

# AT BIG LON POST

By George Van Schaick

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## Synopsis.

Boyer Curran, agent of the Hudson Bay Company's Big Looon post, is about to start back with supplies. He learns that Lorimer, an Englishman, and his assistant has just married Amoen, an Indian. He sees the death of the man who was wealthy uncle, and reads a letter just arrived for Lorimer that he has an interest in the white man's canoe. If Lorimer should die, the money would be his wife's, then he could marry her himself and get it.

Curran sends Lorimer and Mashkaugan on an exploring trip and the Indian pushes Lorimer into the rapids and leaves him for dead. During his absence Lorimer's son is born.

Mashkaugan comes back with news of Lorimer's death.

But the white man is not dead. With much difficulty he makes his way back, and just before reaching the camp of the Indians he finds a white baby left alone in the woods.

The young woman looked at him, impressed by the kindness of his face.

"I think thee," she said, "but I shall not stay here long. In seven days, or maybe ten, my father leaves for the winter's hunting, and I go with him. Oh, the sight of this place where I have had such happiness, where I have been so happy, shall be of use to his wife, and can help him who is old. Some traps I can attend, and set snares and snare the game, as I have done since I was a child."

Curran sought to dissuade her from this purpose. "You must not go away for provisions in plenty, and all that she might need would be here for the asking. When she comes back, her husband will be sought to influence her with other arguments."

"The child is son the Yellow Hair, who was a white man. His father would have wanted the boy to be brought up as are the sons of the whites, knowing many things that are not in my mind. Therefore, he should be kept here where there are white people and grow up as a man of that race."

"He has no father now," said Amoen. "He is my child, and will follow the life of my own people. He is again but one of the Indians that are here today and gone tomorrow! The man who might have taught him other ways is dead."

"There are others who may teach him," exclaimed Curran. "I shall myself be at pains to teach him, seeking to take the place of his father whom I loved. I will show him the ways of white people."

"The ways of white people," cried the young woman. "They have some that are evil, as I surely know."

She was looking intently at him with big, frank eyes. Probably she had meant exactly what she had said, but Curran was not sure. He was ever wondering how much others might suspect.

Therefore he could make no answer. He merely nodded his head in a manner that might have signified anything, and in his pockets, trying to look unconcerned.

A few moments later he chanced to see the old Indian, Nisimatus, sitting on the ground and sharpening an axe with a small file which is one of the northern Indian's valued treasures. Curran rolled over to him and sat on the river bank beside him.

"The old Indian tells me that she is going to follow thee in the woods, Nisimatus," he said.

The old chief looked at him for a moment and then he said, "He is a man of many words."

"Thou and thy family have lived quiet without causing trouble to have," said the agent.

"It was according to the word given by Lorimer, Yellow Hair," replied the old man quietly.

"True, but now that Yellow Hair is dead it will be no easy thing to do and unable to hunt. Many years ago no one else could compare with thee in setting traps and bringing in great loads of furs. This year thy hunt was not large, and other men did better by far."

"When a man grows old," said the chief quietly, "other men overtake him. It has always been thus."

"There is no reason for thy toiling much longer," said Curran, looking at the tobacco he was cutting for his pipe. "Yet if thou art not wise the day will come when thou shalt not come back to thy tent, and maybe in another year thy bones may be found on thy trapping."

"I have heard of men who have died in great blizzards, and then their bones were found in the snow, and their wives and children," said the chief quietly.

"Strong, able women are they," said the old man, feeling the edge of

his axe with his thumb. "Thou shouldst see my woman at the mouth of whitefish and the stretching of pelts. Her paddle in a canoe is that of a strong man, young and well fed."

"My daughter is the child of my younger days. Few are as able. Never of them after I die will I have trouble about getting a man to help in trapping. Thou knowest that the hunting ground most of people always belong to the woman. She inherits it from her own mother. Anishko, my wife, and Amoen, daughter of my first woman, have trapping-places that were owned by their people since before the white man came to this post."

"Thou wilt be many to seek Amoen now for the sake of her beauty and for the goodness of her hunting. Even in ten years from now, should I not die till then, there might be suitors for Anishko. Moreover, by that time her two boys would be grown."

The old man was scraping out his pipe suggestively. Curran handed him a plug, and other names too many to remember, saying that thou were no man, but a kukush, a swine and a dog, and that thou were a little baby, strong is thy strong watter. "Remembered one of those things," said the man. "But give me just one swallow of the stuff to take the pain out of my head and throat, and I will show thee what manner of man I am."

"Oh, it takes no more of a man to take the pain out of his head, beating women! No such thing will I have at this post."

"Amoen shall boast that she beat me and called me such names!" cried the man angrily. "The very children of the man in scorn. I will reply her and give her sorrow, that she may never boast again of what she did to me."

"I have it in mind that I shall remain here many years," said Curran after another silence. "I need a man to look after the dogs and bear sons for me. I do not wish to leave Amoen just now, because she is still grieving; but I might come back to look after the dogs. Thus couldst thou live here quietly, always in the midst of plenty for thee and Amoen."

The old man had long ago discerned the drift of all this talk. He shook his head indifferently, as if the matter concerned him little; yet he was by no means so.

Lorimer had certainly proved a liberal son-in-law, and the lines of the chief's living since the marriage had certainly been cast in pleasant places. He had not the slightest objection to renewing such an agreeable state of affairs.

"Amoen is a fine woman," he said at length. "For there is none other for beauty of looks and diligence. A few weeks hence, when her sorrow is less, I will speak with thee at some other time as to what I am to get for the woman, as is our custom."

Curran merely smiled in answer. So far everything was all right. Of course, he had to pay for a wife, but the idea of paying for a wife.

The custom, in its origin, was a fair one. The woman always inherited the land, and the man, which the husband was to get the benefit. It was, therefore, proper that he should pay for the woman and obtaining something that was equivalent to a dowry. The agent, however, was not a white man.

"There was a white man here," said the young woman. "They have some that are evil, as I surely know."

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