

As soon as she disappeared from view, Uncheedah, with all solemnity and reverence, unfastened the leather strings that held the four small bundles of paints and one of tobacco, while the filled pipe was laid beside the dead Ohitika.

She scattered paints and tobacco all about. Again they stood a few moments silently; then she drew a deep breath and began her prayer to the Great Mystery:

“O, Great Mystery, we hear thy voice in the rushing waters below us! We hear thy whisper in the great oaks above! Our spirits are refreshed with thy breath from within this cave. O, hear our prayer! Behold this little boy and bless him! Make him a warrior and a hunter as great as thou didst make his father and grandfather.”

And with this prayer the little warrior had completed his first offering. . . .

Evening in the Lodge

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I had been skating on that part of the lake where there was an overflow, and came home somewhat cold. I cannot say just how cold it was, but it must have been intensely so, for the trees were cracking all about me like pistol shots. I did not mind, because I was wrapped up in my buffalo robe with the hair inside, and a wide leather belt held it about my loins. My skates were nothing more than strips of basswood bark bound upon my feet.

I had taken off my frozen moccasins and put on dry ones in their places.

“Where have you been and what have you been doing?” Uncheedah asked as she placed before me some roast venison in a wooden bowl. “Did you see any tracks of moose or bear?”

“No, grandmother, I have only been playing at the lower end of the lake. I have something to ask you,” I said, eating

Selections from *Indian Boyhood*

my dinner and supper together with all the relish of a hungry boy who has been skating in the cold for half a day.

"I found this feather, grandmother, and I could not make out what tribe wear feathers in that shape."

"Ugh, I am not a man; you had better ask your uncle. Besides, you should know it yourself by this time. You are now old enough to think about eagle feathers."

I felt mortified by this reminder of my ignorance. It seemed a reflection on me that I was not ambitious enough to have found all such matters out before.

"Uncle, you will tell me, won't you?" I said, in an appealing tone.

"I am surprised, my boy, that you should fail to recognize this feather. It is a Cree medicine feather, and not a warrior's."

"Then," I said, with much embarrassment, you had better tell me again, uncle, the language of the feathers. I have really forgotten it all."

The day was now gone; the moon had risen; but the cold had not lessened, for the trunks of the trees were still snapping all around our teepee, which was lighted and warmed by the immense logs which Uncheedah's industry had provided.

My uncle, White Foot-print, now undertook to explain to me the significance of the eagle's feather.

"The eagle is the most war-like bird," he began, "and the most kingly of all birds; besides, his feathers are unlike any others, and these are the reasons why they are used by our people to signify deeds of bravery.

"It is not true that when a man wears a feather bonnet, each one of the feathers represents the killing of a foe or even a coup. When a man wears an eagle feather upright upon his head, he is supposed to have counted one of four coups upon his enemy."

"Well, then, a coup does not mean the killing of an enemy?"