As another hour passed away, the songs grew fewer and fainter upon the mother's lips—at first from vexation, and, finally, from weariness and a vague feeling of anxiety.

"Bessie should know better," she thought to herself, "than to stay so long. I wish I had not let Kitty go with them."

The next moment she smiled to think how hungry the children would be when they returned, and half wished that it would not be "spoiling" them to make them a good sugar-cake for their supper.

Not until the shadows grew longer upon the edge of the forest, and threatening clouds grew thicker overhead, did her heart quail or her cheek grow white with sudden fear.

"Oh! what *can* keep them, I wonder! Why didn't I ask John to go look for them?" she asked herself over and over again. But Mrs. Hedden was not one to sit weeping with folded hands while anything remained to be done.

It was not long before their nearest neighbor, who was still at work, enjoying the coolness of the afternoon, leaned upon his spade to wonder what on earth neighbor Hedden's wife was up to now.

"Why, look there! Bob," he called out to his son, "if she ain't leaping over this way like a year-old colt!"

In the mean time, neighbor Hedden himself was having but sorry sport in the forest. He saw nothing worth even pointing his gun at, and felt altogether so ill at ease and so fidgety as he trudged along, stepping now upon the soft moss, and now upon fallen branches that crackled even under the stealthy tread of his hunting moccasins, that I doubt whether half the bears hidden in the depths of the forest were not in a livelier mood

than he. Not that he had anything to make him feel especially ill-humored, unless it was the disobedience of his children in having failed to appear at dinner-time—but it seemed to him that there was something going wrong in the world, some screw loose in his affairs that, unless he turned it tight in time, would cause his happiness and the prosperity of his home to fall in ruins about him. After awhile this feeling became so strong that he seated himself upon a stone to think.

"I haven't been as neighborly as I might have been," he reflected: "there's many a turn been wanting by these new-comers, the Morrises, that I might have tended to, if I hadn't been so wrapped up in my own affairs. Come to think, almost the only kindness I've done for nearly a year past was in giving a bag of potatoes to that sick fellow, Po-no-kah, who seemed to me to be a good fellow, as Indians go. However, it ain't much kindness to give to those murderous red-skins when there's plenty of white men wanting help. Well, if I'm not agoin' to shoot anything, I guess I'd better go home."

With these last words, uttered half aloud, neighbor Hedden arose, and walked a few steps in the direction of his home. Presently he paused again, muttering to himself—

"It's blamed queer I haven't heard the youngsters coming down with the scow; I certainly should have heard them if they'd passed anywhere near—guess I'd best walk on a little way up stream."

So saying, he turned, with a new anxiety upon his countenance, and moved with rapid strides toward the rivulet, that still ran rippling on, though the bright sparkles that lit its surface at noon had vanished. Indeed, by this time the sunshine was, fast vanishing, too, for heavy clouds were gathering overhead, while those in the west were gilded on their lower edge.

IV.

THE SEARCH.

Neighbor Hedden, now intent upon his new thoughts, hurried along the bank of the stream. There were pretty tassel-flowers and Jack-in-pulpits growing there, which at any other time he might have plucked, and carried home in his cap for Kitty; but he did not heed them now. Something in the distance had caught his eye, something that, showing darkly through the trees, from a bend in the streamlet, caused his breathing to grow thicker and his stride to change into a run—*it was the empty boat!*

Hastening toward it, in the vain hope that he would find his little ones playing somewhere near the spot, he clutched his ride more firmly, and gasped out their names one by one. Where were they?—his sunny-hearted Bessie, his manly little Rudolph, and Kitty, his bright-eyed darling? Alas! the only answer to the father's call was the angry mutter of the thunder, or the quick lightning that flashed through the gathering gloom!

In frantic haste he searched in every direction.

"Perhaps," thought he, "they have become frightened at the sound of bears, and hidden themselves in a thicket. They may even have got tired and gone to sleep. But where is Tom Hennessy?"

Again and again he returned to the boat, as though some clue might there be found to the missing ones; but as often he turned back in despair, trusting now only to the flashes of the lightning to aid him in his search. The sharp twigs and branches tore his face and hands as, bending low, he forced himself where the tangled undergrowth stood thickest. Soon his hunting-cap was dragged from his head, as by some angry hand; he knew that it had caught upon the branches, and did not even try to find it in the darkness.

The heavy drops of rain, falling upon his bare head, cooled him with a strange feeling of relief. Next his gun, which he had leaned against a tree, while on hands and knees he had forced his way into some brush, was swallowed up in the darkness.

In vain he peered around him at every flash that lit the forest—he could see nothing of it. Suddenly a bright gleam, shooting across his pathway, revealed something that instantly caught his eye—it was a small bit of blue ribbon, such as Bessie often wore. Bending to pick it up, he started back in horror! The light had lasted but an instant, yet it had been long enough to show him that the ribbon was stained with blood, while near it the stones and leaves shone crimson! Even the gnarled roots of a fallen tree were dabbled with a fearful stain. He could see it all distinctly. With upraised arms, he knelt and poured forth an agonized prayer—

"Great God! where are my children? Oh! have mercy! have mercy!"

Flash after flash lighted up the kneeling form. Presently loud voices resounded through the forest:

"What, ho!" "Hedden! Hedden!" "Hennessy! Tom!" "Hallo!"

Hedden stood upright. The voices were familiar. He shouted back lustily, and hurried toward the approaching lanterns. Alas! he came upon faces almost as pale and inquiring as his own—no news on either side!

His neighbors had eagerly responded to the mother's appeal, but so far had searched the forest in vain. If Bouncer only could be found; and, for almost the first time in years, Hedden called, "Bouncer! Bouncer!" without seeing the great fellow leaping toward him. What wonder, though—even Bouncer could scarcely have recognized that voice now!

"Hark!" cried one of the neighbors.

They listened. There was certainly a panting sound from some spot not far away.

"Bouncer! Bouncer!" cried the poor father. The panting again; they lowered their lanterns. What was that lying upon the ground—lying there close by Bouncer? It was Bessie! They rushed toward her. She was lying very still; Bouncer was breathing heavily.

They raised her from the ground.

"Bessie! Bessie! my darling, speak to me!" cried the father.

Her eyes opened slowly; for an instant she did not know who held her.

"Bessie, child, it's father—speak to me!"

She looked at him an instant, then with a pitiful cry buried her face in his bosom.

Bouncer staggered forward, and now, by the light of the lanterns, they could see a broad gash upon his shoulder, and another upon his head. He looked up at Bessie with a mournful whine.

"Oh, Bouncer, dear Bouncer! can't *you* tell me where they are?" cried Bessie, turning suddenly, and gazing upon him with streaming eyes.

The brave fellow tried to wag his tail, but his strength was failing fast.

"He came to me only a little while ago," sobbed Bessie. "Oh! I was so thankful! but he came so slowly I knew he was hurt. I put out my hand and felt him all hot and wet—I can't remember anything since then. Oh! father, don't let poor Bouncer die—see! he is falling! Dear old Bouncer!" and she threw herself down beside him.

The poor fellow turned his head, and tried to lick her hand; then started up, growling with something like his old savageness, and fell over. They tried to lift him; they called his name. Even Bessie attempted to arouse him with a cheerful call. There was no movement;—Bouncer was dead!

It seemed hard to leave the body of the faithful creature lying exposed in the forest, but this was no time to bury him.

All that they could gather from Bessie's confused account of the surprise by the Indians, and her own escape, served to make the party feel that further effort was almost hopeless—still they would not despair. It was decided that one of their number should take the rescued girl back to her mother, while the rest should proceed in their search.

The fury of the storm had passed by this time, though the rain fell in great splashing drops, and the wind muttered angrily among the trees in answer to the distant rumbling of the thunder. Drenched to her skin, and shivering with excitement, Bessie begged that she might go with her father.

"We will find them soon," she pleaded; "I'm sure we will, and then we can all go home together. It will frighten mother so dreadfully to see me coming alone, without Rudolph and Kittie, and Bouncer!"

The man whose lantern had gleamed upon her shaded the light with his great rough hand from the spot where Bouncer lay, and in a voice as tender as a woman's, urged her to go with him at once,

"Go, Bessie," said her father hurriedly, on seeing that she still resisted, "we are losing time."

This was enough. "Good-night, dear father!" she sobbed, as she was led away; "don't tell Rudolph about Bouncer until he gets home, father—it will almost break his heart."

A voice that even Bessie could scarcely recognize called back through the darkness: "Good-night, my child. Go easy, Joe, and keep a sharp look-out."

"Ay! Ay!" answered the man in a suppressed voice, as he grasped more firmly the little hand in his, and hurried on.

After a wearisome tramp, they at last reached the edge of the forest. Bessie started to see a tall, white figure rushing with outstretched arms toward them.

"It's the mother," said Joe, pityingly, raising the lantern as he spoke.

"Oh, Joe!" screamed the poor woman, "have you found them?—tell me, quick!"

"Well—no, Mrs. Hedden," he shouted in reply, "not exactly that—but we've got the gal safe an' sound—not a scratch on her."

In another moment Bessie was in her mother's arms.

"Only me, mother!" she sobbed; "only me; but father's looking for them and, oh! mother, Bouncer is dead!"

The next day brought no better tidings. At noon the men returned from their search, jaded and dispirited. After the first explanations were over, Mr. Hedden called one of the party aside and whispered, huskily—

"Give her this, Dennis—I can't; and tell her it was the only trace we could find."

The mother's quick eye caught sight of the object before her husband had fairly drawn it from beneath his hunting-jacket. "It's Kitty's hood," she cried, stretching forth her hand as she fell senseless to the floor.

That evening, and for many a day afterward, the search was continued but without success; no trace could be

found of either Tom Hennessy, Rudolph, or little Kitty.

V.

THE CAPTIVES.

And what had befallen Tom and the children, on the fearful day of their sail up the beautiful stream? Bessie's eyes had not deceived her when, in one agonized glance, she had seen Tom dash into the forest bearing Rudolph and Kitty in his arms, followed by yelling savages. The chase, however, was a short one; before Tom had advanced many steps his pursuers closed upon him, and tearing the children from his embrace, bound his arms close to his body with deerskin thongs. The children, screaming with terror, struggled in the arms of the Indians and called frantically upon Tom for help; but he, poor fellow, could only turn his pitying eyes upon them and beg them to remain quiet.

"It'll save you from worse things," he groaned. By this time several savages, darting from near hiding-places, had surrounded them and Tom abandoned all hope of escape. Bessie's screams had died away, and he felt sure that she had been killed by the Indian who had first rushed upon her.

After holding a moment's council the Indians began a rapid march, hurrying Tom along with them, and almost dragging the terrified children—who, each with a tiny hand in the grip of a painted warrior, ran panting by their sides. Hurrying on, faster and faster, until even Tom was nearly out of breath, the savages, without exchanging a word among themselves, continued their flight (for such it seemed), carefully avoiding even the breaking of a twig, or anything that could furnish a clue to those who might come in pursuit.

Soon Kitty, who could run no more, was snatched angrily from the ground and carried, like a bundle, under the great muscular arm of one of the savages. But when Rudolph showed evident signs of exhaustion, the Indians paused, evidently consulting together whether they should not tomahawk the children at once. Tom could stand it no longer. He declared that he would not go another step if the children were injured a hair.

"Let me carry them," he cried. "I am strong enough to bear a dozen youngsters—unbind me, I say, and hand 'em over."

Some of the red men knew enough of English to understand his meaning. With a contemptuous sneer one of them tossed Rudolph on Tom's back; then set one of his arms free, and drove him onward with many a brutal stroke. It was hard work for Tom, shackled as he was, to bear the frightened boy, who at times clung to his throat so tightly as to almost strangle him.

"Hold on, Rudolph, boy," he whispered; "lower down—there, that way. Now don't cry; you're father's little man, you know."

"Oh, Tom," sobbed the poor boy, "they'll kill us, I'm sure, as they killed little Annie Green. See, now, how they carry Kitty—how they scrape her face against the bushes; oh! oh!" and Rudolph hid his eyes in Tom's hair, crying as if his little heart would break.

"Hush!" muttered Tom, sternly, "or I'll put you down."

In an instant one of the red men whose look, though grim and fearful enough, showed less savageness than his companions, gruffly took Kitty from the Indian who was carrying her with such cruel carelessness. The change comforted the child, and in a few moments the exhausted little creature was sleeping soundly upon his shoulder, never waking even through the thunder-storm that ere long seemed to rend the forest.

In this way the Indians hurried on, pausing once to change their captive's bands, so as to leave his right arm free instead of his left. Now and then Tom would put Rudolph upon the ground for awhile, and when the little fellow flagged he would lift him up to his shoulder again.

At nightfall the party halted and made a large fire of brush, by which they cooked some venison and hominy, which had been carried by them during the march. After partaking of their meal, and giving their prisoners a liberal supply, they disposed themselves for the night, first taking care to fasten Tom's hands and feet securely, and even to bandage the children's ankles so that they could not stand. In vain Tom peered about him for a chance of escape for himself and his charges—for he would on no account have left them behind—but there was no hope. His knife had been taken away from him, and all night long he was watched by two Indians, who remained near him in a sitting posture. Even when their dusky faces were lost in the darkness, he could see the gleam of their piercing eyes as the fire-light flashed and faded. Once, when the pain from his fastenings became insupportable, he complained to one of the watchers and begged to be unbound for a moment, while a wild hope rushed through his heart that he might then, quick as a flash, seize Rudolph and Kitty and fly through the darkness out of the reach of his pursuers. Vain hope! no opportunity came, though the Indian readily complied with his request. Almost every warrior raised himself upon his elbow in an instant, and he felt the glare of a dozen eyes upon him at the slightest motion he made. After the Indian had loosened the fastenings somewhat, and given Tom a drink of pure spring water, he even offered him some parched corn, and in no unfriendly way motioned to him to try and sleep; but all this show of kindness did not reassure Tom. He had heard enough of Indian warfare to feel that any consideration they might show their prisoners at first was often but a proof that they were reserving them for the greatest cruelties afterward.

Long before daylight the next morning, the march was resumed, in the same manner as on the previous day;

and, indeed, for three or four days it was continued over a country dense with cedar thicket, and becoming rougher and more rocky as they journeyed on. At last, after traveling westward for a distance of ever a hundred miles—as nearly as Tom could estimate—they saw, afar, rising from the lowlands, the smoke of an Indian encampment.

Some one evidently had been on the look-out for them. Before they reached the spot, they were welcomed with loud whoops and yells. Presently the entire community, as it seemed, turned out to receive them—hundreds of savages, men, women, and children—who, when they saw the prisoners, pierced the air with wild shouts of joy.

The men were painted in every conceivable way, with hideous daubs of color upon their limbs and faces, or tattooed so as to look more fearful still; their heads were closely shaved, leaving only a lock on the crown, called the scalp-lock, which was twisted up so as to hold tufts of brilliant feathers. The women, scarcely less hideous than the men (excepting here and there a young maiden, the joy of her tribe, standing apart from the rest), crowded fiercely about, and the children, naked and dirty, whooped and yelled like so many imps.

The scene was certainly not likely to inspire the prisoners with any keen sense of security. Indeed, Tom expected instant death at their hands. As for Rudolph and Kitty, the poor little creatures were stupefied with terror, and clung to Tom in a way that seemed to make the Indian children half mad with delight.

Suddenly all the warriors arranged themselves into two long lines, facing each other—and, brandishing their tomahawks, switches, and clubs, called upon Tom to run the gauntlet! One of the savages proceeded to set free the limbs of the captive, at the same time explaining to him, in broken English, the nature of the ceremony about to be enacted. This was nothing less than for Tom to run between the lines, along their entire length, with the chance of receiving a blow from each Indian as he passed.

"Run like deer!" said the Indian, as he jerked off the last strip of hide from the captive's arm, "then he get more few knock."

Casting one despairing look about him, and seeing not a possible chance of escape, even if he were not bound to the spot by the presence of Rudolph and Kitty, poor Tom entered upon the dread ordeal. His weariness was forgotten as, in very desperation, he flew between the lines so rapidly that for a short distance the blows fell but lightly upon him. Soon a crushing stroke from the back of a tomahawk fell heavily upon his shoulder, but he did not falter; the yells and blows of the savages lent wings to his feet—until, at last, when the end was nearly reached, a huge chief struck him a blow, with his club, that felled him to the ground. Springing up instantly, Tom dashed forward again, and staggered on to the end of the line where he sank to the ground, unable to rise. Up to the last moment he could hear the shrieks of Rudolph rising above the din. The poor child had been forced to witness Tom's suffering from the first.

As soon as Tom opened his eyes he saw the pale, tearful faces of Rudolph and Kitty. "Don't cry, youngsters," he gasped; "be good, and we may get home again yet."

"Oh, come *now*," urged Kitty; "come tell mammy—mammy'll whip'em for hurtin' 'oo; naughty Injins!"

Rudolph, forgetting his misery for an instant, laughed outright at Kitty's words. The next instant he shook his head solemnly—at her—"No, Kitty, mother couldn't whip 'em. But oh, I wish we were home! I wish we were home!" he cried, giving vent to his terrors again, as he saw a group of red men moving hastily towards them.

After dashing water over Tom's wounds and laying him upon a bed of deer-skins, the savages seated themselves in a ring, and held a council to decide the fate of the prisoners. The warriors sat in silence while a great war-club was passed around the circle. Those who were in favor of burning them alive struck the ground heavily with the weapon before handing it to the next warrior; while those who objected to putting them to death in that manner merely passed it on in silence.

Tom saw all this from where he lay, and he knew its meaning well. With a sinking heart he heard the heavy thump of the club as each warrior gave his cruel vote, until at last one chief, holding the club in the air, pointed with a meaning gesture—first at Tom, then at Rudolph and Kitty. The chiefs responded with a grunt of assent to his inquiry concerning the latter, but shook their heads when their attention was directed to Tom. Then the noble fellow knew that not his fate, but that of the children was being decided; while they, unconscious little creatures, looked on half amused at what seemed to them some singular game.

"Hi!" whispered Rudolph to Kitty, "didn't that fellow hit hard, though?—he'll beat I guess."

A moment more and the council was ended. One of the Indians approached the children and daubed their faces with black; it was a fatal sign, for it proved that the vote had been against them—Rudolph and Kitty were to be put to death!

VI.

KA-TE-QUA.

All that night, and for many days afterward, Tom lay in a burning fever, quite unconscious of what was passing around him.

Meanwhile, strange to say, Rudolph and Kitty were treated almost with kindness. They were well fed, and were given the softest deer-skins to lie upon at night. Finding themselves unharmed as the hours went on, the little creatures became more confident, and finally resumed their natural playfulness.

Kitty was never weary of the bright beads and ornaments of the Indian maidens, and Rudolph found great delight in shooting with the bows and arrows of the *papooses* or children, who, in turn, were wonderfully amused at the bad shots of the little pale-face. Now and then, to be sure, the vicious child of some chieftain would amuse itself by pricking Kitty's tender skin with a thorn, and hearing her scream in consequence; or, having seen the black-and-blue marks upon her delicate arms, caused by the rough handling of her captors, they would pinch her flesh and watch for the change of color with intense interest. One day they tried it while Rudolph was standing by, holding the hand of the squaw who had him in charge. No sooner did the usual scream escape Kitty's lips than, quick as thought, the boy broke from the woman's grasp, and, rushing upon his sister's tormentor, laid the little savage in the dust and pummeled him well. Instead of resenting this, the Indians seemed to admire the pluck of the young pale-face, and he rose in their favor at once. Especially did the old squaw, as Indian women are called, applaud him. She was a strange old creature, named Ka-te-qua (*female eagle*), and, being half crazy, was looked upon by the Indians as one inspired by Manitou, or the Great Spirit. Besides, her brother had been a famous Medicine-man^[1] of the tribe; and her two sons, who had been slain in battle, were celebrated braves or warriors, each owning long chains of scalps, which they had taken from their enemies. So, of course, when she wagged her head in approbation of Rudolph's conduct, all the women near her wagged their heads also. Indeed, had Tom remained ill a few weeks longer, the black marks on the children's faces would have worn off without any further injury being done them. But as he grew better, and, finally, was able to sit upright on his deer-skin couch, the malice of his captors was renewed. They resolved not only to carry out the sentence upon the children, but to put the sick pale-face to new tortures as soon as he was strong enough to afford them the requisite amount of sport on the occasion. Accordingly on the fourth day after Rudolph had punished the little "Red-skin," preparations were begun. Heaps of fagots were industriously piled against an oak tree, which stood apart. Tom, with feet shackled, and his arms tightly secured to his sides, was led out to witness the fearful scene. Rudolph and Kitty were seized, and, in spite of their struggles, bound side by side to the tree.

Already the wild dance of the Indians had begun. Frightful yells and whoops filled the air, and even women and little dusky children clapped their hands and shouted with excitement and delight. They brought armfuls of brush and laid it close to the pile. Nothing was needed to complete the deed but to apply the fatal torches, now sending forth hot, fierce gleams into the pale air, and brandished by a dozen yelling savages.

At a signal from an aged chief, the brush was lighted. The fire cracked and snapped; soon its snake-like wreaths curled about the pile, sending thick smoke around the screaming victims, when, suddenly, old Ka-te-qua—she who had taken charge of the children—rushed from the neighboring forest. Tearing through the crowd, she flew to the pile of fagots, and with vigorous strokes scattered the blazing wood in every direction.

Then, turning toward the astonished savages, who had retreated a few paces to escape the burning brands, she addressed them passionately in the Indian tongue:

"The Great Spirit," she cried, "scowls upon you—the very flames hiss in the wet grass. The sons of Ka-te-qua are gone to the happy hunting grounds of the dead. Her wigwam is dark. The young pale-faces are to her like the water-lilies of the stream. Why, when she was in the forest gathering herbs for the sick of her tribe, did ye steal them from her lodge like dogs?"

"Is the tongue of Ka-te-qua forked? Has she not said that no warrior need hunt the deer for the young pale-faces? With her they shall grow like hickory saplings, towering with strength. The deer shall not be more fleet than they, nor the songs of the birds more glad. The sun shall paint their white skins. The love of the red man shall enter their hearts: they shall be as the young of our tribe. Unbind them! Give them to Ka-te-qua, or by the next moon a burning fever shall fall upon you. Like panthers will you bite the dust. All the waters of the great cataract cannot quench your thirst, and your mightiest hunters will be as women."

She paused. A fine-looking chieftain arose and spoke:

"The sister of the great Medicine-man has spoken well. She dwells alone in her wigwam Her arm is strong. Her eye is keen, like the hawk's. The deer fall before her, and her arrow can find the heart of the grizzly bear. Her corn stands higher than the grass of the prairie. She can feed the young pale-faces. The Great Spirit gives them to her. Let it be so."

A council was held at once. This time more than half the chieftains passed the club on in silence, for Ka-te-qua, as I have said, was respected among them; she had great powers of healing, and many of the Indians regarded her with a superstitious reverence.

The children were unbound and borne in state to the old squaw's wigwam. From that hour, though they were closely watched and guarded, their lives were safe.

[Footnote 1: Mystery-man or Indian prophet.]

VII.

BIG TOM.

From the conduct of the Indians towards Tom, it was evident that his time for torture had not yet arrived. He therefore had tact enough to remain "weak" as long as possible, tottering languidly about the grounds whenever they allowed him the liberty of exercising his limbs, and drinking the mixtures and decoctions of Ka-te-qua with the patience of a martyr. In the meantime, the shrewd fellow took care to win the good-will of the tribe by taking apparent interest in their games, and showing a great amount of admiration at their feats of strength and agility. He amused them too by the display of numerous accomplishments peculiar to himself, such as whistling in close imitation of the songs of various birds, and performing feats of jugglery that he had long ago learned in his native town. He could bark like a dog and howl like a wolf; imitate the distant tramping of horses' feet, and give the sound of a whizzing arrow so perfectly that the oldest chiefs would turn their head quickly in the direction of the sound. Neither at this, however, nor at any other of Tom's performances, would they show the slightest change of countenance, for an Indian never allows himself to exhibit feelings of surprise, considering it quite beneath the dignity of his race to do so. Even when, by some dexterous trick, Tom would show them two or three acorns under a leaf where their reason told them there could be none, and then as mysteriously cause the same acorns to disappear, the stony faces looking on never changed a muscle though at heart they were probably quite as astounded as the Welsh monster was supposed to be when Jack the Giant-Killer, performed such wonderful feats with hasty-pudding. By degrees, as Tom deemed it prudent to appear stronger, he would dance the sailors' hornpipe for them, or sing wild, rollicksome songs, or make beautiful rustic seats and bowers for the squaws. He was a capital marksman, too, and soon won respect by showing that he could handle a musket with the best of them. The few Indians who owned guns had become very expert in their use; and Tom, whenever they had trials of their skill, took care to shoot just well enough to prove himself a good marksman, without provoking their anger by excelling too often.

After awhile, in his desire to win their confidence, he even went so far as to signify to the Indians that he would like to become one of them; that their mode of life suited him well, and he would be glad to hunt and fish with them and be a pale-face no more. Alas! poor fellow, he did not know what he was saying, or how soon he would find out that even in cases of great temptation no one can tell a lie without suffering unhappy consequences. The savages took him at his word. They held a council. After it was over, while most of them were still smoking their long, richly ornamented pipes with great deliberation, two or three of the Indians seized him and gravely commenced plucking out his hair by the roots.^[2] Soon Tom twitched from head to foot, and water stood in his eyes; but the red men still kept on with their work, dipping their fingers in ashes occasionally to enable them to take a better hold. Before long his head was completely bald, with the exception of one long tuft upon his crown, called the scalp-lock. This was immediately stiffened and plaited, so as to stand upright and hold a variety of ornaments, which his glum hairdresser fastened upon it. Then two old Indians pierced his nose and ears and hung big rings in the smarting holes. They then took off his clothing and painted his body with every variety of color. Next they hung a gaily embroidered cloth about his loins, put a wampum^[3] chain about his neck and fastened silver bands on his right arm. When this was done the whole party gave three shrill whoops, and men, women, and children crowded around him, making the most frantic gestures, and uttering the most horrid sounds that ever a poor fibbing white man heard.

Next the maidens of the tribe rushed upon him, and, hurrying him to a stream that ran near by, dragged him into the water until it reached his waist, and tried to force his head under. This of course, aroused all his spirit of resistance; but, when one of the girls, named She-de-ah (wild sage), cried into his ear. "No kill! no kill!" he concluded to submit.

After this he was ducked and held under most unmercifully, until, believing by this time that "the white blood must be all washed out of him," they led him up the shore, all shivering and dripping, and presented him to their principal chief.

The next performance was to dress him in an Indian shirt ornamented with feathers and beads and bits of porcupine quill. They put leggins on his legs and moccasins on his feet, and, seating him upon a bear-skin, gave him flint and steel to strike a light with; then a pouch, a tomahawk, some tobacco, and a long pipe. Then the chiefs seated themselves beside him, and smoked in silence. Tom knew well enough that he was expected to smoke too, and filled and lit his pipe accordingly, never dreaming of the consequences. Old as he was, nearly twenty, this was his "first smoke," and very soon the poor fellow found himself growing deadly sick. He could feel the cold chills creeping one after another into his very face. Finally, something within him seemed to turn somersaults, when, yielding to a sudden impulse, he flung the pipe upon the ground, and rushed into the recesses of the wigwam, where he usually slept. This the Indians, who attach an almost sacred importance to the pipe, took as a great affront; and only when Tom afterward, by the most earnest gestures, explained to them the real cause of his conduct, did they allow their injured feelings to be pacified; though it cut him sorely to notice the expressions of contempt, and ridicule that were soon lavished upon him. Whether this proof of what seemed in Indian opinion a want of manliness had anything to do with their conduct or not, I cannot say, but certain it is that no further ceremonies towards making him a red-man were performed though he was allowed to wear his Indian costume. Neither did they allow him to hunt with them, as he had hoped. Whenever they went forth to shoot the bison or deer, or to trap the beavers, or wage war with hostile tribes, they always left him with the squaws, the old men, and the warriors who remained at home to take charge of the settlement.

Rudolph and Kitty were sorely frightened when they first saw the strange figure, "half Indian, half Tom," as Rudolph afterward described him, stalk into Ka-te-qua's wigwam. His bald head and painted body struck poor Kitty with dismay. When he spoke soothingly to her, and gave her a handful of bright feathers, she ventured to approach him, though she cried pitifully all the time for Tom, dear, big Tom, who knew papa and mamma, and Bessie and Bouncer.

Neither Kitty nor Rudolph had forgotten the brave dog through all these days of absence, and they loved to hold long conversations with Tom about him; though the little creatures oftener talked of their parents and Bessie, as they lay at night upon their beds of dried grass.

[Footnote 2: See American Adventure by Land and Sea. Harper Bros. 1842.]

[Footnote 3: *Wampum*. Beads made of shells, used by North American Indians as money, the shells run on strings, and are wrought into belts and ornaments.]

VIII.

BOUNCER'S WORK.

There was another person in the settlement besides the captives, who was not likely to forget Bouncer very soon. This was an Indian who, wounded and exhausted, had reached the settlement four days after the arrival of the prisoners. He had an ugly mark upon his throat, and another on his chest, and he sulked aside from the rest of his tribe as though he felt that his wounds were ignoble, and a dishonor to his Indian birth. It was his blood that Farmer Hedden had seen on that fearful night; and when more than once the agonized father had listened to what seemed to be the tread of some skulking wolf, he had heard this very Indian, who, half dead with pain and loss of blood, was dragging himself slowly through the depths of the forest.

This discomfited warrior had looked upon Tom and the two little pale-faces with dislike, from the hour when he first saw them as prisoners in the encampment. They were constant reminders to him of his mortifying struggle with the dog. He felt it all the more because, though his jacket and leggings were trimmed with the scalps of his enemies, he had lately been forced to receive charity from the white man's hand. This was when, starving and nearly frozen, he had fallen helpless in the forest, after an unlucky trapping excursion; a settler had found him there, given him food and drink and sent him on his way with a bountiful supply of provisions.

Big Tom saw the dark looks of this Indian, and regarded him with suspicion; but little Kitty was quite unconscious of the resentful feelings of "the sick man," as she called him. In fact, as soon as she grew more familiar with the Indians, she often sought him in preference to the rest, and loved to sit upon the ground beside him, and trace with her tiny fingers the patterns worked upon his leggings and moccasins.

At first the grim warrior repulsed these familiarities; but when, as he began to mingle with his tribe, he heard her sweet voice calling him by name, and saw her day after day display her store of beads and feathers at his feet, his feelings gradually softened. Before long he ceased to scowl upon her when she lifted her sunny face to his, and, on rare occasions, he even allowed her to count his arrows.

Once, when Rudolph had shot a wild turkey, he rushed to Ka-te-qua's wigwam with his prize, for he had learned to love the strange old squaw, though he feared her, too, sometimes. Kitty clapped her hands with delight at her brother's skill, and begged him to go with her and show the dead bird to her favorite Indian.

"Come, Rudolph; come show 'Nokah,'" she pleaded, pulling the young hunter by the arm. "Come twick! he goin' away."

Rudolph suffered himself to be led. They found Po-no-kah standing alone by a tree, fully equipped for the hunt. He looked at the turkey and gave a grunt, not particularly flattering to Rudolph's vanity.

"I've shot THREE!" said the boy, holding up three fingers to make his meaning clearer.

"Ugh!" grunted the savage again. "Paleface no shoot much."

"But I'm growing," persisted Rudolph. "When I'm big, I'm going to shoot bears and bison. Did you kill the bears to get all these claws?" he added, pointing up to Po-no-kah's necklace, which was formed entirely of huge bear-claws, strung through the thickest end.

"Ugh," replied the Indian, nodding his plumed head, "me shoot him."

"And these scalps," said Rudolph, shuddering as he pointed to the fringe of human hair hanging from the buckskin leggings; "did *you* get all these?"

"Ugh," he answered grimly, nodding the plumes again.

"You are bad, then," exclaimed Rudolph, looking fearlessly into Po-no-kah's eyes. "I know *you*," he added suddenly, after gazing at him intently for an instant. "Father brought you into our kitchen last winter, and I ran behind the door. Mother gave you meat and hot drink, and father warmed you and gave you a bag of potatoes. Oh!" he continued, clasping Po-no-kah's knee, "*you* know where our home is. Nearly every night I dream that mother is calling us. Show me the way, please do. Ka-te-qua says there are dreadful things in the forest that will eat me up, but I am not afraid. Oh, do tell us the way home!"

The Indian gave a sharp look at the sobbing boy, and seemed in part to understand his words. Stooping, he whispered in a stern tone: "No speak; no tell Ka-te-qua;"—and without one glance of encouragement, he stalked away to the spot where the other Indians had assembled, preparing for the hunt.

The children saw him no more for weeks. Rudolph remembered his parting words, and though he could not fully understand Po-no-kah's motive, he faithfully obeyed his command. Not even to Tom did he relate what had occurred.

IX.

INDIAN LIFE.

Rudolph and Kitty learned many things from the Indians that they never would have studied in the rough school-house near their pretty home; and they soon became familiar with many singular customs that at first filled them with wonder.

For instance: when they, or any of the little papooses, were naughty or disobedient, they were put under what might be called the water-cure treatment. Instead of being whipped or locked up in a dark pantry—as was, I am sorry to say, the custom among some white people—they were simply "ducked" under water until they became manageable. Winter or summer, it was all the same. A bad child would very soon become a wet child, if there were any water within a mile.

There are bright sides, as well as dark, to the Indian character; and in considering their cruelties and inhuman practices, we must remember that the white man has not always been just to him or set a good example to his uncivilized brother, or been careful not to provoke him to deeds of resentment and wrong. An Indian rarely forgets a kindness, and he never tells a lie. He is heroic, and deems it beneath a man's dignity to exhibit the slightest sign of pain under any circumstances. Among the Sioux tribe of that time, the boys were trained from the first to bear as much hardship as possible. They had a ceremony called the Straw Dance, in which children were forced to maintain a stately and measured step, while bunches of loose straws tied to their naked bodies were lighted and allowed to burn slowly away. Any poor little creature who flinched or "broke step" was sorely punished and held in disgrace.

There were certain dances among the Indians performed by the warriors, before going either to battle or to the hunt. If to battle, they spent hours, and often whole days and nights together, in the fearful war-dance, accompanied by clashing on their drumlike instruments, and whoops that rang long and loud amid the echoing hills. If to the hunt, the Bear-Dance or the Buffalo-Dance was kept up nights and days before starting, in order to propitiate the Bear Spirit or Buffalo Spirit, whichever it might be. They had a funeral dance also, which was very solemn and impressive. And if a chieftain was to be buried, either in the river, or, as among the Mandans, on a rough platform erected on poles high up from the ground, the warriors danced before his wigwam, and assigned to a few of their number the duty of seeing that his widow and children, if he left any, should never be without food and shelter.

Kitty and Rudolph often looked on with, mingled feelings of terror and delight, while some of these strange ceremonies were being enacted. It was curious to see the stalwart warriors, with bent backs and glum faces, and many a grunt or whoop, stamp through the measured dance. Often Kitty would clutch her brother's arm in terror, when, in strange concert, the savages would suddenly halt, and with fiendish look and stealthy gesture, seem to be listening to the approach of an enemy.

Sometimes, too, the women danced, but always apart from the men. Even in their games the warriors and squaws never played together. Among the Crow Indians, famous for their long black hair, it was not uncommon for a thousand young men to play in one game of ball for three or four consecutive days without interruption. As soon as one player retired, exhausted, another took his place. Often hundreds of women played together, and they were generally as expert as the men in throwing and catching the ball.

Another strange feature among Indian customs, was the importance attached to the *medicine-bag*. Every warrior had one, and would no sooner hunt, or go to battle, or appear among his tribe without it, than he would neglect to wear his bow or his scalping-knife. Not that the bag contained any medicine, such as we understand by the word—for it was nothing but a small piece of skin sewed like a bag, curiously ornamented, and stuffed with straw or leaves—but because he regarded it as a *charm*. With him, "medicine" meant some mysterious power that would protect and guide him, and propitiate the unseen powers in his favor. When about to obtain his medicine, the young Indian went alone to some solitary river or lake in the depths of the forest, or mounted to some lonely peak. Here he fasted, and remained until, sleeping, he dreamed. The first animal he dreamed about, whether it were a bear, buffalo, deer, weasel, or bird or reptile of any kind, became his "medicine" forever. He at once hunted until he found one, and obtained its skin for a bag.

Rudolph and Kitty looked with awe upon many of the rare medicine-bags of the tribe, though they were never on any account allowed to touch them. Indeed, Kitty had managed to make a rough little one for Rudolph, dotted with clumps of beads, and he wore it next his heart with secret pride. The little fellow had once, while tramping through the forest with Katequa, seen a number of deer gathered around a spring, or salt-lick, as it is called, and had quivered with frightened delight to see the finest one fall wounded by her arrow. When the large eyes of the wounded creature had turned plaintively toward him, he had tried not to feel sorry, but his heart ached in spite of his efforts,

"I shall be a mighty hunter one of these days," he said to Kitty on his return; "but I won't shoot deer, for they look at you just as if they wanted to speak. I'll get bears though, lots of 'em, and buffalo; and I'll have a fine trap when I get home, and catch badgers and foxes, just as the Indians do."

Tom and Rudolph saw with indignation that, throughout the village, the labor and drudgery were forced upon the squaws, while the warriors stretched themselves lazily upon the ground, or smoked their pipes under the spreading trees. As for Kitty, she was too busy watching the women cook, dig, chop, and carry, to make any moral reflections.

She loved, also, to sit beside them when they prepared the skins brought in from the hunt, or while they were busy with their curious sewing, so different from that with which she had seen her mother occupied.

Bright-colored rags, feathers, beads, porcupine-quills, and even scraps of tin, were the ornaments upon which the squaws relied to make the toilets of their tribe "stylish" and beautiful; and Kitty—tiny little woman that she was—soon grew to agree with them perfectly in matters of taste.

To be sure, the Indian women never did anything quite so barbarous as to put their little girls' feet into narrow shoes with high heels, nor fasten tight belts about their waists, so that the God-given machinery within could hardly work. But they did many preposterous things, for all that. They painted their bodies and tattooed their skins, by pricking figures on the flesh and rubbing in some staining juice when the blood appeared. They even pierced their noses so that bright rings could dangle from them. Many, too, hung bits of metal from their ears in a similar way—but that may not strike my civilized readers as being a very barbarous custom.

X.

KA-TE-QUA'S "GOOD NIGHT."

Thus weeks and months passed away, not so wearily to the prisoners, as to the poor, sorrowing hearts that mourned for them at home. Tom's brain was always busy in planning some mode of escape for himself and his little charges. But, as he was still closely guarded, never being left alone for an instant, night or day, and as the children slept in the wigwam of Ka-te-qua, whose eyes seemed never intended to close, he concluded to wait patiently rather than to risk the lives of all three by an unsuccessful attempt.

Meantime, Ka-te-qua's strong arms grew feeble, her arrow became less fatal in its aim, and her strange fits of moodiness filled Rudolph and Kitty with dread.

For hours she would sit at the entrance of her wigwam, chanting mournfully in the Indian tongue. At such times she would compel the children to remain within,—becoming frantic with crazy rage should they attempt to force past her into the pleasant sunshine; and they would sit together in the shadow, hoping that by some whim she would walk away, or that the long, long chant would cease. One afternoon she kept them waiting in this way for hours. The sun sank lower and lower into the distant prairie, and the crimson clouds faded to a dull gray. Rudolph and Kitty sat listening to the wailing tones of Ka-te-qua's voice until, as the evening grew dark and chilly, they found for themselves a scanty supper of parched corn, and after whispering their simple prayer, groped their way to bed.

The strange old creature ceased singing after a while, and entered the wigwam. They could distinguish her form as she slowly moved about, before throwing herself down near the entrance to indulge in her usual cat-like sleep. Afraid to speak to her, for they were not quite sure in what mood she might be, they watched her movements as well as they could, and at last felt sure that she was tottering slowly toward them.

Kitty clasped Rudolph's neck more tightly, and broke into a frightened sob. In an instant, they felt her hand steal very gently over their tumbled curls.

"Night! night!" she whispered softly.

"Good-night, Ka-te-qua," they answered in a breath, for their fear was all gone now.

"Night, night," repeated the voice, as kindly as their own mother could have said it, and after giving each a caressing stroke, their old friend moved softly away.

Very early the next morning the children were awakened by a buzzing of many voices. Ka-te-qua had been found lying stiff and cold at the entrance of her wigwam. Not a trace of injury of any kind was upon her. The Indians, crowding round, shook their heads gravely. Ka-te-qua was wise, they said, but Manitou had sent for her. She had gone to the happy Hunting Grounds of her fathers.

XI.

FIRE-WATER BECOMES MASTER.

After a long absence, the hunting party returned. As soon as Po-no-kah's stalwart form appeared in sight, Rudolph and Kitty rushed, with a cry of joy, to meet him; but, to their great dismay, he pushed them away with a frown and a grunt that told them plainly that they were to be familiar with him no more. Poor children!—Ka-te-qua gone, Po-no-kah changed, and Tom scarcely heeding them,—they felt friendless indeed. Kind words they never heard now, and kind looks rarely, except when Tom threw them a hasty glance that warmed their hearts, though they scarcely knew why. They did not know how his feelings yearned towards them, nor how eagerly he would have joined in all their simple pursuits, had he dared to do so; but the poor fellow had discovered that any notice he took of the children aroused suspicion, and he therefore concluded to pursue a

prudent course.

In the meantime the children had one great joy. Their love for each other was always the same. Kitty trusted in the belief that "mammy" would send for them; but Rudolph looked ever up to the Great Love that he knew was watching over them and the dear ones at home.

"If it's *right*, Kitty," he would whisper, "I *know* we'll go home one of these days. Don't be afraid. God will take care of us."

"But Dod took Te-qua away," Kitty would sometimes say.

"Yes, I know He did, Kitty," and Rudolph's eyes would look sadly up to the blue sky, "I know He did, but then I think she was tired and wanted to go."

Summer, autumn, and winter had passed away, and now came the season when the Indians carried their largest supply of furs and skins to sell in the city far over the prairies. Often, after their hunts, they had met with traders, and exchanged the skins they had taken for such articles as the white man had to give—guns, blankets, knives, powder, pipes, and fire-water;^[4] but this was the grand trading excursion of the year.

When the party returned, after a few weeks' absence, they brought with them among other things, a keg of whisky. After the first welcome was over, the savages held a council.

It was soon evident that a fearful scene was to be enacted. The prisoners had seen something of the kind before, but never on so large a scale as this.

The Indians had decided to hold a revel, in which nearly all the men were to drink fire-water until they could take no more.

Even these savages knew the horrible consequences of parting with their wits in this manner. Before the drinking commenced, they appointed a few able-bodied Indians who were to remain sober and take care of the rest. They then deprived themselves of all their dangerous weapons—tomahawks, clubs, guns, arrows, and knives, and prepared for their fearful riot.

The scene that followed need not be described.

Soon the confusion became fearful. The few sober chiefs were constantly risking their lives in their efforts to prevent mischief. Squaws were screaming, and frightened children were hiding in every direction.

Tom, who was half forgotten in the general excitement, saw Po-no-kah whisper hurriedly to one of the women. In a moment she caught Rudolph and Kitty by their hands and stole cautiously with them into the forest. Tom's suspicions were aroused. He started up only to feel a strong arm force him back to the log upon which he had been seated.

"No move!" muttered a voice, close by his ear. "Soon come.—Be very drunk."

In a few moments, while the tumult and uproar were at their height, Tom saw Po-no-kah reeling toward the forest.

Wondering what the fellow meant to do, yet filled with a wild hope, Tom watched his chance, staggered past the rioters, and managed to follow the warrior by another path, without creating any suspicion.

When, at last, they met, Po-no-kah had Rudolph and Kitty in his arms, and, staggering no more, was hurrying through the forest, armed with bow, quiver, and traveling pouch. The astonished prisoner, after taking Kitty from his companion's arms, followed him in silence. Not for hours did Po-no-kah look back or speak, and then it was but to say a few broken words:

"Po-no-kah was hungry. The father of the little pale-faces fed him. Po-no-kah no snake—he remember—Po-no-kah take 'em home."

[Footnote 4: Brandy, rum, and all alcoholic liquors.]

XII.

SHOWING HOW THE BAG OF POTATOES CAME BACK AGAIN.

Farmer Hedden was busily at work in the fields, looking ten years older than on that sunny day, nearly a year before, when he had shouted a laughing "good-bye" to Tom and the little ones.

Bessie was trudging alone from school, wondering why the birds sang less sweetly than they did the May before, and wishing that the noble dog that bounded by her side looked a little more like the first Bouncer.

Mrs. Hedden sat with her brother in the lonely cottage, talking on the old, old theme; the memory of that terrible night had never left her heart.

"No, no, Robert," she said at length, in reply to some appeal from her brother, "we must not go. I know it would be better for us to sell out and go to Philadelphia. But it cannot be; we must never leave this spot."

"Surely, Betsy," urged her brother, "you cannot be so wild as to suppose—"

"No!" she interrupted, "I never dare even hope for that now. I know my lost darlings are not in this world, and yet—and yet why not hope? why not think that perhaps—"

A shadow fell upon the threshold. What wonder that the mother sprang forward with a cry of joy! What wonder that Farmer Hedden, looking from the field, came bounding toward the house! Po-no-kah was there—Po-no-kah and little Kitty!

Laughing,—crying,—clasping her dear Kitty frantically to her heart, then gazing at her at arms' length, Mrs. Hedden raised her eyes to the Indian, and gasped faintly—

"Rudolph? the boy—is he—"

She could say no more.

"Yes—boy all good," answered Po-no-kah, eagerly, "white man say break heart see two—he here."

Just then Farmer Hedden, Tom Hennessy, and Rudolph rushed in.

Oh, what a meeting that was! And Bessie, too, was there before they knew it. Such laughter—such tears—such shouts of rejoicing had never been known in the Hedden cottage before!

Soon the barking of a dog was heard. Rudolph sprang from his father's arms:

"Oh, it's Bouncer!" he cried; "let me see him. Here, Bouncer!"

Bouncer indeed came leaping in at the call, but it was not *the* Bouncer, though it was a great, shaggy fellow, worthy of the name.

Rudolph started back; the dog, too, eyed him with a suspicious look.

"That isn't Bouncer! Where is he, mother?" exclaimed the poor boy, looking up with a bewildered glance.

Po-no-kah slunk aside.

"Do tell me where Bouncer is," he repeated,

"We are all here but him. Here, Bouncer! Bouncer!" and he ran to the door.

Bessie wound her arms about his neck.

"Rudolph, darling," she sobbed, "don't cry. Bouncer was killed on *that* day. He saved my life, Rudolph—"

"Bouncer dead!" screamed the boy.

Just then the new dog, seeing Bessie and her brother so close together, felt that he had a right there, too. With many a frantic leap and bound he endeavored to draw Rudolph's attention, until, finally, the tearful eyes of the boy were turned upon him. Then, if ever a dog tried to do his best, that fellow did. He sprang into the air, barked, tumbled, leaped, whined, wagged his tail till it almost spun, and, finally, licked Rudolph in the face until the chubby cheeks shook with laughter.

All this time Tom's Indian dress had scarcely been noticed. At last Mrs. Hedden, grasping both his hands, exclaimed:

"Why, what in the world have you been doing with yourself? I knew you, though, the moment you came in. Oh, Tom, how you have suffered!"

Tom tried to answer her; but somehow his great faithful heart was overflowing, and he could only look at her with a tearful smile.

"That's nothing," he said at length. "It's all ended well, anyhow. But a fellow can't help thinking of his own folks, dead and gone, when he sees such a meeting as this."

Mr. Hedden, who had been talking with Po-no-kah, walked over to Tom and placed his hand upon his shoulder.

"We are your folks now, my faithful fellow. God bless you! I can never repay what I owe you. Remember, our home is yours from this hour. I shall take no denial."

"Good!" exclaimed Bessie, clapping her hands; "now I shall have two brothers!"

Mrs. Hedden, who had listened to Po-no-kah's broken words, kissed and hugged Tom in her motherly way. "Dear me," she exclaimed, "how can we make you look like a white man again; and to think you have had chances to escape and would not leave the children," and then she hugged him again.

"Ugh!" grunted the Indian, nodding his head and holding up three fingers—to signify that Tom had had three chances.

"Pooh!" said the brave fellow, blushing through all the red paint, "I didn't have any at all until a month or so ago, and I'd got kind o' used to staying then."

Soon the red man turned to go. In vain the grateful parents tried to force their gifts upon him, and to persuade him to at least partake of some refreshment after his long journey.

He pointed to his hunting-pouch and his bow, as if to say that they would furnish all the the food he required,

and nodded westward to show that he must be far on his way before sundown.

As Tom gave him a hearty hand-shake and the rest crowded about him, all, even to little Kitty, thanking him over and over again, he waved them off with dignity.

"No thank," he said; "Po-no-kah was cold and hungry; the father of the young pale-faces gave him food. He come tell white man Indian no forget."

Tom expressed anxiety lest their deliverer should suffer for his act when he returned to his tribe.

"Po-no-kah no fraid" answered the Indian grimly with almost a smile upon his face. And, nodding a farewell to little Kitty, he strode majestically away.

A year later, the Heddens settled on a fine farm near Philadelphia. Rudolph and Kitty doubtless walked many a time by the old Hall where our Declaration of Independence was signed.

Bessie Hedden's sons when they grew up became pioneers themselves; and their names were Hennessy; so you see the maiden probably, in the course of time, changed her mind about having Tom for a brother.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PO-NO-KAH: AN INDIAN TALE OF LONG AGO ***

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