Reid Mayne

The White Squaw

Томас Майн Рид

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Майн Рид Т.

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Содержание

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Chapter One.
A Deadly Introduction

The last golden gleams of the setting sun sparkled across the translucent waters of Tampa Bay. This fading light fell upon shores fringed with groves of oak and magnolia, whose evergreen leaves became gradually darkened by the purple twilight.

A profound silence, broken by the occasional notes of a tree-frog, or the flapping of the night-hawk's wings, was but the prelude to that wonderful concert of animated nature heard only in the tropical forest.

A few moments, and the golden lines of trembling light had disappeared, while darkness almost palpable overshadowed the scene.

Then broke forth in full chorus the nocturnal voices of the forest.

The mocking-bird, the whip-poor-will, the bittern, the bell-frog, grasshoppers, wolves, and alligators, all joined in the harmony incident to the hour of night, causing a din startling to the ear of a stranger.

Now and then would occur an interval of silence, which rendered the renewal of the voices all the more observable.

During one of these pauses a cry might have been heard differing from all the other sounds.

It was the voice of a human being, and there was one who heard it.

Making his way through the woods was a young man, dressed in half-hunter costume, and carrying a rifle in his hand. The cry had caused him to stop suddenly in his tracks.

After glancing cautiously around, as if endeavouring to pierce the thick darkness, he again advanced, again came to a stop, and remained listening. Once more came that cry, in which accents of anger were strangely commingled with tones appealing for help.

This time the sound indicated the direction, and the listener's resolution was at once taken.

Thrusting aside the undergrowth, and trampling under foot the tall grass, he struck into a narrow path running parallel to the shore, and which led in the direction whence the cry appeared to have come.

Though it was now quite dark, he seemed easily to avoid impediments, which even in broad daylight would have been difficult to pass.

The darkness appeared no barrier to his speed, and neither the overhanging branches, nor the wood-bine roots stayed his progress.

About a hundred paces further on, the path widened into a rift that led to an opening, sloping gradually down to the beach.

On reaching its edge, he paused once more to listen for a renewal of the sound.

Nothing save the familiar noises of the night greeted his ear.

After a short pause, he kept on for the water's edge, with head well forward, and eyes strained to penetrate the gloom.

At that moment the moon shot out from behind a heavy bank of clouds, and, with a brilliant beam, disclosed to his eager gaze a tableau of terrible interest.

Down by the water's edge lay the body of an Indian youth, motionless, and to all appearance dead; while stooping over it was another youth, also an Indian. He appeared to be examining the body.

For some seconds there was no change in his attitude. Then, all at once he raised himself erect, and with a tomahawk that flashed in the moonlight above his head, appeared in the act of dealing a blow.

The hatchet descended; but not upon the body that lay prostrate.

A sharp report ringing on the air for an instant silenced all other sounds. The would-be assassin sprang up almost simultaneously, and two corpses instead of one lay along the earth.

So thought he who fired the shot, and who was the young man already described. He stayed not to speculate, but rushed forward to the spot where the two Indians lay. He had recognised them both. The one upon the ground was Nelatu, the son of Oluski, a distinguished Seminole chief. The other was Red Wolf, a well-grown youth belonging to the same tribe.

Only glancing at the would-be assassin to see that he was dead, he bent over the body of Nelatu, placed his hand upon the region of his heart, at the same time anxiously scanning his features.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation of surprise. Beneath his fingers a weak pulsation gave signs of life. Nelatu might yet be saved.

Pulling off his hat, he ran down to the beach, filled it with water, and, returning, sprinkled the forehead of the young Indian.

Then taking a flask containing brandy from his pouch, he poured a portion of its contents down the throat of the unconscious youth.

These kindly offices he repeated several times, and was finally rewarded for his pains. The blood slowly mantled Nelatu's cheek; a shivering ran through his frame; and with a deep sigh he gazed dreamily upon his preserver, and at the same time faintly murmured "Warren."

"Yes, Warren! Speak, Nelatu. What is the meaning of this?"

The Indian had only the strength to mutter the words "Red Wolf," at the same time raising his hand to his side with apparent difficulty.

The gesture made his meaning clear. Warren's gaze rested upon a deep wound from which the blood was still welling.

By the tremulous movement of his lips, Warren saw that he was endeavouring to speak again. But no sound came from them. His eyes gradually became closed. He had once more fainted.

Warren instantly flung off his coat, tore one of the sleeves from his shirt, and commenced staunching the blood.

After a time it ceased to flow, and then tearing off the second sleeve, with his braces knotted together, he bound up the wound.

The wounded youth slowly recovered consciousness, and, looking gratefully up into his face, pressed the hand of his deliverer.

"Nelatu owes Warren life. He will some day show his gratitude."

"Don't think of that now. Tell me what has happened? I heard your cry, and hastened to your assistance."

"Not Nelatu's cry," responded the Indian, with a faint blush of pride suffusing his face. "Nelatu is the son of a chief. He knows how to die without showing himself a woman. It was Red Wolf who cried out."

"Red Wolf!"

"Yes; Red Wolf is a coward – a squaw; 'twas he who cried out."

"He will never cry out again. Look there!" said Warren, pointing to the lifeless corpse that lay near.

Nelatu had not yet seen it. Unconscious of what had transpired, he believed that Red Wolf, supposing him dead, had gone away from the spot.

Warren explained.

Still more gratefully did the Indian youth gaze upon the face of his preserver.

"You had an encounter with Red Wolf? I can see that, of course; it was he who gave you this wound?"

"Yes, but I had first defeated him. I had him on the ground in my power. I could have taken his life. It was then that, like a coward, he called for help."

"And after?"

"I pitied and let him rise. I expected him to leave me, and go back to the village. He feared that I might speak of his defeat to our tribe, and for this he determined that my tongue should be for ever silent. I was not thinking of it when he thrust me from behind. You know the rest."

"And why the quarrel?"

"He spoke wicked words of my sister, Sansuta."

"Sansuta!" exclaimed Warren, a strange smile overshadowing his features.

"Yes; and of you."

"The dog; then he doubly deserved death. And from *me*!" he added, in a tone not loud enough for Nelatu to hear, "what a lucky chance."

As he said this he spurned the body with his foot.

Then turning to the Indian, he asked —

"Do you think you could walk a little, Nelatu?"

The brandy had by this time produced an effect. Its potent spirit supplied the loss of blood, and Nelatu felt his strength returning to him.

"I will try," said the wounded youth. "Nelatu's hour has not yet come. He must not die till he has paid his debt to Warren."

"Then lean on me. My canoe is close by. Once in it you can rest at your ease."

Nelatu nodded consent.

Warren assisted him to rise, and, half carrying, half supporting, conducted him to the canoe.

Carefully helping him aboard, he shoved the craft from the shore, and turned its prow in the direction of the white settlement.

The moon, that had become again obscured, once more burst through the black clouds, lighting up the fronds of the feathery palms that flung their shadows far over the pellucid waves.

The concert of the nocturnal forest, for a time stayed by the report of the rifle, burst out anew as the boat glided silently out of sight.

Chapter Two.
The Settlement

The site of the settlement to which the canoe was being directed merits description.

It was upon the northern shore of Tampa Bay.

The soil that had been cleared was rich in crops of cotton, indigo, sugar, with oranges, and the ordinary staples of food.

Through the cultivated lands, mapped out like a painter's palette, ran a crystal stream, from which the rice fields were watered by intersecting rivulets, looking like silver threads in a tissue.

Orange groves margined its course, running sinuously through the settlement.

In places it was lost to sight, only to re-appear with some new feature of beauty.

Here and there it exhibited cascades and slight waterfalls that danced in the sunlight, sending up showers of prismatic spray.

There were islets upon which grew reeds, sedges, and canes, surmounted by groups of caricas, and laurel-magnolias, the exogenous trees overtopped by the tall, feathery palm.

In its waters wild fowl disported themselves, scattering showers of luminous spray as they flapped their wings in delight.

Birds of rare plumage darted hither and thither along its banks, enlivening the groves with their jocund notes.

Far beyond, the swamp forest formed a dark, dreary back-ground, which, by contrast, enhanced the cheerfulness of the scene.

Looking seaward, the prospect was no less resplendent of beauty.

The water, dashing and fretting against the rocky quays, glanced back in mist and foam.

Snow-white gulls hurried along the horizon, their wings cutting sharply against an azure sky, while along the silvery beach, tall, blue herons, brown cranes, and scarlet flamingoes, stood in rows, their forms reflected in the pellucid element.

Such were the surroundings of the settlement on Tampa Bay.

The village itself nestled beneath the hills already mentioned, and comprised a church, some half-dozen stores, with a number of substantial dwellings, whilst a rude wharf, and several schooners moored near by, gave tokens of intercourse with other places.

It was a morning in May, in Florida, as elsewhere, the sweetest month in the year.

Borne upon the balmy atmosphere was the hum of bees and the melody of birds, mingled with the voices of young girls and men engaged in the labour of their farms and fields.

The lowing of cattle could be heard in the distant grazing grounds, while the tillers of the soil were seen at work upon their respective plantations.

There was one who looked upon this cheerful scene without seeming to partake of its cheerfulness.

Standing upon the top of the hill was a man of tall, gaunt figure, with a face somewhat austere in its expression.

His strongly lined features, with a firm expression about the mouth, marked him for a man of no common mould.

He appeared to be about sixty.

As his keen grey eyes wandered over the fields below, there was a cold, determined light in them which betrayed no pleasant train of thought.

It spoke of covetous ambition.

Behind him, upon the hill top, of table shape, were poles standing up out of the earth. Around them the sward was trampled, and the scorched grass, worn in many directions into paths, signified that at no distant period the place had been inhabited.

The sign could not be mistaken; it was the site of an Indian encampment.

Elias Rody, as he turned from gazing on the panoramic view beneath, cast a glance of strange significance at these vestiges of the red-man's habitation.

His features assumed a sharper cast, while a cloud came over his face.

"But for them," he muttered, "my wishes would be accomplished, my desires fulfilled."

What were his wishes? What his desires?

Ask the covetous man such a question, and, if he answered truly, his answer would tell a tale of selfish aspirations. He would envy youth its brightness, old age its wisdom, virtue its content, love its joys, ay, even Heaven itself its rewards, and yet, in the narrow bigotry of egotism, think he only claimed his own.

Elias Rody was a covetous man, and such were the thoughts at that moment in his mind.

They were too bitter for silence, and vented themselves in words, which the winds alone listened to.

"Why should these red-skins possess what I so deeply long for; and only for their short temporary enjoyment? I would be fair with them; but they wrap themselves up in their selfish obstinacy, and scorn my offers."

How selfish others appear to a selfish man!

"Why should they continue to restrain me? If gold is worth anything, surely it should repay them for what can be only a mere fancy. I shall try Oluski once again, and if he refuse – "

Here the speaker paused.

For some time he stood in contemplation, his eye roving over the distant view.

As it again lighted upon the settlement a smile, not a pleasant one, curled his lip.

"Well, there is time yet," said he, as if concluding an argument with himself. "I will once more try the golden bribe. I will use caution; but here will I build my house, come what may."

This natural conclusion, to an egotistic mind, appeared satisfactory.

It seemed to soothe him, for he strode down the hill with a springy, elastic step, more like that of a young man than one over whose head had passed sixty eventful years.

Chapter Three.
Elias Rody

Whilst Elias Rody is pondering upon his scheme, let us tell the reader who he is.

A Georgian, who began life without any fixed idea.

His father, a wealthy merchant of Savannah, had brought him up to do nothing; and, until he had attained man's estate, he faithfully carried out his father's teaching.

Like many Southern lads borne to competence, he could not appreciate the dignity of labour, and accordingly loitered through his youthful life, wasting both time and patrimony before discovering that idleness is a curse.

At his father's death, which happened upon Elias reaching his twentieth year, all the worthy merchant's property descended to the son, and the idler suddenly found himself the possessor of a large sum of money with a sort of feeling that something was to be done with it.

He accordingly spent it.

Spent it recklessly, freely and rapidly, and then discovered that what he *had* done was not the thing he *should* have done.

He then became reformed.

Which meant, that from a liberal, open-handed, careless fellow, he changed to a cynical, cautious man.

With a small remnant of his fortune, and an inheritance from a distant relative, Elias became a man of the world, or rather, a worldly man.

In other words, he began life for a second time, and on an equally wrong basis.

Before his eyes were two classes of his equals. Reckless men with large hearts, and careful men with no hearts at all, for such was the organisation of the society surrounding him.

Of the first class he had full experience; of the second he had none whatever.

To the latter he resolved to attach himself.

It is useless wondering why this should have been. Perhaps he had never been fitted for the community of large-hearted men, and had only mixed with them through novelty, or ignorance of his own station.

Be this as it may, one thing is certain, he became before long a most exemplary member of the society he had selected for imitation. No one drove a closer bargain, saw an advantage (to himself), or could lay surer plans for securing it, than Elias Rody.

He learned, also, to control, and in every way wield influence over those around him. Power became his dream. He was ambitious of governing men.

Strange to say, this feeling was almost fatal to his prospects. We say strange, because ambition generally carves its own road, and moulds its own fortune.

Rody, however, had commenced an active career too late to arrive at much importance in the political world – that grand arena for attaining distinction.

He therefore cast about him for another field of ambitious strife, and speedily found it.

At this time throughout the state of Georgia were many planters, who, without capital to purchase additional property, found themselves daily growing poorer as their land became worn out with exhausting crops.

These men were naturally enough the grumblers and discontented spirits of the community.

Another class were those with little save a restless disposition, ever ready for any venture that may arise.

Rody, shrewd and plausible, saw in these men the very instruments for a purpose he had long thought of, and had well matured.

"If I cannot attain the object of my wishes here," said he, to himself, "perhaps I may be successful elsewhere, if I can only persuade others to join me. These are men ready to my hand; I will take them with me, they shall be my followers; and whilst contributing their means to my end, they will look upon me as a benefactor."

Rody, it will be seen, was a thorough egotist.

This idea becoming fixed in his mind, the rest was easy. He spoke to them of their present condition; drew a brilliant picture of what might be achieved in a new land; painted with masterly eloquence the increase of wealth and happiness his plan presented, and finely gathered around him a large number of families, with whom he started from Georgia, and settled in that section of Florida we have described.

The reason for Rody's selection of this spot was another proof of his profound selfishness.

In his reckless, generous days, he had, on the occasion of a visit to Columbus, been the means of saving from insult and outrage a Seminole chief, who had visited the capital upon some business connected with the State Government.

This act of generosity had been impulsive; but, to the Indian, it assumed the proportion of a life-long debt.

In the fulness of his gratitude, the chief caused papers and titles to be drawn up in Rody's favour, giving a grant of a portion of his own property lying on the shores of Tampa Bay.

The Indian chief was named Oluski.

The grant of land was the settlement we have spoken of.

Rody, at the time, made light of Oluski's gratitude, and thrust the title into his desk without bestowing a second thought on the matter.

Now, in his days of worldly wisdom, these papers with the Seminole's emblematic signature, were brought to light with a very different appreciation.

He saw that they represented value.

Elias Rody accordingly determined to make use of them.

It ended in his carrying a colony southward, and settling upon Tampa Bay.

The scheme originated in selfishness turned out a success.

The lands were valuable, the climate salubrious, and the colony thrived.

A bad man may sometimes do a good thing without intending it.

Rody received even more credit and renown than he had expected; and, being a shrewd man, he achieved a part of his ambition.

He was looked up to as the most important personage in the community.

Although some of the settlers did not approve of all his measures, still, their opposition was rather negative than positive, and had, as yet, found vent only in remonstrances or grumbling.

None had dared to question his prerogative, although he often rode a high horse, and uttered his diction in a tone offensively arrogant.

What more, then, did Elias Rody want?

A covetous man always wants more. Oluski's gift was a noble one. It covered a large area of fertile land, with water privileges, and a harbour for trade. It was the choicest portion of his possessions. The chief, in bestowing it, gave as a generous man gives to a friend. He gave the best he had.

Unfortunately the best he had did not embrace the hill; and, therefore, Rody was unsatisfied.

More than once during the progress of the settlement, he had cast a wishful eye upon the spot, as the choicest site in the whole district for a dwelling.

As his means expanded so had his tastes, and a grand dwelling became the great desire of his life.

It must, perforce, be built upon the hill.

To every offer made to Oluski for a cession of this spot, the chief had firmly and steadfastly given a refusal. He, too, had his ambition; which, although not so selfish as the white man's, was not a whit less cherished.

For nine months in the year Oluski and his tribe dwelt in a distant Indian town, and only visited the waters of Tampa Bay for the remaining three, and then only for the purposes of pleasure. The wigwams of himself and people were but temporarily erected upon the hill. For all this they had an attachment for the spot; in short, they loved it.

This was what Elias Rody stigmatised as a mere fancy.

There was another reason held in similar estimation by Elias. In the rear of their annual encampment was an Indian cemetery. The bones of Oluski's ancestors reposed therein. Was it strange the spot should be dear to him?

So dear was it, in fact, that to every proposal made by Rody for the purchase of the hill, Oluski only shook his head, and answered "No."

Chapter Four.
Cris Carrol

Nelatu recovered from his wounds.

Warren had conducted him to a hut, the temporary residence of a man of the name of Cris Carrol.

This individual was a thorough specimen of a backwood's hunter.

He was rough in manner, but in disposition gentle as a child.

He detested the formalities and restrictions of civilisation.

Even a new settlement had an oppressive air to him, which he could not endure.

It was only the necessity of disposing of his peltries and laying in a stock of ammunition that brought him into any spot where his fellow creatures were to be found.

To Cris Carrol the sombre forest, the lonely savannah, or the trackless swamp, were the congenial homes, and bitterly he adjured the compulsory sojourn of a few days every year amongst those to whom society is a pleasure.

It was always a joyful day to him when he could shoulder his rifle, sling his game bag over his shoulder, and start anew upon his lonely explorations.

When Warren brought the wounded Indian to Carrol's rude hut, the old backwoodsman accepted the responsibility, and set himself to the task of healing his wounds with alacrity.

Nelatu was known to him, and he was always disposed to be a friend to the red man.

"No, of course not," said he to Warren, in answer to his explanation; "I don't see as how you could take the red-skin up to the governor's house. Old dad wouldn't say no, but he'd look mighty like wishin' to. No, Warren, lad, you've done the right thing this time, and no mistake, and that there's sayin' more nor I would always say. Leave the boy to me. Bless you, he'll be all right in a day or two, thanks to a good constitution, along of living like a nat'ral being, and not like one of them city fellows as must try and make 'emselves unhealthy by sleepin' in beds, and keeping warm by sittin' aside of stoves, as if dried leaves and dried sticks warn't enough for 'em."

Carrol's skill as a physician was little short of marvellous.

He compounded and prepared medicines according to unwritten prescriptions, and used the oddest materials; not alone herbs and roots, but earths and clays were laid under contribution.

A few days of this forest doctoring worked wonders in Nelatu, and before a week was over he was able to sit at the back door of the hunter's dwelling, basking himself in the sun.

Carrol, who had been in a fever of anxiety greater even than his patient, was in high glee at this.

After giving the Indian youth a preparation to allay his thirst, he was on the point of packing up his traps to start upon one of his expeditions, when he saw an individual approaching his cabin from the front.

Thinking it was Warren Rody, he called out to him that Nelatu was all right.

He was somewhat surprised to perceive that instead of Warren, it was his father.

"Good morning, neighbour," said Elias.

"Mornin', governor."

"How is your Indian patient?" asked he whom Carrol called governor. "I hope he has entirely recovered."

"Oh, he's ready now, for the matter of that, to stan' another tussle, and take another thrust. It wasn't much of a wound arter all."

"Oh, indeed," said Elias; "I heard from my son Warren that it was a bad one."

"Perhaps your son ain't used to sich sights; there's a good deal in that. Would you like to see the Injun? He's outside, at the back."

"No, thank you, Carrol; I didn't come to see him, but you. Are you busy?"

"Well, not so busy but I kin talk a spell to you, governor, if you wishes it. I war only packin' up a few things ready for a start to-morrow."

Saying this, Carrol handed the governor a stool – the furniture of his hut not boasting of a chair.

"And so you're off to-morrow, are you?"

"Yes, I can't stand this here idle life any longer than I'm obleeged; 'taint my sort. Give me the woods and the savanners."

At the very thought of returning to them the backwoodsman smacked his lips.

"When did you see Oluski last?" abruptly asked Elias.

"It war a fortnight ago, governor, near as my memory sarves me; just arter I'd shot the fattest buck killed this season. Oluski's people war all in a state o' excitement at the time."

"Indeed; about what?"

"Wal, Oluski's brother, who war chief o' another tribe, died not long 'fore, and his son, Wacora, had succeeded to the chiefship. Oluski was mighty perlite to his nephy, who war on a visit to Oluski's town when I war thar. I expect they'll all be hyar soon. It's about thar time o' comin' to Tampa."

"Did you see this Wacora, as you call him?"

"I did so, governor," answered Carrol, "and a likely Injun he is."

Elias sat for some moments silent, during which time Cris busied himself over his gun.

After a time he put the question —

"Is that all you ha' to say, governor?"

The governor, as Carrol styled him, started at this abrupt interrogatory.

"No, Carrol, that is not all. What I have to say is this. You are a friend to the red-skins?"

"Yes, siree, so long as they behaves themselves, I am," promptly replied Cris.

"I also am their friend," said Rody, "and want to deal fairly by them. They have, however, a foolish sort of pride that makes it difficult, especially in some matters. You know what I mean, do you not?"

"Yes, I see," rejoined the hunter, in a careless drawl.

"Well, in a bit of business I have with Oluski, I thought a friend might manage with him better than I could myself."

The governor paused to give Carrol an opportunity of replying.

The backwoodsman, however, did not avail himself of it.

"So you see, Carrol," continued Elias, "I thought that you might act the part of that friend in the negotiation I allude to."

"No, I don't quite see *that*," said Cris, looking up with an odd smile upon his face, and a twinkle in his eye. "But come, governor, tell me what you want done, and I'll tell you whether I kin do it."

"Well, then, Carrol, I will."

The governor drew his stool nearer to Cris, as if about to impart some confidential secret.

Chapter Five.
Plain Speech

The backwoodsman preserved a wary look, as if suspicious of an attempt to corrupt him.

He was not alarmed. Cris Carrol knew himself to be incorruptible.

“Well, Mr Carrol,” proceeded the governor, after a pause; “you know that my settlement has prospered, and, as you may imagine, I have made money along with the rest?”

“Yes, I know that,” was the curt answer.

“And, having now got a little ahead of the world, I feel that I have a right to indulge some of my fancies. I want a better house, for instance.”

“Do you, now?” said Cris.

“And so I’ve made up my mind to build; and I want a good site. Now you see what I am driving at.”

“Well, no; I can’t say that I do exactly.”

“Why, Cris, you are dull to-day. I say I want a good site for my new house.”

“Well, ain’t you got hundreds of acres – enough and to spare for the most tremenjous big house as was ever built?”

“That’s true; but on all my land there’s not a spot I really like. Does that seem strange to you?”

“Mighty strange to me, but, perhaps, not so strange to you, governor.”

“But there *is* a bit of ground, Cris,” continued Elias, “that I do like exceedingly. The worst of it is it’s not mine.”

“Why don’t you buy it?”

“Just what I wish to do; but the owner won’t sell.”

“Perhaps you don’t offer enough.”

“No; that’s not the reason.”

“What is it, then?”

“Do you know the top of the hill?” abruptly asked Rody.

“What, where the Injuns make their camp?”

“Yes; that’s the place where I want to build. Oluski won’t sell that piece of property to me. Why, I don’t know.”

The governor did not stick very closely to the truth while talking on matters of business.

“Wal, what I have I to do with that?” asked the backwoodsman.

“Why, I thought if you were to see Oluski, perhaps you might talk him into letting me have the ground. I’ve set my mind on it; and I wouldn’t care if it cost me a good round sum. I’ll pay you well for any trouble you may take in helping me.”

Elias Rody had but one estimation of his fellow man, and that was, that every one has his price.

In the present instance he was mistaken.

“It won’t do, governor; it won’t do,” said Carrol, shaking his head. “I see now, plain as can be, what you’re after; but I won’t help you in it. If you wants the property, and Oluski won’t let you have it, then the Injun’s got his own reasons, and it ain’t for me to try and change ’em. Besides,” added he, “I don’t like the job; so no offence meant, but I must say now – and I says it once and for all. Is that all you’ve got to say to me?”

The governor bit his lips with vexation; but, possessing a wonderful command over his temper, he merely inquired what his son had said about Nelatu.

“Well, sir, he didn’t say much about anything special, except to ask me to look after the Injun lad, and see to his wounds. I did that in first-class style, and, as I told you before, *he’s* all right. Your son has been down every day to see my patient, as the doctor chaps calls them they physics. He

'peared mighty anxious to know how it was that he had come over to this part of the country alone, and where was the young girl, his sister."

"Ah! so he was inquiring about her, was he?" exclaimed Rody, rising, and pacing the hut with restless steps. He was glad of a pretext for his rage.

The backwoodsman uttered a prolonged whistle.

Suddenly pausing in his impatient strides, the governor faced towards him.

"So he was anxious about her, was he?"

Elias Rody was evidently out of temper, and not now afraid to show it. But Carrol was not exactly the person to care much about this.

"He was," was his cool answer; "but I don't know how I've got anything to do with it, except to tell him, and you, too, for the matter of that, that the red man has his rights and feelings. Yes, and they're both worth considerin' as much as if they war pale-faces like ourselves."

"And why to me, sir?" asked the governor.

"Well, just because I ain't afraid to say to your face what I'd say behind your back, and that is, that your son had better stop thinking about that gurl, Sansuta, as soon as may be, and that you'd best see to it afore worse happens."

A very outspoken man was the backwoodsman, and Elias Rody was sorry now for having visited him.

Before he could recover from his surprise, Carrol returned speech.

"There ain't no good, governor, in mincing matters. Last year, when Oluski war here, your son war always prowlin' 'bout the Injun encampment, and down in the grove war thar gurl used to be. He war always a talkin' to the chief's darter, and making presents to her. I know what I seed, and it warn't jest the thing."

"Perfectly natural, man," said the governor, mastering his chagrin, and speaking calmly; "perfectly natural, all that, seeing that Nelatu, Sansuta, and my son grew up as children together."

"All that may be; but it ain't no use applyin' it now that they're most growed up to be man and woman, and you knows it, governor, as well as I do. As for Nelatu, he don't amount to shucks; and I sometimes wonder whether he is Oluski's son after all."

The home truth in the first part of Carrol's speech pleased the "governor" as little as any of his previous remarks; and, surprised at the freedom of the backwoodsman's language, he was silent.

Not so Cris, who had evidently determined to say more. His garrulity was unusual; and, once started, he was too honest to hold his peace.

"Governor, there's many things I've had in me to say to you at a convenient time. That time's come, I reckon, and I may as well clur it off my mind. I don't belong to yur colony. I'm only a 'casional visitor, but I sees and hears things as others don't seem to dare to tell you o', though why I can't fancy; for you're only a man arter all, although you air the head man o' the settlement. As near as I can fix it in my mind, all yur people hev settled hyar on land that once belonged to the Injun. This bein' the case, it seems to me that the same laws as is made for the white man is made for the red-skins too. Now, governor, it ain't so; or, if they are made, they ain't carried out; and, when there's an advantage to be got for the white man at the expense of the Injun, why, you see, the law's strained just a leetle to give it. It's only a leetle now, but by and bye it'll be a good deal. I know you'll say that's only natural, too, because that's the way you think; but I tell you, Mr Rody," here Carrol became excited, "that it *ain't* natural no how; and it ain't right; and, therefore, mischief's sure to come o' it. Now, I tell *you*, because you've more brains and more money than any o' the rest, of course you've got more to answer for. So them's my sentiments, and you're welcome to them whether you like 'em or no."

"Well, Mr Carrol," replied Rody, with a withering emphasis on the "Mister," "I'm glad you've given me your opinion – it's a valuable one, no doubt."

"I don't know whether it's a valyable one, but I know it's a honest one," answered Cris, with a quiet dignity, that, despite his rough dress, bespoke him a gentleman. "I have no object in giving

advice to you, governor. I only feel it a duty, and I like to discharge my duties. The same way I thinks about your son Warren running after this Injun girl. No good'll come o' that neyther."

Whatever reply the "governor" would have made to this last observation was cut short by the entrance of Warren Rody himself.

Seen now in the light of open day, the young man presented a strange contrast to his father. Of small stature, effeminate countenance, restless, shifting eyes, and a vacillating expression of mouth, he did not look like the son of the hard, rugged man who stood beside him.

He was neatly, almost foppishly dressed, and had a self-sufficient air not altogether pleasant. He seemed like one who would rather pass through the world with oily smoothness than assert himself with confidence of power and honesty of purpose.

By one of those strange mental impressions impossible to account for, both Cris and the "governor" felt that Warren had been a listener.

If so, he did not betray any sign of annoyance at what he had heard, but stood smilingly tapping his boot with a handsome riding-whip.

"Ah, father, you here? Have you come to see the invalid, or to say 'good bye' to the hunter, who tells me he is off to the wilderness to-morrow?"

His father did not answer him, but, turning to Carrol, said —

"The matter I intended to have spoken to you about will do at another time; but I'm still much obliged to you for your *good* advice."

This was spoken with as much cutting politeness as could be well pressed into the speech.

As he turned to leave, he said aside to his son, "Be home early, Warren. I have something particular to say to you."

Warren nodded, and his father passed out of the house, not at all pleased with the interview between himself and the backwoodsman.

Nothing disconcerts scheming men more than blunt honesty.

As soon as the governor was gone, Carrol commenced humming a song. His new visitor waited for several moments before speaking to him.

"How is Nelatu?" he at length asked. "Will he be strong enough to travel to-morrow?"

"Not quite," said Carrol, pausing in the chorus part of his ditty; "he'd best remain here till his people come. They won't be long now, and the stay will give him time to get right smart."

"What was it that vexed my father, Cris?"

"Well, I don't know 'cept he's took somethin' that's disagreed with him. He *do* seem riled considerable."

"But, Cris, are you really off to-morrow?"

"By sunrise," answered Carrol.

"Which way are you going?"

Cris looked slily at his questioner before answering.

"I don't know for sure whether it'll be along the bay, or across the big swamp. The deer are gettin' scarce near the settlement, and I have to go further to find 'em. That's all along of civilisation."

"If you go by the swamp you might do me a service," said Warren.

"Might I?" Then, after a thoughtful pause, the back woodsman continued – "Well, you see, Warren, it won't be by the swamp. I've made my mind up now, and I'm goin' along the bay."

Warren said, "All right; no matter."

Then, with a word of explanation, parted from Cris, and proceeded to find Nelatu.

As soon as he was out of sight, Carrol's behaviour would have furnished a comic artist a capital subject for a sketch. He chuckled, winked his eyes, wagged his head, rubbed his hands, and seemed to shake all over with suppressed merriment.

"A pair of the artfullest cusses I ever comed across. Darn my pictur if the young 'un ain't most too good. War I goin' by the swamp, 'cos then I might do him a service? No, no, Mister Warren, this

coon ain’t to be made a cat’s paw of by you nor your father neyther. I ain’t a goin’ to mix myself up in either of your scrapes, leastways, not if I knows it; nor Nelatu shan’t if I can help it. I don’t let him stir till his fellow Injuns come, and, may-be, that’ll keep him out o’ trouble. No, Master Warren, you must do yur own dirty work, and so must your father. Cris Carrol shan’t help either o’ you in that. If the young ’un don’t mind what he’s heard, altho’ he made b’lieve he didn’t, and his father don’t mind what I told him, there’ll be worse come of it.”

Chapter Six.
Crookleg

When young Rody took his departure from Carrol's hut, he went off in no very enviable mood.

His interview with Nelatu, although of the briefest, had been as unproductive of results as that with the blunt old backwoodsman.

The plain speaking indulged in by Carrol, and which he had overheard before entering the cabin, had annoyed him, while the oracular manner adopted by Cris in no way assuaged the feeling.

The fact of the matter is that the old hunter had made a clear guess at the truth.

Warren had a passion for Sansuta, the daughter of Oluski.

Not a manly, loving passion, though.

Her beauty had cast a spell upon him. Had his soul been pure, the spell would have worked its own cure. Out of the magic of her very simplicity would have arisen chaste love.

But his heart was wicked, and its growth weeds.

Hitherto the difference of race had shielded from harm the object of his admiration. He would have been ashamed to avow it in an honest way.

Secretly, therefore, he had forged a false friendship for her brother, as a mask to conceal his base treachery.

In the incident with which our tale opens, he had found a ready means of advancing his own interests by more closely cementing Nelatu's simple friendship, and moulding it to his will.

We have said that Red Wolf, the would-be assassin, fell by the bullet of his rifle.

With his hand upon the trigger, and in the very act of sending this wretch to his account, a thought had flashed across young Rody's mind, which made his aim more certain.

Let us explain.

Nelatu said that Red Wolf had spoken wicked words of Sansuta and of Warren.

The very conjunction of their names supplied the calumny.

Nelatu spoke truly; but what he did not know was, that the wretch who paid the forfeit of his life for his foul speech was only the dupe of Nelatu's own friend, Warren Rody.

Red Wolf, an idle, drunken scamp, had been a fit instrument in Rody's hands to be employed as a messenger between him and the Indian girl.

For these services Red Wolf received repeated compensation in gold.

But the old story of the bad master becoming discontented with a bad servant was true in this case.

Warren was afraid that Red Wolf would, in one of his drunken orgies, talk too much, and betray the secret with which he had entrusted him.

So far, he was right; for it was whilst endeavouring to warn Nelatu of his sister's danger that Red Wolf made use of language about the girl.

He had reviled Nelatu's sister while traducing his friend.

The issue is already known.

Wicked were Warren's thoughts as he stood, rifle in hand, watching the two.

If Red Wolf – and he recognised him at once – were removed in the very act of killing Nelatu, a dangerous tongue would be for ever silenced, while Nelatu's friendship would be further secured, and Sansuta eventually become his.

The decision was taken, the bullet sent through Red Wolf's brain, and Warren Rody accomplished a part of his design.

Having succeeded so far, it was terribly mortifying to find that one clear-sighted individual had penetrated his schemes, and, without appearing to do so, had placed a restraint upon the otherwise warm sense of gratitude with which Nelatu regarded him.

All this Cris Carrol had done, and therefore Warren Rody was angry with him.

He left the cabin vowing vengeance upon Carrol, and casting about for the means to accomplish it.

He had not long to wait, or far to seek.

At the end of the bye-road upon which the backwoodsman's dwelling stood, he encountered the very tool suitable for his purpose.

It was in the person of a negro, with a skin black as Erebus, who was seen perched upon the top of a tall fence.

He was odd enough looking to attract the attention of the most careless traveller.

His head, denuded of the old ragged piece of felt he called hat, was unusually large, and covered with an enormous shock of tightly-curling wool.

This did not, however, conceal the apeish form of the skull, that bore a strong resemblance to that of a chimpanzee.

Rolling and sparkling in a field of white, were eyes preternaturally large, and wickedly expressive, above a nose and mouth of the strongest African type.

His arms were ludicrously long, and seemed by their unusual proportions to make up for the shortness, and impish form of the body.

He was whistling in a discordant strain some wild melody, and kicking his heels about like one possessed.

As Warren Rody approached, he paused in his ear-splitting music, and leaped nimbly from his perch, whilst flourishing his tattered felt in a sort of salutation.

It might have been observed that he was lame, and the few halting steps he took imparted a droll, hobbling motion to his diminutive body.

His dress was a curious warp of rags – woven, as it were – upon a still more ragged woof.

They were held together more by sympathy than cohesion.

In his right hand was a stout gnarled stick, with which he assisted himself in his frog-like progress.

At sight of young Rody, the huge mouth of this uncouth creature seemed to open from ear to ear.

"Ha, ha! Who, whoo! Gor bress me, if it ain't Massa Warren hisself dat I see! My stars, massa, but dis ole man am glad to see ye, dat he is!"

Such was his salutation.

The young man came to a stop, and surveyed the negro with a smile.

"Well, Crookleg, what do you want with me, you old fiend?"

"Ha, ha! Ho, ho! Bress him, what a brave young gen'lman it is! How han'som' – jess like a pictur'. What do the ole fien' want? Why he want a good deal, massa, good deal."

"Are you out of work again?"

"Ha, ha, ain't done a bressed stroke of work, massa, for more nor two week! Ain't, 'pon dis old nigger's solemn word! Ain't had it, massa, to do. Poor Crookleg am most used up, sa, most used up."

As if to prove his last assertion the hideous wretch cut a high caper into the air, and settled down again in a grotesque attitude.

Young Rody laughed heartily at this feat, slapped his riding-whip roughfully across the negro's back, pitched a piece of silver to him, and passed on.

Whilst Crookleg stopped to pick up the coin he glanced after him under his arm, and saw, with some surprise, that the youth had paused at a few paces distance as if in thought.

After a time the latter faced round and came back along the road.

"By the way, Crookleg," said he, "come up to the house, my sister may have something to give you."

"Ha, ha! he, he! Miss Alice, bress her, so she may, massa! I'll come, sartin; dis old nigger's always glad to get what he can from Miss Alice."

"And," continued Rody, "ask for me when you come. I may find something for you to do that'll help you along a little."

Not staying to hear the voluble expressions of gratitude with which Crookleg overwhelmed him, Warren strode on, and was soon lost to sight.

The moment of his disappearance the darkey perpetrated another aerial leap, and then hobbled off in a direction opposite to that pursued by the governor's son.

He could be heard muttering as he went —

"Wants to see dis chile, does he? Why, dat looks good for de old nigger; and, who knows, but what de long time am a coming to an end, and all dis old nigger's work is gwine to be done for him by odder folk. He, he! dat would make dis chile bust a laffin! He, he, he!"

Chapter Seven.
The Two Chiefs

Our story now takes us fifty miles inland from Tampa Bay.

The spot on the edge of an everglade.

The hour noon.

The dramatis personae two Indians.

One an old man, the other in the prime of life.

The first white-headed, wrinkled, and with traces of a life spent in action.

He presented an appearance at once striking and picturesque as he stood beneath the shade of a tall palm tree.

His dress was half Indian, half hunter.

A buckskin shirt, leggings, and moccasins richly worked with beads; a wampum belt crossed his shoulder; a scarlet blanket hung at his back, its folds displaying a figure which, in its youth, must have been superb.

It still showed, in the broad chest and powerful limbs, almost its pristine strength.

Upon his head he wore a band of bead-work, in which were stuck three wing feathers of the war-eagle.

His face was full of dignity and calm repose.

It was Oluski, the Seminole chief.

His companion was no less remarkable.

As he lay stretched upon the ground, leaning on one elbow, his face upturned towards that of the old man, a striking contrast was presented.

Like Oluski, his dress was also half Indian, half hunter, but more richly ornamented with bead-work, whilst a certain careful disposition of the attire, seemed not inappropriate to his youth and bearing.

It was, however, in his features that the difference was chiefly apparent.

In the attitude he had assumed, a ray of sunshine piercing a break between the trees, illumined his countenance.

Instead of the coppery colour of the Indian, his skin was of a rich olive, an unmistakeable sign that white blood flowed in his veins.

He was remarkably handsome. His features were regular, well defined, and admirably chiselled. His eyes were large and lustrous, overarched by a forehead that denoted the possession of intellect.

Like the old man, he wore a plume of eagle's feathers on his head, as also a wampum belt; but in lieu of a blanket, a robe made of skin of the spotted lynx was thrown over his shoulders.

Oluski was the first to speak.

"Must Wacora depart to-day?" he asked.

"At sunset I must leave you, uncle," replied the youth, who was his nephew, already spoken of as Wacora.

"And when do you return?"

"Not till you come back from Tampa Bay. I have still much to do. My father's death has still placed me in a position of trust, and I must not neglect its duties."

"I and my tribe depart from this place in seven days."

"And Nelatu, where is he?" asked Wacora.

"I expected him ere this. He and Red Wolf went away together."

Oluski was ignorant of what had happened.

"They went upon a hunting excursion, and if not able to return in time, were to go on to the bay, and there await our coming."

"You still make your summer encampment upon the hill. I have not seen it since I was a boy. It is a shame, too, since out people are buried there."

"Yes; and, therefore, it is dear to you as to me."

"And yet the whites have a settlement near it. It was your gift to them, uncle, I remember that."

Wacora said this with an accent that sounded almost sneering.

The old chief answered warmly.

"Well, I owed their chief a debt of gratitude, I paid it. He is my friend."

"*Friend*!" said Wacora, with a bitter smile; "since when has the pale-face been a friend to the red man?"

"Still unjust, Wacora. I thought you had changed. The foolish sentiments of youth should give place to the wisdom of age."

Oluski's eye brightened as he spoke. His heart swelled with noble feelings.

"I do not, will not, trust in the white man!" answered the young chief. "What has he done to our race that we should believe in him? Look at his acts and then trust him if you can. Where are the Mohawks, the Shawnees, the Delawares, and the Narragansets? How has the white man kept faith with them?"

"All white men are not alike," responded Oluski. "A pale-face befriended me when I required aid. The deed always weighs against the word. I could not be ungrateful."

"Well, Oluski's gratitude has been proved," returned Wacora. "But let him beware of those on whom it has been bestowed."

The old chief did not answer, but stood in an attitude of thought.

Ideas, slumbering till now, were awakened by Wacora's words. An unknown feeling appeared to gain possession of him.

So contagious is mistrust.

The nephew, too, seemed lost in thought. Still lying upon the ground he idly plucked the petals of a flower growing by his side.

The conversation was at length resumed by his uncle.

"I have nothing to charge the white chief with or his people. Our tribe yearly visits the place. We are welcomed on arrival, respected during our stay, and unmolested at leaving. No, Wacora, these white men are not like others."

"Uncle, all white men are the same. They make their homes in our land. When space is needed, the Indian must yield to them. What faith or friendship can exist where there is no equality? Do not the Seminoles suffer at this very moment from the white man's ambition? Are not their hunting grounds profaned by his presence – their towns pillaged for his fancied wrongs? Your *friend* is a white man, and, therefore the enemy of your race."

Wacora spoke passionately.

The Indian is not always a savage. The reverse is often the case. In every tribe there are men of education, of quick intelligence, and with a high sense of right.

Both Oluski and Wacora were superior men, in the sense that education and natural intelligence gave the stamp of superiority over ignorance and superstition.

Chapter Eight.
Sansuta

As we have said, Wacora had white blood in his veins.

His mother was a Spaniard, the daughter of a planter, who had lived near the town of Saint Augustine.

Almost a child at the time of her capture, she eventually forgot her own kindred, and became devoted to the chief who had been her captor.

It ended in her becoming his wife, and the mother of Wacora.

Albeit that in Wacora's veins white blood flowed, his soul was Indian, and he loved his father's people as if he had been of their purest blood.

He was a patriot of the most enthusiastic stamp.

His judgment, clear in most things, was clouded in estimating the qualities of the white race, simply because he had seen the worst phases of their character, its cupidity and selfishness.

Oluski would have answered his companion's address, but the same train of disagreeable thought that had entered his mind at the first part of Wacora's speech held him silent.

Wacora proceeded.

"Enough, uncle. I did not intend to trouble you with my feelings; I meant only to warn you against danger, for danger exists in all dealings with the pale-faces. They, as ourselves, are true to their instincts, and those instincts blind them to justice. Your friend, the White Chief, may be all you think of him. If so, he will rather admire your caution than blame you for mistrust; natural, because not causeless."

Whatever reply Oluski intended, was postponed by the arrival of a third person, at whose coming Wacora sprang from the ground with a gesture of surprise and admiration.

The new comer was an Indian maiden. A perfect wood nymph.

She was a girl of slight stature, beautifully rounded limbs, with hands and feet unusually small.

Her dress was simplicity itself; yet so gracefully worn that it seemed the result of laboured art.

A tunic of bright-coloured cloth, clasped round her neck by a silver brooch, descended to her ankles, while around her waist was twisted a scarf of many colours; over her shoulders fell a bright cloth mantle, bordered with shells worked into delicate patterns; upon her head was a bead-work cap, trimmed with the plumes of the white eagle, like a fringe of newly-fallen snow; her wrists were encircled with bead bracelets, whilst embroidered mocassins covered her small feet.

She smilingly approached Oluski, and nestled close to the old chief.

Wacora seemed puzzled by the fair presence.

"I had forgotten," said Oluski, "that you are strangers to each other. Sansuta, your cousin Wacora stands before you."

Sansuta – for she it was – smiled upon the young Indian.

He did not approach the spot where father and daughter stood.

His impassioned eloquence had vanished.

He could scarce find words for the simplest salutation.

Oluski, perceiving his bashfulness, hastened to his relief.

"Sansuta has been upon a visit, and has only now returned. It is many years since you have seen her, Wacora. You did not expect her to have grown so tall?"

Wacora finished the sentence.

"Nor so beautiful!" he said.

Sansuta cast down her eyes.

"No praise like that should reach an Indian maiden's ear," said Oluski, with a smile; "nevertheless, Sansuta is as the Great Spirit has made her, that is sufficient."

The girl did not seem to share her father's sentiments; a slight pout of her beautiful lips implied that the compliment was by no means unpleasant.

Wacora was again dumb, as if half regretting what he had said.

Such is the power that beauty exercises over bravery.

The young Indian warrior actually blushed at his boldness.

"But what brings you here, Sansuta?" asked her father. "Did you not know that your cousin and myself were in council?"

The pretty Sansuta had recovered her composure.

The pout had disappeared from her lips, which, opening to answer her father's question, revealed two rows of teeth of a dazzling whiteness.

"I am here to bid you both to the evening meal," she said.

Her voice, melodious and soft, struck upon Wacora's ear like the music of the mocking-bird.

The charm was complete.

Forgetful of his late conversation, forgetful for a time of his thoughts and aspirations, oblivious of his enthusiasm, he stood a very child, eagerly watching her and listening for those tones again.

It was Oluski, however, who spoke.

"Come, Wacora, let us go with her."

The old chief strode away from the spot, Sansuta by his side.

Wacora followed, with a new feeling in his heart.

It was love!

Chapter Nine.
The Indian Village

A week later the table top of the hill over-looking the settlement presented a changed picture.

It was one of active life.

The naked poles, formerly standing there, had disappeared, and comfortable Indian dwellings – wigwams – were in their place.

At the doors of several were planted lances and spears, with plumes and pennons depending from them.

These were the residences of the chiefs.

In the centre of the group was a large building, which was carefully, almost elaborately constructed, and which far o'ertopped over the others.

It was the council house of the tribe.

Around the doors of their respective dwellings, the owners might be seen engaged in every variety of employment or peaceful idleness. Children frolicked in the presence of their parents, and dusky maidens, in twos and threes, loitered up and down the main street or avenue.

At one of the doors an interesting group seemed rapt in attention at the recital of a story that was being told by an aged chief.

The chief was Oluski, and among the individuals around was his daughter, Sansuta.

The others were his kindred.

They had assembled, as was their usual evening custom, in front of his wigwam, to listen to tales of virtue or valour; of deeds done by their ancestors in the days of the early Spanish settlers.

The Indians are admirable listeners, and, in the easy natural attitudes into which they fell as they lent forward to catch Oluski's words, they formed a charming tableau.

The venerable chief, with dignified action, measured speech, and great skill in modulating his voice, held their attention as much by the manner as the matter of his narrative.

As the incident he was relating developed pathos, chivalry, horror or revenge, so did his audience yield themselves to its influences. By turns they lowered their eyes, shuddered, stared wildly around with knit brows and clenched hands.

Like all people constantly communing with nature, they were easily moved to joy or sorrow; and not civilised enough to make any attempt at concealing it.

As Oluski sat in their midst, the observed of all observers, he looked the picture of a patriarch.

The time and piece were both in harmony with the subject.

Oluski's story drew to a close. His hero had achieved his triumph. The distressed Seminole maiden was rescued, and joy and union wound up the tale, which had for more than an hour held his listeners enthralled.

"So now, children, away! The sun is sinking in the west; the hour of council is at hand, and I must leave you. Return to-morrow, and I will relate to you some other episode in the history of our tribe."

The young people rose at the chief's bidding, and with "thanks" and "good nights," prepared to depart; Sansuta among the rest.

"Where are you going child?" asked her father.

"Only to the spring, father. I shall be back soon."

As the girl said this, she turned, as if wishing to avoid her father's gaze. The other people had all departed.

"Well," said the old man, after a pause, "do not forget to return soon. I would not have you abroad after nightfall."

She murmured a few words, and sauntered away from the spot.

Oluski did not immediately depart, but stood leaning against the spear that stood up in front of his dwelling.

The old man's eyes were filled with tears, while a hand was laid upon his heart.

"Poor girl," he reflected, as he watched her form disappearing in the fast darkening twilight; "she never knew her mother. I sometimes think I have been but a poor guardian of Sansuta's steps. But the Great Spirit knows I have tried to do my duty."

Sighing heavily, he brushed the tears from his eyes, and strode off to the council house.

Chapter Ten.
An Appointment Kept by Deputy

Let us follow the steps of Sansuta.

Once out of sight, and conscious that she had eluded her father's observation, she quickened her steps, not in the direction of the spring, but towards a thick clump of live oaks which grew at the foot of the hill.

As she approached the spot, her pace gradually became slower, until she at length came to a stop.

As she paused, a shiver ran through her frame.

She was evidently in doubt as to the propriety of what she was doing.

The sun had sunk below the horizon, and darkness was rapidly falling over the landscape.

A distant murmuring alone gave token of the proximity of the Indian village upon the hill.

After a few moments, and while Sansuta still stood beside the grove, these sounds ceased, and perfect silence reigned around the spot.

Presently a cuckoo's note was heard – followed by another nearer and louder – that in its turn succeeded by three others.

Whilst the echo of the last still vibrated on the evening air, the maiden was startled by a sudden apparition.

It sprang into view at her very feet, as if the ground had opened suddenly to give it passage.

When the girl regained courage sufficient to look upon it, her fears were in no way lessened.

Standing in a grotesque attitude, she beheld a negro, with arms enveloped in a ragged garment, moving about like the sails of a windmill, whilst a low chuckle proceeded from his huge mouth.

"He! ho! ho! brest if de ole nigga didn't skear de galumpious Injun. He! he! he! 'gorry if de Injun beauty ain't turn white at de show of dis chile!"

It was Crookleg who spoke.

He seemed to enjoy the fright he had given the maiden; for, after having ceased to speak, his gurgling cachinnation was continued.

It was some time before Sansuta recovered presence of mind sufficient to speak to the black deformity before her.

"What do you want?" was all she could gasp.

"Ha! ha! ha! It warn't dis ugly ole nigga what the big chief's chile 'pected to meet – war it? No, I know it warn't. But don't be skeared, ole Crookleg won't hurt ye. He's as innercent as a angel. He! he! he! as a angel."

Here another caper, similar to the one with which he had introduced himself, placed him in a still more impish attitude.

The Indian girl had by this recovered from her first surprise, seeing that some attributes of humanity appertained to her strange interlocutor.

"Again, what do you want? Let me pass. I must return to the village."

"Gorry, an it arn't Crookleg dat will hinder you," the negro answered, standing directly in her path. "He only want say a word to you – dat is if you is de beautiful Sansuta, de darter of de chief?"

"I am the chief's daughter; that is my name. I am Sansuta!"

"Den de young gen'l'm'n tole dis old darkey true wen he say I find you down by de live-oak grove at sunset – he told de old nigga true."

A blush overspread the girl's face as Crookleg spoke. She did not answer him.

"He said to me," continued the negro, "dat I were to tell de *lady*" (here he chuckled), "dat he de gen'l'm' couldn' come to meet her to-night, on accoun' o' de ole man his bossy wot hab gib him

somethin' 'tickler to do. He send ole Crookleg to tell her dat, and gib her sometin' what I've got hyar in my pocket, he! he! he!"

Saying these words, the monster made a series of movements, having in view the discovery of his pocket.

After a most elaborate and vigorous search for its aperture among the multitudinous rags, he succeeded in finding it. Then, plunging his long right arm therein up to the elbow, he drew forth a small parcel wrapped in white paper, and tied with a string of dazzling beads.

With another acrobatic bound, he handed it to the trembling girl.

"Dere it am, safe and soun'. Dis ole nigga nebba lose nuffin and offen find a good deal. Dat, says de gen'l'm', is for de most lubbly of her seek, de Missy Sansuta."

The tender look accompanying this speech was something hideous to behold.

Sansuta hesitated before taking the parcel from him, as if in doubt whether she should not decline it.

"Da! take it," urged he; "'tain't nuffin as'll go off and hurt ye; dis nigga kin swar to dat!"

Not so much this friendly assurance as a resolution the girl had come to, decided her.

She stretched forth her hand and took the package.

This done, she essayed once more to move past the negro in order to return to the hill.

Crookleg, however, still blocking up the path, made no movement to give way to her.

He had evidently something more to say.

"Lookee hyar," he continued, "I war bid to tell the lubbly Injun lady that the gen'l'm'n wud be at dis berry spot to-morrow mornin' early to meet her, and I war 'tickler told say dat it war private, and not to be told no 'quisitive folks wat might want to know. Now I think," here Crookleg took off his tattered hat and scratched his wool. "Yes! dats all dis nigga war tole to say – yes, dats all."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.