

Toward sunset he rode slowly, and with an air of expectancy. The sun had gone down behind the mountains, and the narrow valley was deep in shadow. Before them, standing in the centre of the valley, rose a tall white tuad tree, within fifty paces of the underwood of the mountain on either side.

When Moondyne, who led the way, had come within a horse's length of the tree, a spear whirled from the dark wood on the right, across his path, and struck deep into the tuad tree. There was not a sound in the bush to indicate the presence of an enemy. The gloom of evening had silenced even the insect life, and the silence of the valley was profound. Yet there was startling evidence of life and hostility in the whirr of the spear, that had sunk into the tree before their eyes with such terrific force that it quivered like a living thing as it stood out from the tuad.

Moondyne sprang from his horse, and, running to the tree, laid his hand on the shivered spear, and shouted a few words in the language of the aborigines. A cry from the bush answered, and the next moment a tall savage sprang from the cover and threw himself with joyful acclamations at the feet of Moondyne.

Tall, lithe, and powerful was the young bushman. He arose and leant on his handful of slender spears, speaking rapidly to Moondyne. Once he glanced at the sergeant, and, smiling, pointed to the still quivering spear in the tuad. Then he turned and led them up the valley, which soon narrowed to the dimensions of a ravine, like the bed of a torrent, running its perplexed way between over-joyful hanging walls of ironstone.

The sun had gone down, and the gloom of the passage became dark as midnight. The horses advanced slowly over the rugged way. A dozen determined men could hold such a pass against an army. Above their heads the travellers saw a narrow slit of sky, sprinkled with stars. The air was damp and chill between the precipitous walls. The dismal pass was many miles in length; but at last the glare of a fire lit up the rocks ahead.

The young bushman went forward alone, returning in a few minutes. Then Moondyne and the sergeant, proceeding with him to the end of the pass, found themselves in the opening of a small valley or basin, over which the sky, like a splendid domed roof, was clearly rounded by the tops of the mountains.

A few paces from the entrance stood a group of natives, who had started from their rest at the approach of the party.

(To be continued.)

THE HEROINE OF HICKORY BEND

'You've never been and got back already!'

'Yes, I have. And here's the pattern, but Mrs. Ridgely says she doesn't like the sleeve. And so she sent you another sleeve from one of Mary Anne's dresses.'

Miss Susan Parke looked severely at her niece through her spectacles.

'It's a good mile to Mrs. Ridgely's. If you've been there and back in half an hour, besides waiting for Mrs. Ridgely to hunt up her patterns—she never knows where to put her hand on anything, Mrs. Ridgely don't—it's easy to guess how you went.'

Becky laughed. She was not a pretty girl, but her freckled face with the good-humored mouth and cheeks aglow with vigorous health, had a charm not always associated with beauty. She slipped an arm about Aunt Susan's waist, and hugged her reassuringly.

'Confess it's lovely to have the pattern in half an hour, instead of waiting an hour and a half.'

'I don't know what the world is coming to, I'm sure,' said Aunt Susan, who lived in a state of constant apprehension regarding the future of the race to which she belonged. Aunt Susan was emphatically a person who believed in the good old times. Vainly had she tried to impress and repress Becky by animated descriptions of the great-grandmother, whose oil portrait,

hanging in the front parlor, was the one cherished family heirloom. 'Such a waist,' Aunt Susan would say impressively, 'I have often heard her tell that at the time of her marriage, your great-grandfather could span it with his two hands.'

Becky always cast a reflective glance at the mirror at this point.

'But, Aunt Susan, I should think it would have been very inconvenient when it came to breathing.'

'From her childhood,' Aunt Susan continued, magnificently disregarding the interruption, 'her complexion was guarded with the utmost care. She wore a thick veil even to school, and I have heard her say that her mother would as readily have allowed her daughters to use improper language as to tan or freckle.'

'Poor things,' said Becky, irreverently. And as Aunt Susan looked at her aghast she persisted:

'Honestly, Auntie, nobody could have any fun wearing a veil.'

'When your Great-grandmother Parke was married,' said Aunt Susan, 'she was considered the most beautiful woman in Doan county. Of course,' she added, with withering sarcasm, 'some of her descendants may prefer riding bicycles, and other tomboy pursuits to mere beauty and womanliness. Standards change so. I really don't know,' concluded Aunt Susan, falling back on her favorite perplexity, 'what the world is coming to.'

It was the bicycle that Aunt Susan found it the hardest to overlook. Bringing up a solitary girl in a family of boys makes it difficult to conform to such standards as were responsible for the manifold perfections of Great-grandmother Parke. Becky went fishing with the boys in summer and skating in winter. She developed a most unfeminine dislike for tears, and aroused Aunt Susan's apprehensions, at a very early age, by pounding her finger with a hammer, and then saying it didn't hurt. She loved baseball better than piano practice, and knew very much more about incurses than she did about the key of five flats. Great-grandmother Parke had played the harp. Her picture in the parlor represented her manipulating that instrument, with beautifully tapering white hands. From her point of vantage on the wall, she looked benignly down on her great-granddaughter hammering out scales with stout brown fingers, and always with a watchful eye on the hourglass.

But the skating and fishing and baseball, bad as they were, in Aunt Susan's estimation, all faded into insignificance beside Becky's fondness for the bicycle. In the small town where Becky's father was the only physician the bicycle had never come into general favor for the use of girls and women. But when the doctor added enough to Tom's earnings one summer to enable him to buy a bicycle, Becky learned to ride, as a matter of course, took her tumbles without complaint, and longed for a bicycle of her own.

But there Aunt Susan put her foot down. It was bad enough for Becky to ride Tom's wheel, but that was nothing compared to the official sanction of such impropriety implied in giving her a wheel of her own. The doctor thought his sister over-particular, yet he respected her objections, and turned a deaf ear to his daughter's coaxing. And all that was left for Becky was to endeavor to conquer Aunt Susan's prejudice by performing necessary errands in incredibly few moments, and similar pieces of strategy. Had she known just how she was to gain her point at last, it is very sure she would have preferred to surrender all thought of the bicycle.

One spring afternoon Becky found herself in charge of the establishment, a rather unusual responsibility. Aunt Susan was spending the afternoon with an old friend who lived on the rise of ground above the valley where the most of the houses of the village nestled. The boys were scattered in various enterprises. Becky's father had announced at the dinner table that he meant to drive up to the dam, which five miles above the town held back in a huge reservoir the water supply of the nearest large city.

H. LOUIS GALLIEN

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