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OODLES, THE AVENGER

He Was Half Witted, but Faithful.

"The New York attorney, he goes to morrow," said Frederic, the fat French landlord of Pere Chene.

His wife, a thin little woman, with a sharp voice and a heart of gold, blazed into sudden anger.

"He stayed too long, and he goes too soon!" she cried.

Frederic took his pipe from his mouth and turned ponderously.

"You mean—what?" he questioned.

"I mean that our Therese"—

Frederic gazed uncomprehendingly, and she made a gesture of impatience at his stupidity.

"Tehk! Can't you see? She likes him too well."

Her husband's mouth sagged open. He held the pipe in his pudgy hand. His black beard rippled over his breast. His eyebrows were raised in amazement and something of dismay. He looked like a wondrously carved statue, for he sat very still.

But one's mouth cannot stay open indefinitely. Frederic's closed reluctantly. He peered into his pipe and drew forth his buckskin tobacco pouch. "Chut!" he commented.

Mme. Lecoeur ceased her agitated rocking.

"Chut!" she snapped. "Chut! And our only child is breaking her heart. Look for yourself. They are coming."

She inclined her head sideways. Her husband turned in his stout chair, all together, like a piece of machinery, and looked up the one street of the back-

woods Michigan town.

It was a pretty sight that Frederic saw—one that appealed to the quick sentimental perceptions of his race.

A man and a girl were coming toward the hotel on the veranda of which they sat. The man was of the city, and his neat, fashionable clothing was in striking contrast to the Mackinaw garb of the few woodsmen who lounged in doorways. He was talking eagerly to the girl, who kept pace with him, and his keen young face was alight with the visions of one who is both dreamer and doer.

The girl was a glorious creature, whose roundness was not plumpness and whose slenderness was not thinness. Her luxurious brown hair was uncovered. She walked in Indian moccasins with the springy ease of a frontiersman.

Her big, dark eyes were turned on young Amidon with flattering attention. In their depths was an unconscious and pitiful revelation of her heart.

They paused a moment by the rude steps.

"We are going down to the falls," said the lawyer. "I want to explain to Miss Therese what our company means to do here. Why, M. Lecoeur, the country above is a natural reservoir. A dam will furnish power to light every town within a hundred miles of here and run the mills besides."

He turned to Therese as he finished

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THEN HE TOTTERED AND FELL.

as one turns to a friend who comprehends. But there was nothing in his look or his manner but impersonal enthusiasm; no hint that he was conscious of her sex or of her loveliness.

"Your company is rich, M. Amidon?" queried the landlord.

A smile came to the lawyer's boyish face.

"They have barrels of it," he replied.

Mme. Lecoeur turned to her husband when the young people had gone on.

"You see, you see?" she demanded. "She cannot get enough of looking at him. And he—his head is full of dams and electric lights and mills. Tehk-men!"

"My daughter," she continued, "is worthy of any man in the land. She has graduated from the Grayling high school. She can bake and sweep and sew. She is as merry as a robin. She

can walk from here to Tahquema in four hours, and it is twenty miles.

"She has taste, too, Frederic—a taste she did not inherit from the Lecoeurs. Faith, no."

"She has the high heeled, small shoes and a gown no bigger around than your trousers leg—great, fat—oaf! She has even been three times to Bay City. She is as innocent and unspoiled as a babe. Why does he not see?"

She had spoken rapidly in French. Her husband removed his pipe in order to shake his head slowly.

"I will tell you why he does not see," she said, switching to English to answer her own question. "He has had no time but to bargain and plan and buy the land."

"If he could stay here for two weeks more, with his mind free of business, he could not help loving her. But he will go without seeing or speaking, and it will kill her."

She sighed wistfully. "If he would but fall sick. She is a splendid nurse."

They turned guiltily at a sound behind in the doorway, but at sight of the queer face looking down at them Mme. Lecoeur spoke relievedly. "Oh, Oodles! It is you!"

Oodles Napper was one of "God's innocents," a silent young half wit who roamed the wilderness, sitting here and there as the errant fancy took him. The door of every settler from the straits to Saginaw bay was open to him. No one dreamed of charging him for food and lodging.

But he paid in his own way nevertheless. He was a mighty hunter. He always carried a rifle, and his aim was of the deadliest. Birds and squirrels and deer in season he brought to the homes of his friends.

Now the wide, thin, upturned mouth was doleful; the small blue eyes were dull.

"You heard, Oodles?"

Mme. Lecoeur and all of Pere Chene knew that he loved Therese, as the dog loves his mistress, with a dumb love that asks nothing but the privilege to serve.

The half wit nodded.

"Yes," he murmured. "Sorry—sorry." He looked to the north after Therese and Amidon.

"Where to, Oodles?"

Frederic had noted that he carried rifle and pack.

"Tahquema—south."

(Continued on last page)

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