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THE LAST OF THE MALUNGHONS.

By Will Allen Dromgoole.

A sanitarium valley was making merry with the echoes among the crags of the Ireland old summit known as Nonesuch Ridge.

Isolated Ireland is the ridge; and people enough to be transverse this, by virtue of accident or duty, ventured upon the territory of the Ridgemaulers, or Malungoes, that strange and lawless clan, the most incorrigible that ever infested the State of Tennessee. Ten years ago he would have been called a hero, or else a fool, who ventured into the "Tawnee district." The country succeeded, without remonstrance, so much of Hancock county, one tarn, one interference in any way whatever, to the Malungoes.

But times are changing; changing slow, though. There is a school-house over in the Black Water Swamps, and a half-finished meeting-house down on Big Sycamore Creek. The sanitarium is to come, built both houses, thinking to settle themselves permanently among the hills where life is sweet and labor light. But they were driven away by the Malungoes before they had well stripped half a year in their brown. Driven away because of the sanitarium that spread up between the Malungoes and the valley of the valley. The sailor crew would not have it; the Malungoes were Indians, they claimed, descendants of those Cherokees who refusing to follow the banished tribes to the reservation, still lurkeit as lonely peak of the Great Smokies. This band had sought the ridge—and had lived alone, rather giving up selling capture; until the valley now of the sanitarium, on Black Water Creek, was the nearest to the Malungoes' lands in swamp at the base of the ridge.

The negroes formed themselves into a settlement across the Virginia line. A few have wandered back of late years since the old blocks are gone, and warily timidly afternoons in their old, still unchanged meeting-house with the Malungoes. Nobody offers molestation now, since the Malungoes, with the sunken eyes, who having of late become "Indians," as they said, in "Virginy," occupied the pulpit now and then, sing, ing the same song in the same chanting tones, that he sang as he trudged home to the dowy evening from the still under the sabaing crags.

He was very tall and straight, with hawk-like eye, and long, coarse jaw, that fell about his well-shaped shoulder, with a peculiar sweep, that left the chin below the free child of the forest. He was neither shoes nor stockings, nor his trousers were rolled back above the strong, well-formed knee, showing the dusky skin which marked him of a race other than white or black.

Indian; the grandson of a chief, and the son of a full-blooded Cherokee. Such he claimed, and the most dubious would have yielded the point when, with his long, black hair falling about his edge, he mounted an overhanging crag and bent his sharp, penetrating gaze down upon the valley below, warm with the October sunset. So lynx-eyed warrior ever scanned the white enemy country with more earnest thoroughness than did he that mid-October, the far-away valley of the Clinch.

Indeed he might have been a warrior, some called chief, as kingly was his bearing, as he stood there, with his dusky hight the monument of his white foes. What is he? Who is he? And what means it, that strange, Indian-like presence, in all its savage freedom of dress and manner, roaming with fearless abandon the old Tennessee forest in this, the good guard our Lord, eighteen hundred and ninety! Study him a moment! His hawk-like eyes swept the valley from mountain to mountain, with a long, searching look, with abundant, sluggish flow, paces under the searching gaze. Empty, both field and road. Well! Ah, the Indian leans no antispectd assess. He drops upon his belly, lays his ear to the cooling earth, resist now with the caressing mist. A moment of absorbing silence, intense straining of the sensitive ear, then to his feet he leaps, a bound, a fling to the best wall, and takes up the run, he precisely the point at which he set off singing a moment before—

Come count the low land on me,
On the red ground he rolls,
Hay brother, stay, ed' ne' ar away,
Ar ver ium wi ver ium.

The song comes to an abrupt stop, and again he puts his ear to the earth.

It was early in mother's voice he had heard; he was nearing the cabin upon the bluff; his voice had reached his little pony pastured about the rude fireplace near the spring where they were purposing the evening meal.

"Hi ave King," said his mother, when the song found up to her from the crags. "He air singin' a thy' ing, ye know, ye know, ye know, he air sill gin a pi of he ain't ner ainfin' in his mouth. Times ain't what they tuter was."

"Shuttin' thar airs no danger' ter King. Folkes air all too long long yer ration a ossin', ter be a-lagin for kills ov' arch."

"Ho! I believe in Jesus Christ'
Sich an air a Forgive."

The singer drew nearer the group at the fire. There were his two brothers and his sister, the last a young girl of goodly proportions. And there was his mother, a toothless old crone with the same sharp eyes and the coarse hair that were common to the Malungoes. Jim, too, was handsome, as were his sisters. And her short dress, hanging a trifle below the knee, allowing the firelight to play upon the strong old limbs, gave her a picturesque appearance thoroughly in keeping with her surroundings.

Leaning against a tree was a tall, lithe young man, a visitor, also barefoot, and bearing the unmistakable mark of the Malungoes.

The Stephens was simply a candid plaging of rocks, convenient alike to the spring half-hidden in a jungle of mountain and chinquapin bushes, and the open space hundred yards farther to the valley.

The blaze from the fire lapped up nearly into the arms of the gray mass, writing a crimson banner of defiance to the sun almost ready to drop behind the farther peaks beyond the valley.

It flirted with real splendor the open space between the spring and the cabin, over which stood an arbor of the twigs, oil leaves and cut-nails pastured in the shape of a horseshoe, and stuck with roses for the arbor was indeed a part of the home itself, and had been used as such for generations back.

Summer days the family gathered there to smoke and dream; dream away the long, languorous hours. At night, indeed, it made as comfortable bed as the cabin, with, cared to rest upon. Within the cabin, to be sure, there were heaps of sweet, fragrant hay, upon which make good sleeping, and filled, perhaps, the sleeper's dreams with the dreamy orders of the Autumn forest. But for the strong-limbed distiller, whose the women called King—he whose the solid earth and blanket, as his grandfather and his father had done before him, under the twinkling old heaven.

Just now a rude table stood in the midst of the clearing, and nearby there were passing to and fro from the cabin, with the assistance of the young smoking rabbits and chickens, the spoons from the clay-oven among the coals. A coffee-pot set to boil on one of the red-hot stones was sending out delicious odors. All hands were busy with the supper, but all stopped at the approach of King, and one of the women addressed herself to the rather hearing against the tree, the sun now sent a long quarter-beam full upon it.

"I don't ye mind, King, ye air gittin' a heaps ov' religion, King. I kinder doubts but he ull git up the fiddle shortly. Hear that!"

"Ho! I believe in Jesus Christ'
Sich an air a Forgive."

The singer passed through the midst of them into the cabin, beyond, he had noted the presence of the visitor, but had not thought it necessary to the need further greeting than a welcoming nod.

When he emerged from the cabin he carried a pipple, a molten pipple, which he proceeded to arrange beside the hang of a large barrel, ostensibly a water barrel, only half concealed by the angle of rocks about the spring. He slowly drew forth the stopper of the barrel, and the yellow liquid bounded with a kind of jubilant gurgle into the cabin vessel. When it was full, he stopped the barrel, and turned to the table that the pipple in the corner of the table.

It was then the old woman announced that supper was "a-cooln;" and invited the assembly to "fetch up." "Come on, King," she called, "come on, Cyclin," the sister and wife, "fetch come on, Calloway."

"Come on, Calloway," said King, "I'm gine to die ner ketch from Black Water Swamp ter Black Mountain, ner' ne ye."

"Pyty, pyty," said the visitor, "Mum Mallice ev' six cayes ony hear song nobow, 'case she ey all the charmer lulls ev' lead, 'ngin them ses gel religion. She ner religion ner charm don't go together."

The dark face of the Malungoes grew stern. He had felt some misgiving, "a charmer" he was official and he had been sent to Black Mountain, and not prepared to give that up; he had only just begun to learn to feel at home in it. Still, it was a good leader his grandfather, old Jordan Collins, had been a leader, too,—a leader and a chief; a full-blooded Cherokee chief. No doubt about that. It was on the reservation.

He sighed. He was given to reflection, lately, this strange, silent, young full-blooded man, who was neither white nor black, and against whom the law of the law was forever set.

He sighed.

"Air she much pyty?" he asked slowly.

"Right much. But I war not come fo' he." I war come fo' ner gide. They-ons what ter ease ter you home wrought for ter dance. He allus ner a long time ain' they had a bee-line ter Black Mountain, ner ye, King' fiddle, ole' Jordan fiddle, ner yer own pappy wair tuk, ner' you-ons gitin' religion."

"Religion?"

"The ticky-hoes about the table war fall of interest; they were always interested when King spoke. "Ner Injun bender pleasure? Dide' David play ner fiddle sing? Tell ther pale fo' comp ony. King ull play fer ton. King ull play fer ton. Ho! ho! King ull play fer ton. Tell 'em ner come. Tell 'em religion don't stop ther fiddle. King ull a fiddle; ole ole Jordan war allus hin."

He half rose from his seat, and waved his large, strong hand toward the upper hights, dark with the pyramidal forests in whose mysterious depths the old Cherokee chieftain had lived, sleeping, for fifty—years—and Jordan Collins had been born, and none have successfully denied the claim, which seemed, indeed, to have descended to three dusky representatives seated about the rude board with the glaring firelight playing upon their faces and bare, brown limbs. But to King, more than to any, did the resemblance cling. A King indeed he might have been, with the long, black hair falling about his shoulders, the sharp, penetrating eye, looking upon the ancient dead, long ago a part of the ancient forest—as stern in his loyalty.

The visitor smiled.

"Thanks, King," he said. "I'll go ner tell 'em, King."

"Wait!"

The moonshiner reached for the guest strung to a sharp stick driven into a convenient tree.

"Drug ometikis' ether pe ge."

He plunged the gourd into the liquid, saying pipple; the amber liquor bubbled and foamed, and the visitor, taking the pipl in a stream of dazzling rainbows, which seemed to have caught the sparkle of the Malungoes's dark eyes and danced for very jubilance.

The guest drained the gourd to the last fary drop.

"Thanks, King." He laid the gourd back upon the table. "I'll go fer ther gide, King. Gee-ipsy!"

The Malungoes watched his hand, but he made no sign, and the visitor, with his left to town. When his gone had departed, he turned from his untasted supper and strode off toward the dying, smokey embers under where drooping boughs his Cherokee ancestors were sleeping.

With the coming of night upon the mountain the air grew chill, so that when the table had been cleared they to make room for the dancers, the old woman shivered and drew her shawl closer about her shoulders, as she sat on the rocks of the fireplace. Coffee is no stranger to the Malungoes, but is great to their fiddle brandy, the most dearly prized of all luxuries, the old woman set the pot "ter keep" ter the receiver, who might fetch a from the same guard which did service for the strong beverage.

King, occupying a chair that had been brought from the cabin, was intently scanning sky size ole fiddle. There were ten, ten strings, and it hanged neither low nor bridge. A low was a small matter to the sober-faced Malungoes. His young indecision was quite enough now for him. As for bridge, an old piece of rock has the stirrup pretty fairly in place. He was not a musician, and had never been elected artist, as it rested on his long fingers and fiddle to harmony before the arrival of the revelers, he promised, indeed, a straight melancholy and nasal pipple. His long, dark face sprinkled with gray, hung about his low, solemn and sensitive, yet more and than sonder, and lay in gloomy moves upon his breast. His hasty dropped forward, as if weary, and even the fingers of the musician ceased to play, strings of the dead chief's fiddle for the chords of the dead chief's music, had a kind of individual intelligence in their movements.

Yet the hour upon never lost Eve, and were seldom removed from that dark cedar forest towering behind the cabin where the old Cherokee pulsists were buried.

It was in readiness, the women had replenished the fire; the long, gourd horse-scraper marked upward toward the purple plumes of cedar that waved triumphantly, forever, beyond their searching touch. Beyond the moonlit, the dancers, the musicians, the women hovered, dividing the Stephens valley below, as she called westward in the direction of Black Mountain, in blocs of sudden and pale pink.

The musicians were playing; the fiddle lay across his knee. Now and then his left hand ran upon the fiddle, low old strings, but only to coaxe them. His thoughts were far away among the dagwoods and Jordan Collins, and the Black Mountain, and the Black Mountain and Black Water Swamp. Old Jordan was an Indian, "full blood," they called him, and he had been reported by the whites. No man knew his age, but old Jordan a negro; he was a Cherokee, friend and reputed as a Cherokee.

But the present generation, the hundred to tight nervous and nervous, the Malungoes's full Cherokee; a Cherokee, and a Malungoes.

"Thar are some mighty ter be claimed in an unspoken whisper. "They hadn't ner ketch from Black Water ner Black Mountain." Their chiefs air all dead. They ketch ner ketch from Black Mountain." The whole tribe of Malungoes, ner ye, King, ner ye, King, ner ye, King