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THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS

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《THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS》

By James Fenimore Cooper

(三)

Chapter 19

Salarino. - Why, I am sure, if he forfeit, thou wilt not take his flesh; what's that good for?

Shylock. - To bait fish withal; if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge.

MERCHANT OF VENICE

The shades of evening had come to increase the dreariness of the place, when the party entered the ruins of William Henry. The scout and his companions immediately made their preparations to pass the night there; but with an earnestness and sobriety of demeanor that betrayed how much the unusual horrors they had just witnessed worked on even their practised feelings. A few fragments of rafters were reared against a blackened wall; and when Uncas had covered them slightly with brush, the temporary accommodations were deemed sufficient. The young Indian pointed toward his rude hut when his labor was ended; and

Heyward, who understood the meaning of the silent gestures, gently urged Munro to enter. Leaving the bereaved old man alone with his sorrows, Duncan immediately returned into the open air, too much excited himself to seek the repose he had recommended to his veteran friend.

While Hawkeye and the Indians lighted their fire and took their evening's repast, a frugal meal of dried bear's meat, the young man paid a visit to that curtain of the dilapidated fort which looked out on the sheet of the Horican. The wind had fallen, and the waves were already rolling on the sandy beach beneath him, in a more regular and tempered succession. The clouds, as if tired of their furious chase, were breaking asunder; the heavier volumes, gathering in black masses about the horizon, while the lighter scud still hurried above the water, or eddied among the tops of the mountains, like broken flights of birds, hovering around their roosts. Here and there, a red and fiery star struggled through the drifting vapor, furnishing a lurid gleam of brightness to the dull aspect of the heavens. Within the bosom of the encircling hills, an impenetrable darkness had already

settled; and the plain lay like a vast and deserted charnel-house, without omen or whisper to disturb the slumbers of its numerous and hapless tenants.

Of this scene, so chillingly in accordance with the past, Duncan stood for many minutes a rapt observer. His eyes wandered from the bosom of the mound, where the foresters were seated around their glimmering fire, to the fainter light which still lingered in the skies, and then rested long and anxiously on the embodied gloom, which lay like a dreary void on that side of him where the dead reposed. He soon fancied that inexplicable sounds arose from the place, though so indistinct and stolen, as to render not only their nature but even their existence uncertain. Ashamed of his apprehensions, the young man turned toward the water, and strove to divert his attention to the mimic stars that dimly glimmered on its moving surface. Still, his too-conscious ears performed their ungrateful duty, as if to warn him of some lurking danger. At length, a swift trampling seemed, quite audibly, to rush athwart the darkness. Unable any longer to quiet his uneasiness, Duncan spoke in a low voice to the scout, requesting him to

ascend the mound to the place where he stood. Hawkeye threw his rifle across an arm and complied, but with an air so unmoved and calm, as to prove how much he counted on the security of their position.

Listen! said Duncan, when the other placed himself deliberately at his elbow; there are suppressed noises on the plain which may show Montcalm has not yet entirely deserted his conquest.

Then ears are better than eyes, said the undisturbed scout, who, having just deposited a portion of a bear between his grinders, spoke thick and slow, like one whose mouth was doubly occupied. I myself saw him caged in Ty, with all his host; for your Frenchers, when they have done a clever thing, like to get back, and have a dance, or a merry-making, with the women over their success.

I know not. An Indian seldom sleeps in war, and plunder may keep a Huron here after his tribe has departed. It would be well to extinguish the fire, and have a watch - listen! you hear the noise I mean!

An Indian more rarely lurks about the graves. Though ready to slay, and not over regardful of the

means, he is commonly content with the scalp, unless when blood is hot, and temper up; but after spirit is once fairly gone, he forgets his enmity, and is willing to let the dead find their natural rest. Speaking of spirits, major, are you of opinion that the heaven of a red-skin and of us whites will be of one and the same?

No doubt - no doubt. I thought I heard it again! or was it the rustling of the leaves in the top of the beech?

For my own part, continued Hawkeye, turning his face for a moment in the direction indicated by Heyward, but with a vacant and careless manner, I believe that paradise is ordained for happiness; and that men will be indulged in it according to their dispositions and gifts. I, therefore, judge that a red-skin is not far from the truth when he believes he is to find them glorious hunting grounds of which his traditions tell; nor, for that matter, do I think it would be any disparagement to a man without a cross to pass his time - -

You hear it again? interrupted Duncan.

Ay, ay; when food is scarce, and when food is plenty, a wolf grows bold, said the unmoved scout. There would be picking, too, among the skins of the

devils, if there was light and time for the sport. But, concerning the life that is to come, major; I have heard preachers say, in the settlements, that heaven was a place of rest. Now, men's minds differ as to their ideas of enjoyment. For myself, and I say it with reverence to the ordering of Providence, it would be no great indulgence to be kept shut up in those mansions of which they preach, having a natural longing for motion and the chase.

Duncan, who was now made to understand the nature of the noise he had heard, answered, with more attention to the subject which the humor of the scout had chosen for discussion, by saying:

It is difficult to account for the feelings that may attend the last great change.

It would be a change, indeed, for a man who has passed his days in the open air, returned the single-minded scout; and who has so often broken his fast on the head waters of the Hudson, to sleep within sound of the roaring Mohawk. But it is a comfort to know we serve a merciful Master, though we do it each after his fashion, and with great tracts of wilderness atween us -

what goes there?

Is it not the rushing of the wolves you have mentioned?

Hawkeye slowly shook his head, and beckoned for Duncan to follow him to a spot to which the glare from the fire did not extend. When he had taken this precaution, the scout placed himself in an attitude of intense attention and listened long and keenly for a repetition of the low sound that had so unexpectedly startled him. His vigilance, however, seemed exercised in vain; for after a fruitless pause, he whispered to Duncan:

We must give a call to Uncas. The boy has Indian senses, and he may hear what is hid from us; for, being a white-skin, I will not deny my nature.

The young Mohican, who was conversing in a low voice with his father, started as he heard the moaning of an owl, and, springing on his feet, he looked toward the black mounds, as if seeking the place whence the sounds proceeded. The scout repeated the call, and in a few moments, Duncan saw the figure of Uncas stealing cautiously along the rampart, to the spot where they

stood.

Hawkeye explained his wishes in a very few words, which were spoken in the Delaware tongue. So soon as Uncas was in possession of the reason why he was summoned, he threw himself flat on the turf; where, to the eyes of Duncan, he appeared to lie quiet and motionless. Surprised at the immovable attitude of the young warrior, and curious to observe the manner in which he employed his faculties to obtain the desired information, Heyward advanced a few steps, and bent over the dark object on which he had kept his eye riveted. Then it was he discovered that the form of Uncas vanished, and that he beheld only the dark outline of an inequality in the embankment.

What has become of the Mohican? he demanded of the scout, stepping back in amazement; it was here that I saw him fall, and could have sworn that here he yet remained.

Hist! speak lower; for we know not what ears are open, and the Mingoës are a quick-witted breed. As for Uncas, he is out on the plain, and the Maquas, if any such are about us, will find their equal.

You think that Montcalm has not called off all his Indians? Let us give the alarm to our companions, that we may stand to our arms. Here are five of us, who are not unused to meet an enemy.

Not a word to either, as you value your life. Look at the Sagamore, how like a grand Indian chief he sits by the fire. If there are any skulkers out in the darkness, they will never discover, by his countenance, that we suspect danger at hand.

But they may discover him, and it will prove his death. His person can be too plainly seen by the light of that fire, and he will become the first and most certain victim.

It is undeniable that now you speak the truth, returned the scout, betraying more anxiety than was usual; yet what can be done? A single suspicious look might bring on an attack before we are ready to receive it. He knows, by the call I gave to Uncas, that we have struck a scent; I will tell him that we are on the trail of the Mingoes; his Indian nature will teach him how to act.

The scout applied his fingers to his mouth, and raised a low hissing sound, that caused Duncan at first to

start aside, believing that he heard a serpent. The head of Chingachgook was resting on a hand, as he sat musing by himself but the moment he had heard the warning of the animal whose name he bore, he arose to an upright position, and his dark eyes glanced swiftly and keenly on every side of him. With his sudden and, perhaps, involuntary movement, every appearance of surprise or alarm ended. His rifle lay untouched, and apparently unnoticed, within reach of his hand. The tomahawk that he had loosened in his belt for the sake of ease, was even suffered to fall from its usual situation to the ground, and his form seemed to sink, like that of a man whose nerves and sinews were suffered to relax for the purpose of rest. Cunningly resuming his former position, though with a change of hands, as if the movement had been made merely to relieve the limb, the native awaited the result with a calmness and fortitude that none but an Indian warrior would have known how to exercise.

But Heywad saw that while to a less instructed eye the Mohican chief appeared to slumber, his nostrils were expanded, his head was turned a little to one side, as if

to assist the organs of hearing, and that his quick and rapid glances ran incessantly over every object within the power of his vision.

See the noble fellow! whispered Hawkeye, pressing the arm of Heyward; he knows that a look or a motion might disconcert our schemes, and put us at the mercy of them imps - -

He was interrupted by the flash and report of a rifle. The air was filled with sparks of fire, around that spot where the eyes of Heyward were still fastened, with admiration and wonder. A second look told him that Chingachgook had disappeared in the confusion. In the meantime, the scout had thrown forward his rifle, like one prepared for service, and awaited impatiently the moment when an enemy might rise to view. But with the solitary and fruitless attempt made on the life of Chingachgook, the attack appeared to have terminated. Once or twice the listeners thought they could distinguish the distant rustling of bushes, as bodies of some unknown description rushed through them; nor was it long before Hawkeye pointed out the scampering of the wolves, as they fled precipitately before the

passage of some intruder on their proper domains. After an impatient and breathless pause, a plunge was heard in the water, and it was immediately followed by the report of another rifle.

There goes Uncas! said the scout; the boy bears a smart piece! I know its crack, as well as a father knows the language of his child, for I carried the gun myself until a better offered.

What can this mean? demanded Duncan, we are watched, and, as it would seem, marked for destruction.

Yonder scattered brand can witness that no good was intended, and this Indian will testify that no harm has been done, returned the scout, dropping his rifle across his arm again, and following Chingachgook, who just then reappeared within the circle of light, into the bosom of the work. How is it, Sagamore? Are the Mingoës upon us in earnest, or is it only one of those reptiles who hang upon the skirts of a war-party, to scalp the dead, go in, and make their boast among the squaws of the valient deeds done on the pale faces?

Chingachgook very quietly resumed his seat; nor did he make any reply, until after he had examined the

firebrand which had been struck by the bullet that had nearly proved fatal to himself. After which he was content to reply, holding a single finger up to view, with the English monosyllable:

One.

I thought as much, returned Hawkeye, seating himself; and as he had got the cover of the lake afore Uncas pulled upon him, it is more than probable the knave will sing his lies about some great ambushment, in which he was outlying on the trail of two Mohicans and a white hunter - for the officers can be considered as little better than idlers in such a scrimmage. Well, let him - let him. There are always some honest men in every nation, though heaven knows, too, that they are scarce among the Maquas, to look down an upstart when he brags ag'in the face of reason. The varlet sent his lead within whistle of your ears, Sagamore.

Chingachgook turned a calm and incurious eye toward the place where the ball had struck, and then resumed his former attitude, with a composure that could not be disturbed by so trifling an incident. Just then Uncas glided into the circle, and seated himself at