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THE MOTHER OF BA'TISTE.

It was growing dusk one wintry day when "Monseer Pierre," the French trader, came riding into Fort Leavenworth. He was well known in the garrison as one of the shrewdest and richest traders west of the Missouri, but known only as "Monseer Pierre," for which peculiar reserve he had never mentioned his surname, choosing rather to accept the nickname which was soon fastened upon him. "Monseer Pierre Parley-vous" he was called whenever his comrades needed to give him a formal or a more distinctive title. Through this mock courtesy they not only resented his want of frankness, but also expressed their native distaste for his alien blood and all the propensities which it entailed. He was not popular. The reserve in regard to his name extended to all his private concerns, and this, with traits of personal fastidiousness, aggressive gallantry and a close, frugal habits in money matters, made him somewhat of an offence to the free-tongued, open-handed Western men, who had a fashion of spending all they could get, and telling all they knew with frank and engaging readiness. So they spoke of "Monseer Pierre" with distrust as a man who, while seeming to take all things quietly, turned them to his own account, always had his own way, and that way one which invariably drew the money aside from their hands into his.

But now, in spite of their prejudice against him, the half dozen men who chanced to be lingering out of doors hurried to meet the "monseer" as he rode in. There was a prospect of news and gossip with every fresh comer, never disregarded at an outpost where the mails are months apart; and, besides, they were surprised to see the man at this season of the year alone, without the train of hunters, trappers, Indians, teamsters, horses, wagons, dogs and all the motley crowd that were wont to attend a successful trader returning to winter quarters with the spoils of the summer.

But "Monseer Pierre" did not check his horse or heed the eager, friendly questions, except by calling out curtly, "Bon soir, my good friends!" Then he drew the cape of his soldier's blue overcoat closer around a queer bundle of buckskin beads and fringe which he carried before him on his saddle—the men had a vague idea that it was a bag of gold—dug the spurs into his panting horse and galloped through the group of curious spectators across the parade-ground to the little dog house in which Major Kent, the Indian agent, lived.

He dismounted here, slipped the bridle over his arm and knocked loudly at the door. It was opened by a tall gray-haired man, the major himself. Without giving him time to speak, Pierre put his bundle gently inside the door, grasped the major's hand in his, and said rapidly, "Major, you once promised to do me the greatest favor I might ask. I've but five minutes to ask it now. That boy yonder: will you and your good lady keep him safe for me? His name' Baptiste—for my father. I want him bred like a Christian and a gentleman. You know better than I. The fact is, sir, he's my own son, and I d'like to give him better show than ever I've had. Keep him for me 'till spring, sir, and then I will put him into the Sacred Heart at St. Louis with the good brothers."

"And," said Mrs. Kent, who had followed her husband to the door, and stood unobserved, looking at the two men, "what does the child's mother say about it? or has he none?"

Pierre took off his hat to the lady and answered with a nervous laugh: "His mother? oh, I forgot to say, his mother's a Sioux Injin with her tribe up at Kearney. She'll get over it, I reckon. I shall never forget your kindness to my child, madame. But farewell: I must be going. God bless you!" And without another word, and only a hasty glance backward into the darkening room, he vaulted into his saddle and was soon out of sight.

The major and his wife stood watching his figure 'till it was lost in the twilight.

"Pierre talks less than ever," said the major; who till then had not uttered a word.

But Mrs. Kent, following her own train of thought, expressed herself more strongly. "I don't like that Frenchman," she said as she turned back into her room, "with his dark face and smooth manner. He's heartless. Besides, Mr. Kent, what are we to do with an Indian papoose on our hands all winter? Likely to get the measles, whooping cough, scarlet fever, croup, chicken-pox—"

The major, smiling, stopped her: "Look there, wife!"

The bundle which Pierre had thrust into the room still lay on the floor, but out of it had crept a dusky little creature about two years old. At the sound of the unfamiliar voices he scuttled across the room like a crab, into the darkest corner between the bedstead and wall, and stood there, his bright black eyes shining through the gloom, and a look of grotesque sweetness, half timid, half defiant, on his round baby face. He was dressed fantastically in a suit of buckskin, jacket and leggings, richly worked and fringed with beads of many hues. Moccasins were on his tiny feet: a string of bear's claws and hawk's bells around his neck jangled low at every movement, and in his long straight hair were twisted three or four of the changeable burnished feathers from the cock's tail. The beads and bells and feathers glimmered in the red firelight with a savage splendor; the little form was straight as an arrow; the little face set in all a child's dignity; and the boy looked not unlike a baby chieftain dressed for the wardance—his grandfather, "the chief of all the Sioux," in miniature.

Mrs. Kent saw only a motherless little one hurt and lonely.

"Come, honey," she cried as she gathered him, buckskin, feathers and all, to her ample bosom. "Poor little man! I'm sure mother's yearning sorely for you this night."

And in the days which came the child yearned for his mother in a way pitiful to see. Or perhaps he missed more the fresh air and the wild free life of the prairies and woods. He was not happy with his kind friends. His new clothes were a torment to him, for, as the first step toward civilization, Mrs. Kent stripped off his heathenish gewgaws and put him into frocks. The daily scrubbing with soap and warm water he considered quite unnecessary, for he had had but few baths before in his life, and those in any chance wayside stream, where his mother broke the ice, held him by the heels and plunged him in. Nor was he comfortable on his soft bed, for he remembered well how through the long summer days he had been strapped into his cocoon-shaped cradle and hung on the low-branched trees to be rocked by every wind that blew, as fat and drowsy as the swaddled butterfly grub which swung by his side.

And yet he never cried or fretted. He sat patiently at first, staring at the door and looking wistfully into the face of any one who entered. He toddled out whenever the door was left unlatched, and could be always captured in the back garden, digging in the earth, throwing sticks and stones at the birds flying over his head, chasing the chickens, torturing the cat, rolling over the dogs; in the stables under the horses' feet; playing in the mud puddles with bits of bark for canoes. And all this with such a sober, steady ardor that Mrs. Kent shook her head in despair, and said, "Ba'tiste is his mother's child, an Indian clear through, and there's no use going again' Nature."

Meanwhile, the winter had fairly set in—a regular old-fashioned winter. The garrison waked up one morning and saw the great yellow river which rolls by the fort frozen from shore to shore, the ice so thick that loaded ox-wagons could be driven across. Then it snowed by day and froze at night till the whole wide prairie around the fort was covered with snow four feet deep on the level, while in the gorges and drifts only the topmost boughs of the pine trees were seen. The soldiers shoveled pathways out through the sally-ports, and piled the snow high above their heads on either side. It froze there into a solid wall lasting far into the spring. The miserable half-clad, half-fed Indians always hovering around a Western fort flocked in for food and shelter. The wolves did not wait to be hunted down, for, tamed by hunger and cold, they prowled close under the walls, and sometimes at night they even crept in, lean and lank, with hideous howling, as if to beg the blood they fiercely snatched in warmer weather. All landmarks and trails were covered up, and the oldest hunters sat around their hearths like women and spun long yarns. Whoever left the fort did so at the risk of his life. One man ventured, for a foolish wager, to go to the river at night, a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile. The air was thick with the blinding snow and the moon was obscured. He lost his way, turned back, wandered about as long as his strength lasted, then he lay down to sleep with the certainty that he should never waken again. In the early morning he was found by his anxious comrades just outside the walls, within a stone's throw of his starting-point, more dead than alive—only alive because a large wolf, weakened by starvation, had fallen on top of him and lain there all night, thus preserving with his shaggy body a feeble spark of life in the man.

The agent's house during this stress of weather was the headquarters of the famishing Indians. They crowded, unkempt and ragged, into the large warm kitchen, and Mrs. Kent gave them whatever portion of corn bread and bacon she could spare from her own stores. One morning, when she went into her front room, she was startled to find a swarthy Indian woman squatted on the buffalo-robe before the blazing wood-fire, sound asleep. It was the heavy sleep of exhaustion. The woman's hands were chapped and bleeding; her pretty face was unpainted and all wasted by hunger; her long hair, an Indian woman's pride, hanging unplaited and tangled; the gay trappings and adornments of her dress frayed and ragged and torn. An empty cradle, made after the curious Indian pattern, rested against the chimney-place, and it was plain by the deep mark of the strap across the woman's brow that she had carried the heavy burden a long distance.

By this mute token Mrs. Kent knew that the poor creature at her feet was childless as well as cold and ill; for it is a custom among some of our Western tribes that when a baby dies its mother shall carry about with her for a year or more the empty cradle for a badge of mourning. On journeys or in camp, at work or at rest, she keeps the empty cradle near her, [illegible] lavishing upon the empty [illegible] the care and endearments she would give her papoose if it were alive to crow and smile in answer.

With great pity in her heart, Mrs. Kent knelt by the woman, smoothed back the straggling hair and called softly to rouse her from her stupor. She stirred at the gentle touch, muttered, stared wildly and then broke out into sobs and exclamations in a curious jumble of languages. She pointed to her shrunken empty breasts, to the cradle, out of the window—wringing her hands, clasped Mrs. Kent's waist, and cried, "My little papoose! I want: I no live. My whole heart go—it he no come back."

"Why, my poor dear," said Mrs. Kent, frightened by her wild looks and gestures, "don't take on so. If the Great Spirit who loves you has taken away your child, you know it can never come again. If you are good you will see him up here in the sky."

"No, no, no! I wake at night. So cold my breast; he does not lie there. My papoose gone. I cry, I look. My man never come. I walk many miles, many suns. I come far. I starve for to get to touch my pretty boy. You good white squaw—know heap, much money. Your man good to poor Indian. Winona do big work for the little dear papoose."

"Wife," said the major, who had just come in—"wife, this is Ba'tiste's mother, sure as you're born. We'll have to get her out of the way somehow. Don't let her see the boy: better send him over to Thomas' quarters for the day. Give her a good warm breakfast and then—"

"And then?" said Mrs. Kent indignantly.

"Well—and then—I don't know."

At this moment Baptiste, fresh and sweet from his morning bath, came running into the room. Winona, crouching on the floor and seeming to see only her sorrow, shivered by the fire at his childish tones. With a greedy gaze her eyes wandered over his body, then with a bound like a tiger's and a cry as deep, she snatched him to her arms and fell to kissing his hair, eyes, lips, hands and feet, murmuring over him a thousand soft Indian names, and Baptiste nestled on her bosom and laughed aloud as if once more he had found his home.

I wish I could tell you the strange story of her journey just as she told it to the major and his wife that morning. But then you might only smile at her queer way of talking, whereas they cried, for you could not see her sad face as they did, nor hear her voice, nor understand how she put a prayer and a sob into every work.

She told them that from the moment she felt her arms empty and her child gone without a kiss she had night and day one thought: her life was narrowed to the simple resolve to leave the camp and her people and to follow her papoose eastward, even though she must walk to where "the sun rises out of the big water." It was long before she could escape. Her father, the chief of the tribe, watched her suspiciously, and so she saw many times the stars fade, and the dawn creep in, and the day darken again, before the moment came when she could steal away upon her desperate journey. At length it happened that the stock of provisions in the camp ran low, and the braves painted their faces, mounted their swift horses and rode off upon a three days' hunt, leaving behind them only the women and children, with a few sleepy old men for protectors. That night, when the camp was still, Winona rose, packed into the cradle her buffalo skin, with as much dried meat as she could hold—it wasn't much—took her bow and arrow, crept stealthily out of the wigwam into the moonlight past the snoring old men on guard, and by daybreak was many miles away upon the trackless prairie.

She knew that the nearest pale-face camp was Fort Leavenworth, distant from Fort Kearney perhaps three hundred miles, and that every one going east passed through this post. In her youth she had several times walked fifty miles between sunset and sunset, and she felt sure she could easily travel three hundred miles in nine or ten days, before the cold weather set in—find her child at the post, or learn some tidings of him, and be helped on in her search by the kind pale-faces. So for the first three days she walked gayly on, singing, I think, her heart was so light and her courage so high.

But on the fourth day the sky was overcast, the open plains were swept by the keen north-west wind, and the snow-storm began. The short days grew shorter still in the broad shadows of the hills, and the sun or moon rarely broke through the gray clouds. With the coming of the wind and frost every sound and sign of life went out, and a dead, unbroken quiet, noiseless as the falling snow, settled down upon the bleak prairie. The trail of birds through the air, the roving herd of buffaloes on the hills, the busy beavers and muskrats by the stream, all vanished as if by magic, securely hidden in their winter homes. Winona was as much alone as the man locked into polar seas, and the awful silence and monotony of this great white world, in which she was the only houseless wanderer, filled her with terror.

Soon her scanty supply of food gave out: there was nothing she might shoot, so she lived upon the frost-bitten rose-hips and black haws which the birds had left on leafless boughs by the roadside, or she dug the dry and sapless roots from the hard ground with her benumbed fingers. Once she was alert enough to trap an unwary beaver who peeped out at her from his mud-plastered house in the creek. With keen hunger she ate him raw, and found him a most delicious morsel. Then again she came one day upon a deserted camping-ground which had been left in haste, for the smouldering fire was still sending up thin blue wreaths of smoke into the frosty air, and scraps of bones and buffalo-meat were strewn over the ground. She rested in this place several days, as long as the scraps lasted. At night she stopped in the sheltered valleys where the willows and cottonwoods grew thick on the banks of little streams. She scooped out a place down to the earth, piled the snow in ramparts to windward, spread out her buffalo robe, kindled a flickering fire, and lay down to fitful slumber and dreams of warmth and food and the aimless touch of baby hands. With the first streak of dawn she was up and away again, climbing over hills, crossing streams on floating cakes of ice, always hungry and thirsty, aching from head to foot, leaving a red print on the snow from her bleeding feet—without guide or trail, and yet divinely led over those dreary, far-stretching wastes, where even the scent of the bloodhound would have been at fault.

When three weeks, as nearly as she could estimate the time, had passed [illegible] climbed a steep hill one morning, sa[illegible] herself that when she reached its to[illegible] would lie down and rest. She was so [illegible] of the fight against starvation and cold nothing seemed worth seeking but sleep or death, which would cure all pains. From that hilltop she looked down upon the gray walls of the fort; she heard voices and barking of dogs—saw men moving about, and the warm smoke rising from the chimneys. The sight quickened her drowsy senses. She dragged herself on hands and knees, along the short distance, staggered past the sentinels, opened the first door she came to, sank fainting in the heart-some warmth o' the fire, and we have seen how, on awaking, she found her child as suddenly as she had lost him.

The major turned away as she looked up at him, her story ended. He was thinking of things he never spoke of—his own dear mother and her tender love, his own dearly-loved son. Both mother and son were dead long ago, but they came back again fresh as yesterday in this mother holding up her thin hands to him, and in this son pleading yet more strongly by his babyish joy and content. On the other hand was "Monseer Pierre." He had a right in the affair. He meant to do a good part by the child—a better one than to leave him in barbarity and ignorance, with no higher ambition than the scalping-knife and war-dance. The major had never broken a trust. He could not now, though all the mothers in the world were on their knees before him. He said so to his wife, and he then made a hasty plan by which Winona should be provided for till she could be sent back to her tribe with the first troops going to Kearney.

The women smiled and whispered together while the major was speaking, for they knew that he did not, that the mighty love which had borne such a strain and trail for love's sake only was not now to be made of no avail. The resolute major had arrayed two women against himself: Samson surrendered to one.

Aided by Mrs. Kent, Winona was the major's shadow from that time. She lay in wait for him: if he mounted his horse, she stood at his bridle; if he walked, she followed; if he came in late, if he went out early, Winona was early and late too, always ready, always patient, always pleading, till at length "the major and his squaw" became a by word in the garrison. The major himself found no amusement in it; for wherever he turned he saw this woman's young, piteous face growing thinner and more haggard, and a look of patient longing settling into the eyes always brimming with tears. She was forbidden to enter the house, and so on days when so bleak and bitter was the weather that not a dog was driven out into it, she stood for hours in the snow, kissing the window-pane against which the chubby brown face of Baptiste was flattened.

It was after such a day that the major said, "Wife, I give in. That squaw's sick face haunts me. I'll give her the child tomorrow night: tell her so. How to make out with Parley-vous I don't know."

Mrs. Kent did not speak: she could not. It was as if a promise had been made that her own dead baby, white and soft, should again sleep warm in her bosom.

The next day was one of the warm bright days that drop sometimes into the mid-winter like a special boon. The sun shone out in such broad bold beams that there was a motion and stir of life through the land such as thrills us in the early days of spring. The snow-birds flew past in a sudden flurry; the long icicles hanging from the eaves grew quite thin and fell splintering on the ground; the ice in the river parted from the shores with a loud crack, and the swift current surged over the banks; while out on the prairie hill the black earth came through the melting snow in streaks and patches. The "January thaw" had begun. By evening, clouds gathered and broke into floods of warm rain upon the steaming earth, and there were thunder and lightning like a summer tempest.

At midnight the major carried a mysterious bundle of buckskin and beads and fringe from his bedroom to the kitchen, threw up the window opening out upon the little garden below, and called in a cautious whisper, "Winona, Winona, are you there?"

"Yes," came back from the darkness—"Winona hears."

"Take your boy, Winona—here, from the window. Tell no one, or he will not be safe with you. I give him up to you."

A pair of arms reached up out of the black night and clutched the sleeping baby. The major heard a low sweet sob of joy above the pealing thunder, and he saw by the glare of lightning the hungry, angular, coarse face transfigured by love, shining with a beauty as pure and divine as that which beams from the fair eyes of pictured Madonnas.

The woman disappeared, and her baby with her, as quietly as she had come. The good Kents never saw her again, but they knew that she reached her tribe in safety, for she sent back by every opportunity some little token of gratitude—moccasins or a pair of dried buffalo-meat, a bag of sweet corn or hazel-nut kernels. They heard, too, of the boy for whom such a wonderful love had been displayed, that he grew into a strong, handsome "young brave," wise in council, skilled in the chase and famed for deeds of blood and daring.

It was late spring when "Monseer Pierre" came to the garrison. He sought the major hastily, and the good old people saw that he was trembling with eagerness and anxiety. "And the boy, major?" he said after the first greetings.

"The boy's all right," answered the major.

"Don't bring him yet, Mrs. Kent: I'll just fetch in my saddle bags. I picked up a few traps that the young 'un may like: he don't know much about me, you see."

He presently came back smiling his arms full of packages, out of which were bursting tin soldiers, trumpets and painted candies. "Children are like their elders—not above a bribe, eh, major?"

"Pierre," said the major, and stopped—"Pierre—"

"Well, man! what's the matter? Speak it out! The boy's in bed, I suppose, and you don't want to wake him."

"The boy has gone."

"Gone! Where? You let him go?"

"I did."

"His mother, I suppose?"

"Yes: she came for him. A mother has the best right to her baby, Pierre."

"Because," added Mrs. Kent, trying to help her husband through—"because she has the most love."

"Ah, madame," said the man in a broken voice, "I too— But what matter? Sacre!"

He dashed the toys to the floor and ground them under his foot. "You're all the same, you women!"

"Thank God, we are!" cried Mrs. Kent with more heat than devotion.

But her resentful words were not heeded. Their guest struck off the major's detaining hand, mounted his horse and rode away, to come no more to his old friend's house.

Baptiste and his mother have long since gone to the happy hunting-grounds of their fathers. Pierre and the major and his wife have likewise passed away, for all this is an old story, though now for the first time told. I found it in a little yellow book [illegible] with [illegible] the major's diary. The lesson is obvious. But Mrs. Kent, with the feminine proneness to emphasize a moral, had written at the end, in a cramped, old-fashioned hand, these words: "It's my opinion—and I've seen enough of them to know—it's my opinion that the Indians—the women anyhow—are not such a bad lot, after all. Everything they touch doesn't turn to blood. They have feelings pretty much like the rest of God's people, and if they were given as good a chance and as fair a start in the world, and if we only knew how to put our finger on the soft spot in their hearts, they would be 'most as human and reasonable as white people."

M. D. RUFF.

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FLOUR, MEAL, GRAIN HAY, ETC.

OFFICE: 58 OHIO LEVEE. } CAIRO, ILLINOIS. 6-8-tf.

C. CLOSE,

—General—

Commission Merchant

AND DEALER IN

LIME, CEMENT, PLASTER, HAIR, &c.,

Under City National Bank.

I WILL sell in car-load lots at manufacturers prices, adding Freight.

JOHN B. PHILLIS AND SON,

(Successors to John B. Phillis)

FORWARDING

—AND—

Commission Merchants

And Dealers in

HAY, CORN, OATS, FLOUR, MEAL, BRAN, etc.

Agents for LAFLIN & RAND POWDER CO

Corner Tenth Street and Ohio Levee.

Z. D. Mathuss. E. C. Uhl.

MATHUSS & UHL,

FORWARDING

And General

Commission Merchants

Dealers in

FLOUR, GRAIN, HAY AND PRODUCE,

64 Ohio Levee.

P. CUHL,

—Exclusive—

Flour Merchant

—AND—

Millers' Agent.

No. 80 Ohio Levee,

CAIRO, ILLINOIS. 7-16-tf.

E. J. Ayres. S. D. Ayres.

AYRES & CO.,

FLOUR

And general

Commission Merchants

No. 78

OHIO LEVEE.

L. D. THOMS,

Commission Merchant,

BROKER

And dealer in

STAPLE AND FANCY

GROCERIES,

Foreign and Domestic Fruits and Nuts

184 COMMERCIAL AVENUE.

8-6tf.

DYAS T. PARKER. R. H. CUNNINGHAM.

PARKER & CUNNINGHAM,

(Successors to Miller & Parker,)

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—AND—

Commission Merchants

And Dealers in

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☞ We have leased the Large Yellow Warehouse, storage capacity 3,000 tons, which gives us ample facilities for storing and shipping. 6-8-tf

INSURANCE.

C. N. HUGHES,

—General—

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OFFICE:

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