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HIGH GRADE

Smoking Mixture

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Some gleam of a smile answered the one Nance gave him. She did not dislike him he saw; neither did she mind his buckskin garments, or the scent of the teepee that clung to them,—the bitter pungent scent of drying game, and pine-smoke mingled with tobacco. . . . He went back to his dogs, and lifted the long whip.

"Oppapago!" Nance called again. Again he turned while the team fell into place.

"You are called 'The runner,' are you not?" she said in Cree.

"Yes," he answered shortly.

"I call you Oppapago, 'the whistler,'" she returned, nodding.

"Where have you heard?" he asked quickly.

"One morning from a window at the mission school, I saw you pass and you called to your brother, the blackbird. He sat on a tree and answered, and you called back again, and I listened, Oppapago—and there was a little half asleep mottled grey owl on that tree also, and you called to him in his own language, and he answered, as the blackbird had done; and up—far, far up among the leaves, there was a blue-jay—Oh a very saucy fellow! and he mocked at you and you mocked back until he grew angry and ruffled up all his feathers and flew away. And you laughed, and went on, and Sister Mary Philomena called me to my lessons, and I heard no more. . . . Please give the whistle of the blackbird now, Oppapago," she ended.

The Indian glanced at Wynn to see how much he understood of all this, but the Englishman was busy tightening a snow-shoe thong.

"There are no blackbirds to call now," said the runner, half-sullenly.

"Oh no!" Nance answered—"No. But it will bring the spring back for a moment if you whistle their song. Please, Oppapago!"

He touched the leader, and the dogs started ahead. In a moment he had taken up his steady trot beside them; yet the pace was not so hard as he had made it before.

For half a mile they went on steadily. Then softly at first, but with a clear rising sweetness from out some snow-covered shrubs they were passing seemed to come the May song of a blackbird.

Nance drew her breath quickly. Wynn slowed up to listen. The dogs pricked their ears, and a rabbit sprang from its form and loped away.

The song ran its short cadences twice over, then trailed into a few broken notes and stopped.

"Oh Oppapago!" Nance cried softly, "You told me the blackbirds had gone!—One has been left behind—Call to him quickly!"

"It was Oppapago who whistled," answered the Indian with a short backward glance.

"But the song came from the bushes yonder," she returned doubtfully. "There might be one blackbird left, perhaps,—just one!"

He shook his head—"That was a trick," he said. "I whistled."

"Then you are very wonderful, Oppapago," said Nance seriously. "I would give a great deal to be able to mimic the birds so." Then, in English: "Is he not wonderful, Dick?" she insisted. "Very," he said warmly, nodding acquiescence. "Very, indeed!"

The runner understood.

"Oppapago is no longer unfriendly," Nance said after they had travelled on awhile. "When he looks back his face is different. It must make him feel happier not to hate us, I should think—you know what I mean?"

"I fancy I gather the drift of your meaning," the man said drawing at his pipe. "In future I feel I may safely leave my enemies to you to deal with, and they will fare better than at my hands. Now, look ahead! When we reach those jack pines we will stop and take lunch. The hill with the jack pines—so the Factor told me, stood for a half-way house to Blue Rock."

After the noon rest they went steadily on, reaching the rough settlement by night. In the night a wet snow fell, that by morning was frost-hardened, but it had made the trail too difficult for the priest's sleigh and pony.

It was the runner who came to their rescue. He and the Post-agent had bar-

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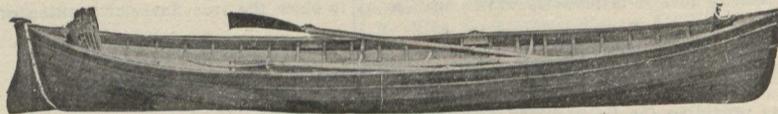
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