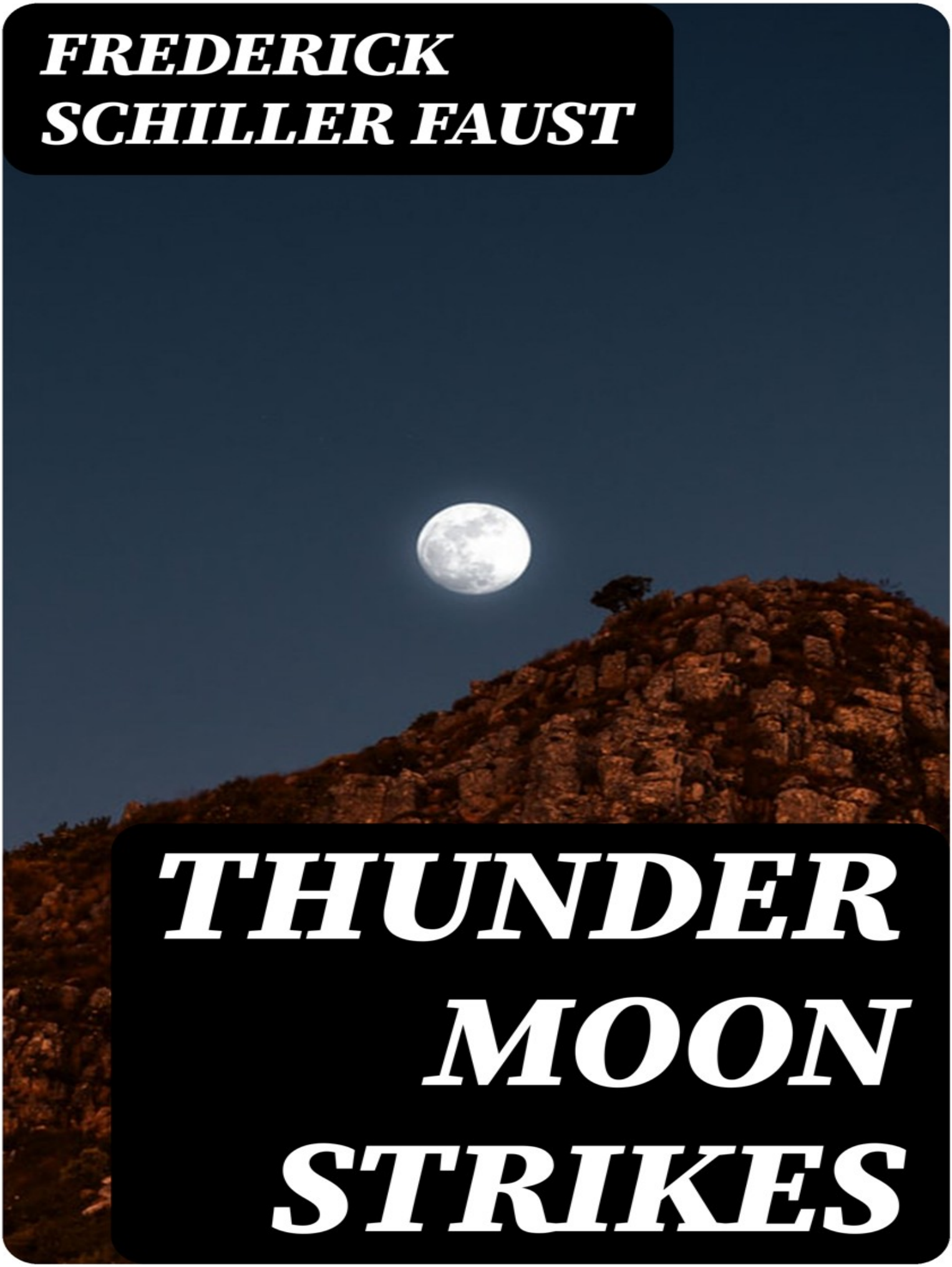
FREDERICK SCHILLER FAUST



THUNDER MOON STRIKES

Frederick Schiller Faust

Thunder Moon Strikes

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Thunder Moon had ridden his great stallion, Sailing Hawk, a thousand miles. Soon he would reach his goal—the home of Colonel Sutton and his wife. Twenty years before, a Cheyenne chief, Big Hard Face, had kidnapped the Suttons' infant son, taking the child to his lodge, where he had brought him up as his own. As the years passed, the boy, Thunder Moon, earned a reputation as the finest young warrior of the Suhtai, one of the tribes of the Cheyenne nation. Never had he taken the war trail in vain.

Then a chief of the Omissis had tricked Big Hard Face into taking his daughter, the beautiful troublemaker Red Wind, as a gift. Yet when Thunder Moon offered to marry her, she repulsed him. He was white, she said, and he should go back to the white people. Angered by the taunts of the girl, and despite the pleas of Big Hard Face and the old chief's aunt, White Crow, Thunder Moon set out with the brave Standing Antelope to find his father and mother.

Not long after they had left the Suhtai village, Thunder Moon and Standing Antelope joined a wagon train of white hunters. The time came, however, when they had to leave the caravan and plunge into the lands of the whites as Big Hard Face had done so long ago. Now at last the journey had ended.

It was well past midnight when they reached the Suttons' house. Suddenly a mounted band of youths surrounded them. Led by young Jack Sutton, Thunder Moon was brought

before the colonel and accused of stealing Sailing Hawk, his own stallion.

Angered by his parents' bewilderment at Thunder Moon's resemblance to the colonel and by his words that he had come to learn what his name might be, Jack Sutton reacted with fury. It was his sister, Ruth, who ran to her father.

"I know what his name is!" she exclaimed.

"The devil you do! What is it, then?"

"It's William Sutton, and he's your own son. Don't you see? He's come back! He's come back to you!"

Whatever the emotion of the others when the excited Ruth Sutton made this announcement, no one felt more keenly than her brother, Jack, though his sentiment may have differed from the rest. For as the eldest child, the only son, he had naturally expected to come into the majority of his father's great fortune. And though perhaps Jack was no worse than the next man, this announcement thrust him literally to the heart. Whatever his first thought might have been, certainly his first movement was to touch the pocket pistol that he carried with him always, like most of the gay lads of that time. And perhaps he recalled a picture seen a little earlier that morning, when this danger to his hopes then stood with the marsh behind him and fifteen armed men before. One shot would have done a great work, at that lucky time. But now the time was past.

There was no opportunity for the others to observe the expression on the face of Jack, for they were all too busily engaged on the subject of this suspected horse thief.

The poor colonel, utterly taken aback, caught his wife and drew her to him, and stared for a moment at Thunder

Moon as though he were looking at a leveled gun rather than at a lost son. And Ruth Sutton recoiled. Her keen eyes had seen a resemblance, but the mark of the wilderness was visibly upon him, and she was frightened.

Only Mrs. Sutton went unafraid to the strange visitor. She drew herself out of the arms of the colonel, and, going to Thunder Moon, she took those terrible hands that Pawnee and Comanche and Crow knew and feared.

“You are William!” she cried softly. “Ah, you are my dear boy come back to us! Only tell me! Will you tell me?”

“My heart is sad,” said Thunder Moon, and he fought back an impulse to take her in his arms. “My heart is sad. All that I know is what an old man of the Suhtai told me. He sent me here. But of myself I know nothing.”

“You see, father,” broke in the matter of fact voice of Jack, “we’d better go a bit slowly. God knows no one wants him to be the true Sutton more than I do! But we have to have more proof than the resemblance of two faces. We have to have something better than that. You see—he isn’t a bit sure himself.”

“How could he be sure? He was an infant when he was stolen!” exclaimed the colonel, who was turning from white to crimson.

“And as for the word of some lying Indian—some old chatterer—”

“I tell you, Jack, you mustn’t speak that way!” cried Mrs. Sutton. “Isn’t there a call of blood to blood? I felt it when I first saw him! Randolf, do something! Let me be sure!”

The colonel hesitated, looked about wildly, and finally said, “Let’s try to be calm. Let’s make no mistake. It would

be too horrible to think that we had him back again and then find it was only a fraud. You understand? Let's try to work out the testimony! Somebody tell someone to give those young fools outdoors some mint juleps—or anything that will keep them quiet! We have to think this out. We have to feel our way to the truth!"

"Here! Here's the truth!" said Mrs. Sutton.

She snapped open a little pendant at her throat and showed a miniature that was painted on the inside, showing her husband as he had been when he was a young man. The colonel looked at it gravely and long; then he raised his eyes as though afraid of what he must see. And the result was a start of amazement and joy.

"By heaven!" cried the colonel. "He's most like! He's certainly most like! Jack, examine this! William, if you are he, forgive us for going slowly now—but once you've been admitted to our hearts, then there'll be no uprooting you!"

"I speak little English; talk slow," said Thunder Moon, knitting his brows with the effort of listening.

"Poor boy!" breathed Mrs. Sutton. "My poor boy! Oh, I believe you!"

"Martha! Will you be still?" cried her husband. "Are you going to make a baby of him before we're sure that the thing is settled?"

"If he's not Indian," said Jack, "I'd like to know where he got that color of skin. He's dark enough to be a red man—or a smoky mulatto, I'd say. Could the sun do that?"

Thunder Moon turned his head and looked calmly, judicially, toward the youth.

“You’ll have trouble on your hands in a moment, Jack,” said the colonel. “He doesn’t like that way you have of putting things, you can see.”

“My dear sir,” said the boy, “I don’t want to stand between a brother and the light. But I’m simply trying to make us all use our common sense. That’s only fair and right, I take it. What do you say to that, Ruth?”

She, pale, tense, eager, raised a hand as though to brush the question away from her; all her being was busied in devouring this stranger-brother with her glance.

But Thunder Moon said in his deep voice—a soft voice, but one that filled the room: “I understand. My face is dark. You want to know why. You ask the sun. He will tell you.”

Then, letting his robe fall from his shoulders, he stripped off his shirt of antelope skin with a single gesture. Brightly and beautifully beaded was that shirt so that it glistened like a particolored piece of chain mail in his hand; but there were no eyes just now for the fine shirt for which his foster father, Big Hard Face, had paid five good horses, five horses ready for the war trail, a strong knife, and a painted horn. Instead, there was a gasp, as every glance fastened upon the body of Thunder Moon, naked to the waist.

If he had broken any conventions, he was totally unconscious of it. He raised an arm along which the interlacing muscles slipped and stirred, and he pointed to his body.

“See,” said he, “that my skin is not all dark. This is paler. Yet I see that it is not as pale as yours.”

With that he waved his hand toward them as though inviting their closer inspection.

The colonel, indeed, had taken a quick stride toward him, with an exclamation of admiration; but Jack moved back a little and became rigid, as though he were responding to a challenge with proud defiance.

“It isn’t all a question of color,” said Jack firmly. “Of course, if he’s an impostor, he wouldn’t be such a fool as to come to us unless his skin were actually white. But the thing to decide on is the testimony. I don’t know. It’s rather queer, though. Taking a fellow on the strength of his face. Such things have been tried before. Clever devils! Use a striking family resemblance to worm their way into a million or so. Cheap at twice the price, you know.”

“Would an impostor be ignorant of the English language, Jack?” asked the colonel sharply.

“Ah, sir,” and Jack smiled, “of course he’ll *say* that he is a Cheyenne. Why—that’s not hard to say. Just be reasonable, please. You know that I could learn a bit of Indian ways, pick up a few of their words, and then say that I had passed most of my life on the prairies. Why not? Then I wouldn’t have to answer a lot of embarrassing questions as to where I’d spent my days. Isn’t that clear?”

It was, after all, a telling point. Some of the enthusiasm faded from the gentle eyes of Mrs. Sutton, and she looked anxiously to her husband.

He saw the appeal in her glance.

“I know, Martha!” he said. “I’m doing my best. But I’m not a prophet, and I can’t look through the secrets of twenty years as if they were glass, you know. Look here, my young friend, tell us how we can be sure that you have spent all of this time with the Cheyennes?”

“I cannot understand,” said Thunder Moon simply.

“I thought he wouldn’t,” sneered Jack.

“I say,” repeated the colonel more loudly, making a vital effort to be clear, “will you tell us how we can know that you really spent those years with the Cheyennes?”

“And by the way,” said Jack, “if you can talk just as well, you might put on your clothes, you know.”

Thunder Moon with one gesture, as he had removed the shirt, donned it again. He swept the robe around his shoulders.

“Young man,” he said sternly to Jack, “what coups have you counted and what scalps have you taken that you raise your voice and that you talk when chiefs are here?”

Even Jack blinked a little at this, but recovering himself instantly, he said coldly, “That’s well done. Clever, by gad! Worthy of the stage, and a big stage. But we want some good, and sound, actual proof that you’ve been with the Cheyennes all this time.”

The color had been growing slowly in the face of Thunder Moon and now it became a dangerously dark crimson; and his eyes glittered as he stared at Jack.

“Do not ask me; do not ask my friends,” he said at last. “Ask the enemies of my people. Ask Sioux, ask Comanches, ask Pawnees, ask Crows. They know my face. They have seen it in the battle. No man has asked, Where is Thunder Moon in the battle? No, for they have seen me. So ask them and bring them here. They will tell you if I am a Suhtai!”

There was a stunned silence after this remark so filled with conviction and disdain.

But Jack, who in a way was playing desperately high for stakes that were worth winning, now broke in, “After all, my friend, you can’t come over us as easily as that! Of course, we’re a thousand miles or so from the hunting grounds of the Sioux and the rest of ’em, whatever you called ’em. Facts, however, are facts. And it seems to me that you should be able to give us some proofs—some plain proofs—that you’ve been with the Cheyennes all this time under the name of Thunder Moon, or whatever you may be called, or say you are called!”

“Steady, Jack,” said the colonel. “By gad, he looks a bit dangerous, just now!”

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Now the excitement of Thunder Moon had been growing with great rapidity, for he felt the constant check of the questioning and sardonic Jack. It came in such a manner, too, that he was half maddened by it. Since he was a youngster and first distinguished himself in feats of arms among the Suhtai, his name had been known far and wide, not in his own tribe only but all through the Cheyenne nation and among the neighboring tribes. But now his very identity was questioned—not so much as the son of this stern-faced Colonel Sutton but as Thunder Moon himself.

He could endure it no longer. The passion that was rising in him must find some outlet, and since he could not act he must speak. And since he must speak, it had to be of himself. It was a theme on which he was not much practiced, for where the other braves at the end of the warpath danced the scalp dance and told of their exploits, or when the coup stick was passed around, Thunder Moon was nearly always silent. Something in his nature had prevented him from joining in these self-acclaiming outbursts. But now he began to speak. He drew back a little until he stood close to the wall. He did not dance, as a pure-blooded Cheyenne would have done, but as passion and fury and exultation mastered him, his voice became a sort of chanting rhythm, and his whole body swayed in unison. Much of what he said came in Cheyenne, sometimes he used what English words he had absorbed into his

vocabulary; but in some manner, as a very intense speaker usually can do, he made his audience realize what he was saying.

“I do not talk of common warriors. I only speak of chiefs who have counted five coups, and taken scalps. Make medicine and call down their spirits! Let them tell you what I am.

“I am Thunder Moon, of the Suhtai!

“The eagle feathers flowed behind the head of Little Wolf and the bravest Pawnees were around him. The hearts of the Suhtai were sick, seeing those heroes charge. But a young warrior went out to meet that charge. He called to the Sky People and they gave him strength; they turned the bullets and the spear points. Like a snake through grass he wove through the men of the Pawnees. He came to Little Wolf. ‘Pawnee, your spear is headed with burned wood; its point crumbles on my shield. My lance is in your heart!’

“And all the Suhtai shouted, ‘Thunder Moon!’

“Three hundred warriors followed Waiting Horse. Among the Comanches he was the strongest man; scalps dried continually in the smoke of his tepee, and with scalps all his clothes were fringed. He did not go upon the warpath alone; but I, alone, met him. The eagle stood still in the wind and the buzzards circled above us, watching. ‘Waiting Horse, your medicine is weak. The Sky People fly with my bullet and send it into your brains. You lie on the plain with a broken forehead and your spirit slips out and flies on the wind.’ ‘It is Thunder Moon!’ cry the Comanches.

“Now in his lodge a great Pawnee was very sad. His brother and his two uncles were dead, and when he asked

his heart who had killed them his heart answered, ‘Thunder Moon!’ He made great medicine. He asked the greatest medicine men of the Pawnees to help him, and they gave him strength to go out and harry the Suhtai.

“ ‘Ah hai! What is wrong with the horses of the Suhtai? Why do they throw up their heads and gallop away? The cunning Pawnee wolves are among them!’ Fast they ride, but faster rides Thunder Moon. ‘Turn back, Three Spotted Elks! Turn back and avenge your three dead kinsmen. Their spirits are crying to you in that strong wind. They are giving you power.’

“He is a brave man. He has heard their voices and turned back from among the flying horses. Now, Sky People, how shall I kill this man? I offer him to you as a sacrifice!

“ ‘Kill him only with your knife, Thunder Moon.’

“So let it be! His arrows stick in my shield. His arrows hiss at my ear. He has thrown away his bow and seized his strong war club, stained with blood. Your war club is strong, Three Spotted Elks, but my hand is stronger. My knife is in your throat! Sky People, accept his blood; this is my sacrifice!

“Behold, now, the Comanches’ camp sleeps. All the lodges are white under the moon. All the new lodges are shining and bright. There is a shadow among them. Beware, Comanches, for it is Thunder Moon! He steals from lodge to lodge. He comes to the medicine tepee and there sits the Yellow Man grinning, the great spirit, the metal wizard. I take him up and carry him away. With his medicine he calls his people to follow me. Your medicine is weak, Yellow Man. I throw you into the deep water. I carry only your arm away

with me so that the Sky People may laugh when they see you with only one arm. I ride away, and with me I carry the fortunes of the Comanches.

“But who are these men whose hair flows to their waist or waves in the wind behind them as they ride? They are Crows, tall and noble of aspect. But none is so tall and none is so noble as Gray Thunder.

“Noble warriors, brave Crows from the mountains, my heart swells to see you. Come swiftly. I am waiting. I shall not run away. In my hands are guns having six voices apiece. Now they speak to you. What, do you fall down when you hear them? Three men fall, and the rest are daunted, but not Gray Thunder.

“Sky People, save him for my hands! With my hands I shall kill him. My bare hands must destroy him. Ha, Gray Thunder, your bullet has missed me. Your rifle as a club is lighter than a piece of rotten wood. I pluck it from you. Now my hand against your hand! Ask mercy, and you shall live to die by the hands of the Suhtai women. He will not ask mercy. He bites like a wolf at my wrists. But now it is over. He is dead. Come back, you Crows, and bury your dead chief. Why do you run away so fast? He is dead, and his scalp will be taken, and his soul will vanish in the wind!

“Such things I have done. Hear me, you people! My name is not something that has to be asked after on the plains. All the tribes know it. Sky People, give these white men a sign that I do not lie! Sky People, if my medicine is strong, hear me! If ever I have sacrificed to you guns and strong lances and painted robes and beaded suits, send them a sign!”

To this strange narration, half story and half mad chant, the Suttons had listened with great eyes, silent, crushed with wonder and with fear. But now, as the speaker raised his voice in a shout, there was a tremendous answer from without: a horse neighed like many trumpets blowing together; hoofs clattered on the wooden steps; the porch quivered and through the window was thrust the head of Sailing Hawk searching for the master whose voice he had heard.

Thunder Moon laughed with joyous triumph.

“Sky People, I thank you!” he cried. “This is the sign. Now will you believe me?”

Believe him? They were almost too frightened to disbelieve.

Mrs. Sutton and Ruth drew closer to each other, but the colonel listened with shining eyes.

Before he could speak, however, it seemed as though the Sky People, to whom Thunder Moon appealed, had sent a more visible sign and one more easily understood. For up the driveway came young Standing Antelope, his hands tied behind him, his feet bound in his stirrups, and a smear of blood on one side of his head. With him were the half dozen men who had captured him—not spruce young gentlemen like those who had hunted Thunder Moon, but rough, brown-faced men in rude clothes.

“Here’s number two,” said Jack, willing to break the trance that had fallen on all in the room. “Here’s the second of ’em. There are the three horses. Now we may get at something. It’s Tom Colfax who’s brought them in!”

They could hear Tom speaking to the scattered group of men in front of the house.

“Here’s a rank Cheyenne, gentlemen. Doggone me if he ain’t! I was starting out with the rest of the boys here and our guns for a hunt when we seen this fellow jump a fence, but his pony wouldn’t clear it. He came down with a slam. And we picked him up. I been enough years on the plains to talk some Cheyenne. And I gathered from his lingo that he might have a friend over here. Anybody know what he means?”

They led Tom Colfax in. He stood at the door, hat in hand.

“Colonel Sutton, sir, the Cheyennes always was the wildest and far-ridingest red devils on the plains, but I never thought that they’d come raiding as far as this!”

The colonel went to him in haste.

“You know the Cheyennes, Tom?”

“I’ve traded with ’em. I know a parcel of them, of course. This boy opened up when he heard me talk his own lingo, and he says that he’s the son of Three Bears. I know Three Bears. An upstanding Indian as I ever seen.”

“Look!” said the colonel, and he took Tom by the arm and turned him a little. “Do you know this man?”

He pointed to Thunder Moon, who still stood near the wall. The effect upon Tom Colfax was amazing. He started back with an oath and at the same instant drew a great, old-fashioned horse pistol.

“Know him?” he gasped. “Know him?”

“I mean what I say, man,” said the colonel. “This is more important than it may seem. Do you know the name of this man?”

“Know him?” echoed Tom. “I never seen him except once, and in the distance, but every man on the prairies knows him or knows about him! Why, Colonel, this is him that’s strung his war trails from the Rio Grande to Canada. If I ain’t a half-wit and lost my eyes, this is the right bower and the best bet and the long arm of the Suhtai and the whole doggone Cheyenne nation!”

“His name!” said the colonel. “What’s his name, man?”

“Ain’t I told you enough to place his name? His name is Thunder Moon. What else would it be? And if I was you, Colonel, I’d have the militia out and bury this Suhtai under ten feet of solid rock. Otherwise you’ll be waking up one of these nights—you and about twenty more—to find that you’re all spirits singin’ on your way to heaven. This is a bad boy, sir, and he makes all his marks in blood!”

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But Mrs. Sutton had heard and seen more than her nerves could stand, and she broke into hysterical weeping at this point. The colonel bade his daughter take her mother from the room. He left Jack with Thunder Moon, and he took Tom Colfax into his private study.

“Tom,” said he, “this is a serious moment.”

“Sir,” said Tom. “I got eyes and ears enough to understand that. But I feel kind of in a dream—after seeing that red devil in your house!”

“But is he red?”

“Is he red?” asked Tom, more bewildered than ever. “Why—well, he’s a half-breed, maybe. He *does* look a little pale.”

“If you know him, do you know his father?”

“The longest hand you ever seen in a trade. Of course I know Big Hard Face.”

“Big Hard Face?”

“Their way of saying December.”

“Do you know the mother of this boy, then?”

“Her? No, I don’t.”

“Did you ever hear of her?”

“Matter of fact, Big Hard Face don’t live with a squaw.”

“Then how does he come to have a son?”

“The ways of an Indian ain’t our ways with women and children, Colonel Sutton. Maybe he just picked up the boy someplace. Maybe he adopted him.”

The colonel caught his breath.

“That’s all you know?”

“No, it ain’t half. I can tell you about Thunder Moon all day. Why, they’ve had articles about him in the papers! He’s the only Cheyenne that don’t count silly coups and that don’t take scalps, and—”

“What of his honesty?”

“The Suhtai are an honest lot. And Thunder Moon’s word is better than gold.”

“He wouldn’t lie?”

“I don’t say he wouldn’t. But I can tell you how he’s raised hell from Mexico to—”

The colonel raised a rather unsteady hand.

“I think that I’ve heard enough about that already. As a matter of fact, Tom, it begins to appear that this man, this wild Cheyenne, is really the child who was stolen from my house more than twenty years ago.”

Tom Colfax opened his mouth and his eyes.

“Does he say that?” he asked.

“He does!”

“If it’s a lie,” said Tom slowly, “it’s the queerest lie that I ever heard tell of! For what would bring a Suhtai a thousand miles, pretty near, to claim you for a father? Why should he pick you out?”

“You’d believe him? You know Indian nature, Tom.”

“Leastways,” observed Tom dryly, “it wasn’t *money* that I got out of my stay on the plains.”

“Go with me and let him tell the story simply to us. Do you think that you could spot a lying Indian?”

“I dunno. But I could make a fine try.”

They went back to Thunder Moon, and found him with folded arms standing against the wall just where they had left him, while Jack, a very nervous lad, fidgeted in a chair.

“Thunder Moon,” said the colonel. “I want you to tell us, clearly, just what the old man of the Suhtai told you.”

Thunder Moon answered, “He had no squaw. He had no child. He was no longer a boy. So he went off to do some great thing before he died. He rode a great distance. No great thing came to him to be done. He came to the land of the white men. He rode among their lands. Then he came to a great house, and near the house he saw better horses than he ever had seen before. He saw that the great thing he was led to do was to take some of those horses. So he took the best. And he waited until dark in the woods near the house. There he saw a black woman come out and leave a child under a tree. He thought he would go and take the scalp. The scalp of a white man is good to have.”

“Good heavens!” breathed the colonel.

“But when he went to the child, it held up its hands to him and laughed. His heart became soft. He carried the boy away and raised him in his lodge. That is the story as it was told to me.”

“Colfax,” called the colonel sharply.

“Sir,” said Tom Colfax, “if this here man is lying, I’m a fool that knows nothing!”

The colonel drew a great breath.

“I have gone slowly,” he said to Thunder Moon. “Even now, perhaps, we have no testimony that would stand in a court. But you ride a horse that may well have descended from my stock. You have a distinct resemblance to me. Your

skin is white. And you have been raised as an Indian. And, more than that, there is something in my heart that speaks to you, William! Come with me, and we'll find your mother!"

"It's settled?" asked Jack, springing up.

"Certainly it's settled, my boy. Do you object to my decisions?"

"I don't know," said Jack Sutton slowly. "It may not be sound reasoning. But—if you've made up your mind, that settles everything. William, I've held back and made things rather hard for you. Will you shake hands to show that you forgive me?"

Thunder Moon paused, and said in his grave way, "In the lodge of Big Hard Face he was called my father, and White Crow, his aunt, was a mother to me; but I never have had a brother. Our blood is the same. Let our hearts be the same, too!"

And he took the hand of Jack with a strong pressure.

They went up to the room of Mrs. Sutton. The colonel rapped, and the door instantly was thrown open by Ruth.

She shrank at the sight of the tall warrior.

"Ruth, my dear," said the colonel, "unless God has blinded me terribly, this is no Cheyenne Indian. He is a Sutton, the heir of Sutton Hall, and your own brother!"

"Mother!" cried Ruth. "It's true! I was right! I was right!"

She took Thunder Moon's hand.

"Come quickly! I've put mother to bed and she mustn't get up. Come quickly! Oh, father, what a day for us! William, my dear big Indian!"

She drew him, laughing up at him, to the door of a big room. Inside, Thunder Moon saw a large bed, and a small

feminine form half rising from it, and the sunlight streaming through the window, glittering on her white hair.

“Do you mean it, Ruth?” And then, seeing Thunder Moon, the mother cried, “My dear boy!” and her arms went out to him.

The colonel would have entered behind his son; but his daughter, with a finer tact, held up her hand and warned him back.

As she closed the door, softly, they heard Mrs. Sutton crying, “My darling! My poor baby!”

Ruth began to laugh, a little wildly.

“Did you hear?” said she. “ ‘Baby’—to that terrible man-slayer!”

Father and daughter went to the window together, their arms around one another, and looking down to the back terrace, behind the house, they saw Jack walking slowly up and down, his hands clasped behind him and his head bowed low.

“Poor Jack!” said the colonel. “He’s taking it very hard, indeed!”

But Ruth said nothing. She merely watched with an anxious eye, and shook her head a little.

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Why should sorrow be beautiful or beauty sad?

Thunder Moon in the room of his mother went through such an agony of joy and of love and of yearning that the muscles of his throat swelled and ached.

He sat by her bed and held her hand, and she looked up at him with love. From the steady mask of his face, it seemed that nothing had touched him in the slightest degree in this interview; but she saw that he could not meet her eyes steadily, and by that she guessed that his stern nature was troubled to the bottom.

“William,” she said.

There was no response.

“Thunder Moon!”

He looked quickly at her.

“Why are you sad, my dear?”

“Because I have found my people and lost my people.”

“They never really were yours.”

“My tongue is their tongue; and part of my heart is their heart.”

“I understand. But when you have our speech, then it will be different. But there will be many things for you to learn. You will have a great deal of patience, dear?”

“Yes.”

“Now I have kept you long enough. Go to your father. He is a stern man, William. But you will find that there is a great deal of love and tenderness under his sternness. Also—your

brother is young; and he is still younger than he seems. Will you remember that?”

“Yes.”

“You may have to forgive him very often.”

“I understand,” said the warrior. “He has been the only son of a great chief. The lodge and the medicine pipes and all the horses have been his to look forward to.”

A faint, sad smile crossed the face of Mrs. Sutton.

“A little time will make everything right,” she said. “I trust in time and—in the goodness of men! Now go to your father.”

But when Thunder Moon left his mother’s room he found that the wild news had gone forth in every direction, and the Sutton ball was being continued through the day as a sort of impromptu reception.

Already half the young blades of the neighborhood had taken part in the chase, and the news of what they had captured had been broadcast. Newcomers began to arrive; farmers on plodding horses; dashing boys of any age; sedate landholders and plantation workers; and just as Thunder Moon came out into the upper hall, there was a screech of wheels turning sharply on the graveled road in front of the house, and Ruth Sutton went to her new brother and drew him to the window so that he could look down.

“You see how many people are happy because you’ve come home at last?” she asked, and she pointed down to the growing crowd.

Three four-in-hands had just torn up the driveway, one after the other, and the filmy clouds of dust they had raised were just blowing away in snatches under the cuffing hand

of the wind. Those vehicles were loaded with people, and Thunder Moon stared at them with wonder. They looked a different kind of beings from those he had been accustomed to. They seemed more delicately made, more slender, and even their voices had a fragile sound in his ear.

Suddenly he stretched forth his long arm.

“What do you see, my boy?” asked the colonel.

“I see,” said Thunder Moon, “the woman who should be my squaw!”

Ah, fickle-hearted Thunder Moon! What of Red Wind, the Omissis girl with the braided hair like red metal? What of her? Has her memory been dismissed so quickly?

“Hello!” said the colonel. “That *is* rapid work.”

He was not altogether pleased, and he cast a worried glance at Ruth, as though a woman should know best how such an affair as this should be managed, and how serious this symptom might be.

But Ruth, laughing silently behind her brother’s back, shook her head, as a token that his was not such a dangerous affair, after all.

“Which one, William, dear?” she asked.

“That one—that one!” said he. “That one with the face like a flower.”

“Oh! It’s pretty little Jacqueline Manners. Of course it would be she! She *is* a darling, father, isn’t she?”

“Is it she?” asked the colonel, beginning to smile in turn. “That one with the flowers in her hat?”

Thunder Moon looked at him with eyes of wonder.

“No, it is that one—she gets down from the wagon now.”

“Heavens!” said Ruth Sutton. “It’s Charlotte!”

Thunder Moon stepped back from the window with a black brow.

“She is the squaw of another man, then?” he asked.

“You haven’t wasted your time with the Cheyennes,” said Ruth. “That’s Charlotte Keene. And every young man in the state has asked her to consider him.”

At this news Thunder Moon shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say that a battle not already lost still might be fought out.

Then he was taken to his room to dress in a suit of the colonel’s.

While the garments were being laid out by the servants, Standing Antelope entered, and his eyes flashed with joy when he saw his friend before him.

“I thought that they were talking and jabbering and getting ready to turn me over to the squaws for torture,” said Standing Antelope, “and I thought that they were bringing me just now to the place where I was to die.”

“And what of me, Standing Antelope?”

“I listened to hear your death song, but I thought that the wind might have blown the sound of it away from my ears. But behold, brother, our hands are free! Through the hole in that wall we may escape and climb down to the ground. There are fast horses everywhere. Never have I seen so many so fine! And with two knife thrusts we can make these two black men silent!”

“Do not touch them, Standing Antelope. Touch no one in this house; everyone is under my protection.”

“Ha?” cried the boy.

“This place is my lodge,” said Thunder Moon. “It is given to me to live in!”

“It is very well,” replied the boy. “I understand. The great chief understands that you are a part of his family.”

“Yes, and so does his squaw, who was my mother.”

“That is good,” said the boy without any enthusiasm, “and how great a sacrifice will this chief and his squaws and his warriors make to Tarawa because he has led you back to them?”

“I cannot tell,” said Thunder Moon, troubled. “All these people laugh and talk much like children in the street of the Suhtai town, but I have not heard them speak a great deal of the spirits. There is not much religion in them, and I have seen no making of medicine, and I have heard no promises of sacrifice. However, you and I must take care of that for otherwise the Sky People will be very angry!”

“You and I?” said the boy. “Ah, Thunder Moon, you have come home to your tepee, and you have your people around you. They seem to me very strange. And though I hope that you may be happy with them, I must go back to our nation.”

“Peace!” said the older warrior. “You are young and you cannot think for yourself. But I have seen many fine squaws and you shall pick out one for yourself, and I shall buy her with many horses. Then, if you must go back one day to our people, you may travel with a woman and with the horses I shall give to you, and many guns, and when you come back to the Suhtai you will be a great and a rich man, and you will tell Big Hard Face and White Crow how to follow the trail in order to come to me.”

This conciliatory speech the boy listened to, only half convinced, but the overwhelming authority of Thunder Moon kept him from answering immediately. He said, pointing suddenly, “Thunder Moon!”

“Aye, brother?”

“The medicines of these people is very terrible and wonderful! Look! There is a pool of water standing on one edge!”

For, at this moment, one of the servants had uncurtained a tall mirror that stood at one end of the room. Both the wanderers stared at this apparition with horror.

And Thunder Moon looked suddenly to the ceiling.

“Sky People,” he said, “if you are angry with me, do not send this miracle as a sign! If you are angry because I am changing my tongue and my dress, I shall give them up! I shall return to the Suhtai! No, Standing Antelope, I think it is not a bad sign!”

So saying, he began to advance, though slowly, and at last stretched out his hand and touched the cold surface of the glass.

“Now I know!” he cried, straightening himself. “It is like the little mirrors that the traders sell; it is like those, made large.”

At this there was a convulsive burst of laughter from the two servants. It died in a shriek of fear, for Standing Antelope, recovering from his terror the instant that he learned the true nature of the miracle, seized one of the valets by his head and at the same time presented a knife at his throat!