

UNCLE LISHA'S SHOP.

III.

(From Forest and Stream.)

Though in mid-day there was yet a hazy after-taste of the sweetness of Indian summer, the season was beginning to have a smack of winter in its night air. On such an evening, as the first star began to shine above the rounded peak of 'later Hill, Lisha rubbed the mist off a pane of his long, low shop window, and stooping his eye to it peered out upon the darkening road. Out of the gloaming presently grew some dark shapes into men, the sound of whose footsteps and voices came a little before them. When they and others had entered and been welcomed by Lisha, he having lighted his pipe and taken some work in hand, declared "the meetin' open," and that they "was all ready to transack business." Little was said till some one remarked, "Pweew!" And then all became aware that an odor more pungent and powerful than those of leather and shoemaker's wax was pervading the atmosphere of the shop.

"Good nith an' seas!" cried Lisha, "I secont the motion! Le's all whew! Some on ye stepped on suthin' t'night, or somebody got skunk's ile to sell."

Each took a sniff of his neighbor till the source of the fragrance was traced to Pelatiah's coroner, when he shamefacedly confessed that he "hed ben a trappin' a leetle," but said in extenuation, "I sot fer mink." I hed one trap in a holler log over to Hillsees brook with a rustler's head fer bait, an' when I went tew it yist'day the trap was hauled int' the log. I pulled on the chain o'nsid'able stout, but it didn't le, go a bit, an' then I got daown on all fours an' peeked in to see what the matter was aided it, an'—O, gosh all Connecticut! My eyes haint god done smartin, yit! I rolled an' I tumbled till I got to water, n' then I washed an' rubbed an' scrubbed till I c'd see suthin' sides stars and fire, an' then I went hum an' barried all them close, an' washed me in three waters an' smudged me with hemlock browae, an' gosh darn it all, I did't 'pose I wa'n't all sweetened out! F my comp'ny haint 'greasable I'll dig fer hum."

"Sho!" Lisha, shouted with hearty politeness, "Guess we c'n stan' it if you can! 'S fer me, I ruther like a leetle good-fresh skunk parfum'ry. The's some 'at eate 'em'—rolling his eye toward a known, mephitophagist—"an' I sh'd think them 'at likes the taste would the smell. Furdermore, I'm beholden to skunks fer c'n'sid'able myself. Keep yerself comf'able, Peltier."

No one objected to Pelatiah's presence, and several asked Lisha how he was indebted to skunks for anything.

"Wal," said he, slowly scraping the sole of a boot with a bit of broken glass, while his thoughts went backward over the rough path of his life, "in the fust place, when I was a leetle chap they cured me o' croup with skunk's ile, which they g'n'at ter me spoo'ful arter spoo'ful, an' greased my stomerck with it outside tew. An' then arter I'd got grow'd up, skunk essence cured me of amny. An' then—I don't scaseely b'lieve I'd ha' ever got Jerushy if I hed n't a ben fer a skunk!"

After the "wal I swan's," and "goshes," and "yeen don't says," which this declaration called forth, there was a general demand for an explanation, and Lisha laid down his boot and glass, and devoted himself wholly to the telling of his story, with his elbows on his knees and looking and unlooking his waxy fingers as he talked, as if so he wove the woof of his tale.

"I never set no gret on ole folks tellin' of what they'd did, or ben, or hed when 't they was younger, but when Jerushy was Jerushy Chase she was 'b out 's pooty a gal as 'c'd be dug up in tew three towns, an' as smart and cap'ble, an' nat'lly she was sought arter, an' none the less cause her father was 'ol'able well off. When I begin a sparkin' on her, I hedn't nothin' much but my tew hands, was a

workin' aout by the month for this one an' that one for six or eight months, an' I'd larnt to shoemake a leetle so 's 't I whiped the cat'winters, so ye see I was arnin' suthin all the time, an' I wa'n't sech a humbly ole critter 's I be naow, so 's 't stood jes 'a good a chance as any o' the fellers. till bimeby the' com a chap to teach aour deestrick school, college teller f'm Middlebury. He was a clever creeter, an' smart, an' good natered an' hahn-some, c'd rattle like a bear, 'n' sing like bobliuk, 'n' wore hahn-some, close every day, so all the gals 'most was a ravin' arter him. Jerushy wa'n't, though, an' that made him the faster and fiercer arter her. An' so arter a while his pooty talk an' hahn-some close an' all them college things begin to work on her, 'n' she get so 't she'd mos' lives I would n't come Sunday nights as not.

"So it run along till tow wards the middle o' sugarin', she a favorin' him a leetle mor'n me of the tew, an' the' was goin' to be a great sugarin' off to Hillsees, 'n' most everybody had a invita. I went 'n' ast Jerushy to go 'long with me, 'n' she said she 'didn't know; guessed she'd go 'ong with the one 'at come arter her fust.' Thinks sez I, Mr. Schoolmarster, 'if you get to Uncle Chase's fore I dew, you'll haffer pull foot for it lively. So 'long in the middle o' the art'noon I got my chores all done up, an' dressed me an' off. I put 'erost lots, 'n' I hedn't got fur when darned if I didn't see that 'farnal schoolmarster jest goin' int' the aidge o' Meeker's Woods, pintin' for Uncle Chase's, 'n' nearer tew it 'n' I was. I doubled my jumps an' got there, an' tole Jerushy I'd got there fust 'n' she'd got to go 'long with me. She kinder hung off, lookin' outen the winder every onet an' awhile, but nary a schoolmarster! An' so bimeby she got rigged up an' off we went an' had a gret carummux to the sugarin'. She kep' a-sythin' an' a-peekin' fer a spell, but nary a schoolmarster, an' then she got desput jolly 'n' made me fun 'n' the hull toot on 'em. Goin' hum in the moonshine, I ast her to jine me in a sugarin' for life, an' fore we got to the chips in the do'yard she 'greed she would, an' here we be! Me on this 'ere shoe-bench, an' she, 'n' lifting his voice and pointing a waxy forefinger at the door that opened into the kitchen, "an' she a-peekin' through the crack o' that 'ere door!" The door squeaked suddenly to, and the wooden latch clicked rather spitefully.

"Wall," said one disappointed auditor, breaking the short ensuing silence, "Wha'd all that hev ter dew with a skunk?"

"O, nothin' much," said Lisha, "only, ye see that feller was a shovin' 'long the beat he knowed, through the woods in a wood, road, an' fust thing he run spat out a skunk aout takin' a walk. The skunk wouldn't run, an' he wouldn't, an' it turned aout con'try to scriptur. The battle was to the strong, an' the race was to the swift. The schoolmarster smelt loud 'nough to fill a forty acre. lot, an' so the' wa'n't no schoolmarster to Chases' nor 't the sugarin' off, nor 't the school in that deestrick that spring, nor nothin' left on him in the deestrick but his parfume. So ye see, a skunk hed suthin' ta dew with his scaseens, which I c'n'sider myself beholden to skunks."

"Bah gosh!" said Antoine, "ah don't fred for skunk, me! Ah tek hol' of it hees tails an' lif 'im aup, he can' do somethings! No sar!"

"'Twouldn't make no difference tew ye if he did," said Lisha, "a skunk's nat'l weepin haint nothin' but double d'stilled bile! daown essence of inyuns, 'n' ye couldn't hurt a Canuck w' that."

"Bah gosh, guess you fin' aout 't he hurt you, you git him on you 'heyesight, whedder you Canuck or somebody. Ant it, Peltier, hein?"

Said Solon Briggs, "Might I a-rise to ask you, Antwine, Anthony, or Antoino, all of which I suppose you ter be, 'shaw dew you pervent the aout-quin'tin' of the viles o' wrath whilst you air a-praachin' of the mostiferous quadruple head?"

"Wal, M'sieu Brigg, dat something you

got t' larn bah—ah—what you call it, pracsit?"

"Perhaps Peltier'd lend you one o' his'n to practise on, Solon," Lisha suggested, but Solon expressed no desire to acquire the art of capturing the skunks by that method.

"They rally can't scent when you hol' 'em up by the tail, 'n' that's a fact," said Joseph Hill. "I remember onot when I was a boy ten'r dozen year ole—I d' know, mebbey I was fourteen—lemme see, 'twas the year't father hed the brindle caow die 't hed twin calves; got choked with an apple—no 't wa'n't, 'was a tater—they was fo' ye'r oles when he sole 'em, the fall 't I was seventeen—no, I wa'n't but thirteen—the' was a skunk got int' the suller, 'n' of course we didn't want to kill him there, so my oldest brother, Lije, he took a holt on him by the tail an' kerried him aout the hatchway with a pair o' tongs, an' I hel' him up while he shot him. He put the ole gun c'us to his head an' blowed him clean aouten the tongs as fur 's c'rost this shop, 'n' by gol, he never scent one mite til then, no more 'n a snowball."

"Did he leave?" asked the ever alert seeker after useful knowledge.

"Why, yes," Joseph replied, "he jes stunk himself to death then."

"Jozeff," said Lisha, "that 'ere puts me in mind of the Paddy. 'Devil a made o' shootin' him,' says he; 'lave him alone an' sure he'll skink himself to death.' What a 'tornal time the creetur dew hev w' skunks 'fore they git 'quinted with 'em. Member the ole story one on 'em tole? What was't Sam?"

Sam repeated the time-honoured tale. "The furs toime iver I wint hoontin' in Amerika was wan day whin I was gow'n to me worruk, an' I kilt a boird call't a skoonk. I threed hur undher a hay-shack an' shot hur wid me sphade, an' the furs toime I hit hur I might hur, an' the next toime I hit hur where I might hur afore. An' whin I wint to plook the feathers off hur, I was forced to shkin hur, an' in down that I shtruck hur ile bag or hur heart I dunno, on the shnell nearly suffocayit me, an' I was near shkarvin' afther, for devil a drink 'oud I take, but the shnell of hur was in me noshtrils to kape me awake all night. I like to died," Sam continued, "to hear Joel Bartlett's Irishmun tell 'bout the fust skunk 't he ever met. 'Twas when he was in Massachusitts, 'Maxacushin' he called it. He ben a workin' on a railroad, an' lived in a shanty as yit though he was workin' fer a farmer. Sez he, 'I wor a shpadin' round threes in a young archar, an' Tom Egan, the devil, was in id wid me, an' I seen caperin' troo: the grass a fione ship av a young cat, an' says f to Tom, says I, begob, I'll capshure it to kill the mice in the curse o' God shanty that's near driven me diastrackit. 'Do,' says he to me, an' the 'til knowin' in his own moind what it was. An' away I wint in purshuit, an' whin I was about to lay me two hands on id, I was shtruck in me face an' the two eyes av me wat a shstream av the devil's own wather an' I was blindit an' shtrangled, entirely. But I pomped on the baste wid me boots an' kilt it. I was choked wid rage, an' a gred d'l baste, an' thin I wint away back to Tom, but devil a near him wud he let me come, the bl'guart, an' I call't out, 'Tom!' says I, 'am I kilt entirely an' is it me, or is it the devil's father o' a baste, that be's makin' the notorius shink altogether?' says I. Be gob! says he, 'tis the both ov yeas, an' ye'll shpell that bad an' may be worse for a year,' says he. 'Ah thin, I cried, 'millia murders, I'm ruinin' tit' an' so skoolked away home to the curse o' God shanty, an' whin I wint in: Biddy an' the childer wint out, an' I had the shanty an' the shnell all to meself. Well, I borrit me close, an' I sailed back an' forth trow the pond o' wather till night, but devil a much better did I shnell for a week. Oh, I had luck to the country that natures such cats!"

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spik so good Angleesh lak ah do, don't it?"

The slim candle in the sconce had burned so low that when Lisha attempted to snuff it with his fingers he pulled it out and it dropped upon the floor, and sputtering out left the shop in darkness except for the thin streaks of firelight that shone through the cracks of the stove, and the dim rays of stars planting in at the little window. The mishap was accepted as a unanimous vote of adjournment, and stumbling and groping their way to the door, Lisha's guests again departed.

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