

The Indian Scout

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A long life in the woods had imparted to Simpson the stoicism of silence. He knew that escape was impossible, but his face showed neither fear nor supplication. Expression was gone from it. He looked over the heads of his captors like one who knew nothing of their presence, and had no care for the future. It was this serenity in the face of disaster or death that men of his class sought most to acquire, and Simpson felt a pride that he had never been found wanting. Of death itself Simpson had not any great fear. It had been his constant companion in a life that had been of his own choosing, and always he had considered it among the things most to be expected. He had enjoyed many years according to his nature, and it was not for him to complain. He was glad that Berry, his comrade, had escaped. Berry was younger, much younger, and had more before him. Doubtless

it was the wisdom of Providence that the one who had the least to lose should lose it. He hoped Berry would remember him, for they had been good comrades.

Simpson turned his eyes indifferently upon his captors, like one who was watching people with whom he had no concern, merely because there was nothing else to do. The sun shone upon the copper of their shoulders and arms, and sifted through the gay feathers in their hair. The crisp October air felt very pleasant to Simpson. He had never seen the woods look more brilliant. The broad river beside them, with the sunbeams dancing on it, flashed in alternate streaks of silver and gold. The forest on the further shore, so thick the eye could not enter it, was painted brilliant yellows and reds and browns by the brush of late autumn. The far hills came nearer in the clear air.

Simpson's eye, which had wandered away for a moment to the woods and the river, came back to his captors. They seemed to pay little attention to him. There was slight need of watching, for he was too tightly bound to move. He had wondered under his impassive face what they would do with him for the present, but their movements now permitted no doubt. In spite of his courage and his long years of self-control, he shuddered a little. He had scarcely expected that so soon. He set his teeth hard and resolved that no cry should escape him. Yet he was sorry that he had not fallen in the encounter.

The chief sat on a log and directed the work of the others. Much dry brush, fallen the winter before, was scattered about, and the warriors gathered the lightest and driest of it, looking at each piece to see whether it would burn. Simpson watched them with the eye of a woodsman. It grated on him when a younger warrior brought a green stick, and the chief's judgment pleased him when he reproved the man and made him take it away. It occurred to him that they might think he was afraid if they saw him watching them. He turned his eyes away to the water. The river made him think of Berry again. His good and loyal comrade was safe on the other side now. It was better that one and not both should suffer.

Two of the strongest warriors lifted him to his feet, and carried him to a tree. They bound him to the trunk in an upright position. Simpson did not seek to resist. It was the code of his class to die as the old Romans would die, with dignity and without protest. He was glad they turned his face toward the river. Its shining waters and the spangled woods beyond were the last objects that he would see.

They began to heap the dry wood about his feet. At the touch of it the shudder seized his nerves; but he resolved again that he would neither cry out nor struggle. Yet it would be hard to endure. The pyre grew until it reached his knees; then its builders stopped to taunt him, to tell him of his coming tortures, and their delight in them. Such was the custom and Simpson had expected it. He understood their language, and he listened while they told him he would shriek and pray to them for mercy. But he appeared not to listen, his gaze wandering listlessly. He saw the anticipation in their eyes, but he would not gratify it by word or movement of his. He looked over their heads and toward the woods on the far shore of the river.

The pyre was finished, and the warriors ceased for the time to taunt him. The chief signed to one of his men, who bent down and began to strike sparks of fire from flint and steel. Simpson heard the rasping sound; but he did not take his gaze from across the river. Just beside the rock where the reds and yellows blazed the leaves were shaking. There was no wind.

The fire flashed from the flint and steel, and the dry wood began to burn. Across the river came the report of a rifle shot, and a puff of smoke rose where the leaves had been shaking. A faint gleam of triumph passed over the face of Simpson. His head fell forward a little; a dark stain appeared upon his breast, and he had forever passed from the power of his captors.

