

Paul

A. P. Campbell

I was in good spirits as I sat in my study waiting for Paul. Once my superiority was demonstrated, and he was put in his place, things would run more smoothly. I would knock some of the conceit out of him. Tramping around the woods was easy enough for him who had been born in the forest. I leaned back in my chair, idly philosophizing on the two pollywogs I had in a glass bowl.

Paul's arrival aroused me from my thoughts. I could hear him clumping up the stairs. Lately he had discarded his moccasins in favor of an old pair of my riding boots. He strode into the room with that great horizontal grin of his; I could stand anything but that smirk. Huge puffs of smoke were rising from the briar pipe I had unwisely given him. I moved him to a seat but he remained standing. Then he walked over to the desk where he stood grinning at the pollywogs.

"Paul," I called him, because his Indian name was too hard to pronounce. He was an excellent guide; knew all the best hunting grounds for miles around—but that was no reason for being so infernally cocky about it. He never said anything; if he had, it would not have been so hard to endure. But he just grunted and grinned to himself.

When we went hunting, I always walked first, cautiously carrying my loaded rifle, while he followed, carrying whatever game I had shot. Some days we would wander thirty or forty miles from home. When it was time to return, I usually found myself hopelessly turned around. I could no more have found my way out than if I had been set down in the middle of the Sahara. But that ignorant savage would start off with ill-concealed amusement, and lead me straight home.

Then I had struck on a great idea. Every man in his own element; that was the key thought in it.

"Paul," I said gently, "there's no doubt about it, you have me beaten when it comes to trailing through the woods. Of course you were born and brought up there. Now if you were set loose in a large house with dozens of rooms and doors, could you find your way out so easily?"

"Yah."

"Then come over tomorrow. We'll test that." Muttering something about the greater the pride the heavier the fall, I had left him.

Now he was here. It was a good chance to show him my house too. For years I had been restoring it, sparing no expense. It was large enough to quarter a whole regiment. There were new floors, just polished; doors of solid oak, carved and polished till you could see your face in them. Even the Governor had admired their beauty.

"Are you ready for the test, Paul?"

"Yah."

I explained the terms. There was still a chance that he might try to trick me. "Now Paul, this thing must be on the square. Are you sure you have no cranberries in your pockets?"

"Yah. No cranberries. Only tobacco."

"Well, follow me."

Then I led him by the most round about way through a maze of rooms, down dark corridors and passages, twisting and weaving. Hiawatha, I felt sure, could not keep his equilibrium following such a course. He came behind, those heavy boots ringing on the polished floors.

When we arrived in the room I had determined as the stopping-place, I pulled up.

Paul stood looking at the cracks in the plaster.

Leaving him there, I skipped down the stairs, sped along the corridors, and thus to my study, where I sat waiting to hear cries of distress.

In about three minutes he strode into the study with a grin that showed his wisdom teeth.

"You cheat."

"No cheat."

"How did you get out so quickly?"

He produced his hunting knife.

"In woods me blaze trees: in house me blaze doors."



Scatter the clouds that hide
The face of heaven, and show
Where sweet peace doth abide:
Where Truth and Beauty grow.

—Bridges.