

The Tall Man

S. Carelton

Table of Contents

<u>The Tall Man</u>	1
<u>S. Carelton</u>	2

The Tall Man

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.
<http://www.blackmask.com>

THERE were two thoughts in my head as I let the marten out of the trap.

One was that Louis and I must part; the other that God has made his creatures very brave, — that marten had whisked off into the woods as coolly as if he had four good legs. I, who could not go where I wanted to, and was no longer brave, went home to find Louis: I would not go on being defied by him, and that was all there was about it.

Curiously enough, it was the disregard of my law against trapping that rankled in me; not the other — and bigger — order that Louis would not obey. Yet when I came upon him, chopping light-wood behind our camp, the rough words on my tongue stayed there. If I sent off Louis, what would become of me? For the small things I could still see on that November morning cut into me, as the smell of the cooking breakfasts in a careless town might cut into a man going through it to the scaffold: they were not for me any more; I was no longer concerned with them; unless Louis — I would make one more try with Louis before I told him to go where he pleased and let me start on my last journey alone.

While I stood, the yellow sunshine dazzled me — as it would not dazzle me long — where it glinted from the silver stems of the stunted birches, and turned topaz through the stubborn banners of the few last leaves. But if there were beauty abroad it did not warm me. Over the noise of Louis's chopping I spoke angrily. His axe rose and fell as if I did not exist.

I had never seen him sullen before; but I was more sullen myself, and with a better reason. I had prayed all the prayers I knew, to a God who must have known them better than I did, for He said nothing in answer. I did not speak as I had meant to about the marten: I was in a worse trap myself, and there was not a human soul but Louis to help me out of it. It was that thought which made me ask an unquiet question quietly.

"Louis, why won't you take me through the woods to Caraquet?"

Indian like, he never turned. He said, "Must catch eels for winter. Going out to Spider Lake."

Now my friendship with Louis, as outcasts together, had not had many lies in it; and this one was a lie for a fool. There had been no rain for two months of the driest autumn I ever saw, and the eels were of course in the mud, and uncatchable.

"I never knew you afraid to go anywhere before," I retorted, and it was only a cheap sneer to match his lie; the thought had never entered my head. I was thoroughly astounded when he turned round on me.

"All my brothers are dead excepting me along," he said violently. "Why should I go over that country?" — he swept his axe eastward. "I have no wish to go — I am not a fool! No white man ever came out of there alive, hardly any Indian. You can go the other way, and I will lead you to the railway. When there is a railway why must you walk? Walk!" — He spat. But it was the way he pitched his axe from him that sobered me. The man was beside himself. He never even looked at me as he flung off into the woods. I heard him long after he was out of sight, and the sound of his going was too like a bull moose in autumn to be pleasant.

"Well!" said I, because the thing was not well at all. Louis and I live farther out in the wilderness than most people, for in this country only the coast is used.

Between Caraquet mines and our camp a whole province runs out to sea sharply and at length. To go down to the sea and follow along the shore by the sparse settlements would mean nearly four hundred miles of walking; the train that Louis was so glib with is an ore train running into Caraquet from the mines; there may be thirty miles of track for it, certainly no more. And Caraquet, straight across the province, lay in round numbers but ninety miles from my own door — without allowing for the possible rise and fall of the country between. And on just that country was my mind set.

It was, of course, unexplored, as all the inland parts are; but that was the only thing I knew against it. I pay no attention to the stories of stray trappers who have to be entertaining in return for whiskey, and the legends of the

The Tall Man

huge timber wolves that infested the interior were the usual legends; the fable that no Indians could live there had arisen because the narrators had happened on no Indians. I had never heard anything of the country that was really daunting — I did not care two straws for the statement that it was impossible for a white man; while there were only plain rocks and trees and animals, and I had two good legs, it would not be impossible for me — except alone. I could not travel alone, there or anywhere else. I was, even out in the sunlight, nearly blind. And the day before there had reached me a scrawl from Caraquet saying there was an eye doctor at the mines, and that if I came at once there might be my eyesight. There is no sense in trying to tell any one what it meant to be a half-blind man to read that letter in a haze and twilight. I had to go; and Louis would not take me except by the coastwise journey that would make me too late. If I was angry with him, you can close your eyes and see for yourself what your life means without them.

I sat down where Louis had left me, since I had nothing to do but sit, and stared in front of me because I should not have long to stare. It was low down in the Indian willows by the frozen brook that I first thought I saw a shadow. If there had been leaves on the willows it might have been natural; but it was not natural now. I shut my eyes to clear them, and when I looked again the shadow was gone. It was in the birch scrub, and nearer.

I might have thought it the shadow of a man, only there was no rustling as it moved. It was a minute or two before I realized that the gray bar under the trees must be in my eyes — and I could not bear the fright of it. I shut them hard and fast, and began to gabble some of my threadbare prayers again; I felt too old and sick and blind to be looking at shadows, and Louis had gone away. I must have been an abject sight enough if there had been any one watching me, but I had not time to think of that when I heard a man call.

As I looked up I saw him. It was the last time I ever did see him — but I saw him then. He was a tall man, dressed in such leather as I had never laid eyes on, and through the softness of it there showed the easy movement of a man still young. His face was not so young, and it puzzled me. The skin of it was clear and pleasant, the lips sweet, but — he was not an Indian like any Indian I had ever known, let alone the different fashion of his clothes. He was very tall indeed; I saw that as he dropped silently down beside me. I had given him no invitation, but I was too startled to think of manners. Anyhow he had watched me, had stolen on me furtively. I made no attempt to be civil.

"Louis's out," I said, "and I'm nearly blind. What do you want?"

He looked at me. The glance was not repellant, but it repelled me. "I do not want, — " he spoke in the Indian that I had used, but with an astounding finish, — "it was you who wanted! I know the way across the country," he pointed east, towards Caraquet; "I was passing, and you spoke out very loud." ("You sounded out your desire" was what he said, literally.)

Now I had said nothing to Louis that any stranger could make sense of, — not that morning; this man must have been in our neighborhood for a day past, — but neither of those things came to me then. If there were even the chance of taking a short cut to Caraquet I wanted to hear of it; wanted to light my pipe that I could still see the smoke from, and talk of it at long length, rolling the sudden hope that had come to me as I rolled my tobacco in my palms. My hand shook as I fumbled for a match, yet it was not altogether with my pleasure; there was something peculiar about the man. I do not think I spoke, but I know that he answered me.

"No, my head is right! But I am an outdweller — of the wilderness — and I know the ways of it. Do you wish to go through?"

"I do not see many strangers." I did not mean to apologize, but I did it. "I was — Did you ever know what it was to be helpless? You might have; you don't look young."

"Perhaps not." I do not know whether he answered the question or the assertion. He sat looking quietly in front of him, and I remembered I had once been a man at whose camp every one was welcome.

"Come in," I said, "and talk. Louis's away, but there is dinner on the fire."

"Welaalin, I have eaten; but I will take tobacco from you." He spoke as a prince might have spoken, but I was past surprise. I handed him the tobacco.

He took out a queer-looking pipe, wonderfully cut and carved. I should have liked to put out my hand for it, but this was no ordinary Indian. When I gave him a light he took a long draw of smoke, wiped the mouthpiece carefully, and handed the pipe to me. I have no fancy for other men's pipes, and certainly I should never have known my own tobacco; under the flavor of it was an odd taste, flat and cold, like the smell.

"Kwedumei, I smoke," I said: it means something like a wish for good health over a drink. But three whiffs

The Tall Man

were enough for me. I held out the pipe.

"It is a gift!" he said quickly; his dark hand was very clean and delicate as he pushed it back to me. "When are you ready to go with me?"

"To-morrow." I would have started then, but I had some decency. Louis had gone off in a passion; but I could not leave him without a word. "Is your camp far out?"

"Sometimes," the tall man returned indifferently.

His aloofness annoyed me. "You can't care for visitors!"

"The wolf is my brother," he answered, neither simply nor admittingly.

There came to me vaguely that I had once heard talk of an Indian who was called brother to a wolf. I was going to say so; but the man put it out of my head with a sudden question.

"How much of the ground do you know?"

"Very little." There was no sense in saying none at all.

"It is no matter." Once more his eyes were on mine, and once more that queer half-repulsion went through me, though I do not say they were startling eyes. "You can keep straight out to the north for a day's journey, and I will meet you. But to-morrow is too soon: it will not take as long as you think to get to Caraquet. In two days you can start. I will bring food for myself."

"Stay here! We can start together," — and it was not altogether to show Louis that he was not the only man on earth: I wanted to get over a certain feeling about my visitor to which I could not put a name.

He answered something about things to do. I remembered that I did not know who he was, nor the terms on which he was to guide me to Caraquet.

"Who I am? Oh — Martin!" I thought he laughed, but the smoke had stung my eyes and I was not sure. "And money — you have been kind sometimes to people who could not repay you — that is a thing I have heard! If you come with me I shall get my satisfaction out of it. I am a man very used to the woods. But you are not to bring that servant of yours."

"He wouldn't go with you." I did not like the order. "I'm only going because I have to. It's bad country."

"And I am a stranger."

It was so point-blank that I touched the knife in his belt, and let my despair come out of me. "It takes longer to go blind," I mumbled.

This time there was no doubt about the man's laughter. He stood up. "Your own food," he said, "and your own knife; it will be handier than a gun, and not so heavy. And in three days I will meet you — one day's journey north."

"But it should be east — to Caraquet!"

"Oh yes, afterwards!" he agreed lightly. He wished me, not adieu, but a word of farewell I had never heard. There was no doubt that he was used to the woods, for he never even rustled the frosted leaves as he trod through them, and some live thing that I imagined to be my marten friend of the morning did not move till he was close on it. He was very quick on his feet.

I called after him: "God give you good weather!" but he must have been out of hearing; anyhow, he did not answer. I puzzled my brains as to what I had ever done that he had heard of, and all I could come to was that he must be some relation of Louis's, — there was no one else I had ever been kind to, and assuredly Louis was not paying back anything of that sort for himself.

In the sunshine I peered at the pipe the stranger had given me. It was bone, well carved, — probably an heir-loom; but I would have been driven before I put my good tobacco into it: the aftertaste of the smoke from it was in my mouth still. I thought I put it down but I must have shoved it into my pocket as I got up to shout for Louis. I had an absurd feeling that I did not want to be alone.

It was a feeling I had time to get used to: sundown, and sunrise and sundown again came, and no Louis. Of course he was only an Indian and not worth caring for; but, as I stood in that quiet camp on the morning of the third day, and put my things together to start due north to meet the tall man, I felt sick and lifeless, and careless even of my eyes.

When I got well out, I realized how very bad they were. Though I kept my direction better than I had thought possible, there was all manner of rough going that Louis could have spared me; Louis, who did not care whether I were blind or dead, — and as I thought it I heard a man running. I never heard a man run like that. Before I could

The Tall Man

even turn there was a crash in the bushes, and Louis seized me by the shoulder.

"We find the way," he burst out in his English, "we been gone two days, but we find the way! We very much 'fraid when we seen you gone. This very bad country. You go here alone, you die; both of us go, p'raps we die too, — but you good man to me, we go with you past this country. Oh," he let out his breath with a queer laugh, "my heart 'way up on a long pole when we think you go this country alone, and you most blind! You wrong already; this place long way north. We best start east right away."

"We can't! There's Martin."

"Who?"

I told him. I had my hand on his arm for the comfort of it, and I felt the muscle jar under my fingers.

"Small little man?" he asked swiftly.

"No," — I had somehow a difficulty in describing the stranger because of that thing in his eyes that had repelled me. "Tall. Oh, just an Indian!"

"Just one very big liar," said Louis angrily, yet I felt something else under his voice. "That not Martin; some one make laugh of you. North — what for we go north?" he flung it out as though it were another word for damnation.

"Because I said I would! But we'll just meet the man, and I'll tell him I don't want him." I got my stiff eyelids open, and saw that if I had spoken to ease a decent jealousy my pains were wasted. Louis's head was up as though he listened — and not to me.

"Best start," he said quietly, — "must go slow, you know. This hard traveling for you."

I had found that out for myself. The sun hurt, and the dazzle hurt, and the wind was torture. There is no sense in trying to keep back how low I fell; I let Louis tie a string round his waist, and I followed on the end of it like a dog. He did not go what I called slowly; but I got along somehow, with my eyes shut. It was the feel of the afternoon sun on my back that made me stop.

"You're going east!" I said angrily.

He grunted. "Must go round some big rock. We go north all right!"

Perhaps we did, — till sundown. Then I could not see the stars well enough to know which way Louis led me, even if he had not begun to travel as though I were a man who could see. I bawled at him to stop, and he went faster.

"Not yet," he put his hand behind him and jerked at my string; "we make hurry now;" and perhaps we might have, if I had not fallen down for the twentieth time. It must have been then that I lost my knife, but I did not think of it.

"Better camp," I panted, where I sat sick and shaken. "I can't make any time here, Louis!"

"We got to," said Louis rudely. He hauled me to my feet and began to flee through the night again, as if I had been the dog I felt. Some kind of a second wind had come to me when he stopped, so short that I nearly fell over him. "You hear anything?" he whispered.

"No! We haven't come far enough to hear Martin."

"Oh, that man! We don't ever hear that man. We mean a noise!"

At that moment I thought I did. When I said so Louis only hurried me on again. Presently he said a word which was certainly one of relief, stopped, and lugged me into some sort of shelter. I felt round the place, and it was a shelter helped with hands, if some part of it were natural rock. The back and sides were solid, but the roof was a strong man's roof: I had a sudden knowledge of Louis's doings in that absence he had not explained. I was so full of wonder that I said something foolish about Martin. Louis commented harshly that Martin would not be waiting at all; if he were it did not matter; it was the way men died in this country, going out to meet strangers they did not know where. His voice shook over it, and I was quiet. After all, the tall man was the friend of a day: he might be waiting and he might not. Louis ate in silence. It was the sound of his breathing that made me speak to him.

"What's wrong with this country?"

"It is forbidden," he said unwillingly, in the Indian I had thought so polished till I heard the tall man speak the same tongue. "What you call 'reserved,' by one of former days."

"Do you mean it's haunted?" The word he used meant an Indian of old time, not an Indian dead and gone, and it puzzled me.

The Tall Man

"I mean — " he hesitated, chose his words palpably, and said them with a rush. "I am afraid of One who was angry and went away to live here. To come where he has forbidden! Well, God is merciful, an Easy Man, supposed to forgive us our mistakes; this one is different! I told you it was not good to cross — his — country, but you would not listen; so I have done what I thought best for you. My brothers crossed before you, and are dead."

"How?"

"How do I know?" — and I was not prepared for the quick stiffening of his lax body. "As for me, I have avenged them," he cried furiously, "and I am a dead man now if I go north. I lied to you to-day. We never went north; we came east, due east! I am a man of low character, and cunning; those nights I was away from you I found a way to skirt the Country of the Waiting. This camp I make, and another one day's journey on — good camps, safe! And in one day and one night we are clear of — his — country. You think it is for my fear I do it, — it is for you. No white man has ever set foot there alive, and why should you? It is not my fear! I heard nothing, I saw nothing those days I was away: why should I fear? Besides, for all I know it is a lie that he who waits here never forgives, and that he can bring the dead out of their graves to call you to him. Why do you suppose I trapped and trapped at your camp when you forbade me? It was my vengeance: they say the beasts are all his servants, the marten most of all; that it is they who call to you with dead men's voices. But I believe that is a lie, too!" He leaned suddenly over me. "Why do you laugh?" he demanded.

I had not made a sound, but I answered as I saw fit: the man was worn out with his three days' running in my service. I could make no sense of his rigmorole — not then; but there was no doubt that he was afraid; all day I had known that he thought some one followed us. I had heard nothing, but after he slept I listened. I was satisfied that there was no sound anywhere when Louis spoke in his sleep.

"Continually he screams behind me!" he cried in Indian. I heard him move toward the door, and as I clutched him he trembled with the shock of waking. I was sorry to have startled him, but it was no place for a blind man to be alone in; and I took the string that was round his waist and tied it to my waist as it had been tied all day. It was Louis's fingers on the hitch in the cold of morning that woke me. When we started I was stone blind. I asked if it were snowing, for there was a cold dampness on my face.

"Frost fog! Kind of dark," Louis answered absently. I felt him lean forward, look, and listen. But I had never been in such quiet woods; not a stick cracked nor a branch creaked. Through that silence we moved, the frosty crush of our steps loud on dead bracken, then on stiffened swamp, then on rising ground; and we moved slowly. It went through me that Louis was fumbling, but just as I would have given the world and all to be able to see he spoke confidently: "Almost we miss our trail, but we find it now!" And apparently we did, for we made as good going for some hours as was possible to the blind and the leader of the blind. It was afternoon when Louis checked so sharply that I ran hard against him. "He cries to me in the day-time!" he shrieked.

"Who cries?" I caught his hand, and felt him loosening my string.

"My brother that was younger than I!"

I dragged him round to face my blindness. "He's dead," I said brutally. "How could he be here?"

"You ask me. I tell you." He shook under my hand, but that was all he said. Perhaps he was ashamed, for he went on quietly.

The weather had not cleared as the sun arched; it kept thick and chill against my face, and in the thickness I felt Louis alter his direction three times. But it was not till I could not take another step that he owned he was lost. There was nothing to fuss about: either the sun or the stars would show in time, and we had plenty of food; yet I should have been happier if Louis had been troubled. He made a scratch sort of camp just where we happened to be standing, and last night's fear had dropped from him like a garment and left a different Louis bare. He was all ears and waiting, and, being blind, it worried me a little in a silent place where there was nothing to wait for. Besides, he did not eat; and when I asked him how he had missed his second camp he said he had not looked for it, because all he told me the night before was stuff and nonsense; and he untied my string and threw it away. I said roughly that I wished I had stuck to Martin, but the jealousy had gone out of Louis. He laughed. From somewhere behind the camp came a cold echo, and it took me out into the dark. On my hands and knees I found we were in the gully of a dead river, close under a low cliff, and bare stones, big and little, ran past us like the paving of a road. A small cold wind sighed up the valley of it, and shale dropped now and then from the crumbling sides.

The Tall Man

It was not a cheerful place to make camp. I asked Louis if he had crossed it on that survey journey of his, and he said carelessly that he did not know. I was cold and tired and angry; Louis lay down and slept. And if last night had been silent, this night was not. There were sudden whisperings round us, like the rustling in thick underbrush, — and the place was all stones. I got to an uneasy sleep at last, and it may have been midnight when it woke me. I say it, because I have no mind to own what I thought. The darkness did not make the difference to me that it does to people who can see: I caught hold of Louis.

"He walks beside me," he said very softly; and struck me in the face. He was gone before I could get up off the ground.

I went out after him, calling myself hoarse. There was nothing to hold a track, even if I could have followed one without my eyes. I was afraid to leave the camp, yet when I heard something I went to it. There was not much sense in a blind man choosing a place to die in, and one would be the same as another to me if Louis abandoned me.

"Louis!" I shouted; and a voice too close to me said something. I knew it; and I may as well tell the truth. When I heard the pat of moccasins on those stones I tried to feel relief, and was aware of senseless dread.

"You have been a long time coming," said the tall man coolly. "I was afraid you had missed the way."

"We got lost!" I made a step to him, but he must have receded; I did not touch him. "Why did you run out of my camp just now?"

"It was not I."

I had known it was not when I asked him, but I answered obstinately, "Louis went out with some one! You must have seen him, even if it were not you."

"No;" and the voice held no interest whatever.

"He said his brother came into the camp. I mean" — the start the man had given me was natural enough. I began to get hold of myself, the more easily that I could not see his eyes; and I stopped some foolishness that was on my tongue. "Louis says his dead brother has been calling him all day," I substituted. "I don't know why, unless he's crazy. And now he's left me. Put me in my camp and look for him."

"You should not have brought him; I said not." And an uncalled-for comprehension in the answer put me in a rage. "My camp is near; we will go to it. Perhaps he may come there."

"If I wait here till the last day I will wait here!" I did not care if the man were angry or not. "Louis would not go near your camp; he said you were a liar, and your name was not Martin at all. He was afraid of this country, and it is because of me that he strayed into it. He says it is haunted."

"Haunted?"

"Reserved, was what he said."

"I live here," commented the cold voice; in the silence I knew its owner was laughing. And over the laugh, quite close to me, some one screamed. The cry was baffled in the gully, beaten to and fro against the sides of it; but it was Louis's cry. I thought it would never stop. The ungovernable terror of a soul unbridled, it stiffened the hair on my head. I began to run, and knew I should be too long on the road.

"Go, man; for God's sake!" I ordered. I felt for my knife and could not find it. "You know this place, and I'm blind. Go!"

"Why? He is a man of low character, and cunning; he is not afraid."

I had to hear Louis call for the help that was not coming, but there was no reason I should listen to mockery. I sprang at the man, and him I did not touch; my hand closed by a miracle on the knife he carried. As he clutched the air for me I was on all fours with it in my hand, crawling to that sound. There was more than a scream now, and it guided me. I touched suddenly what I knew was Louis, and he lay still; touched, too, something else — and God knows I cut at it, and I cut well; but I was late. The tall man's knife went to the hilt in loose gravel, and something no bigger than a marten scuttered up the falling shale of the gully side. There was, literally and absolutely, nothing else. I said to myself that it was my blindness, and Louis's madness, and the Indian devil in the gully laughing at both of them, that made me afraid; but I knew it was the foolish inadequacy of the marten coming on top of that cry.

"Dead men's voices," said I, "and a marten," — and knew I was clutching at my sanity. I meant to swear at Louis, and instead felt furiously for the life in him; the sweat of panic was on my hands when I heard the quick feet of the tall man beside me. I listened — for reasons of my own — till he stopped to make sure that Louis was

The Tall Man

dead; but instead he touched me on the shoulder. It was as if virtue came out of him; I can find no other phrase. I know that I dropped his knife.

"So the smoked pipe goes for nothing, with you!" he said softly. The changed voice sucked the murder out of me till I was slack as Louis, who would have been alive if I had not wanted my miserable eyesight. It was some satisfaction to me to stammer out what he had been to me, even if I had to do it in jerks as I tried to rouse him. But the tall man put me suddenly aside.

"You have, several times, given me back my servants — I can perhaps do as much for you," he said unexpectedly. His laugh was different, just as I knew his eyes were if I could have seen them, and then there dawned on me what I had been a fool not to know from the first. This man was a chief; able to keep up his state in this outlying country; with perhaps twenty captains under him. I did not remember any of his men, I had no hope he would put his hand to squaw's work for Louis, — but I moved aside.

What he did I do not know: I might not even if I had had my sight. But I felt Louis move; I suppose that he opened his eyes; and I know that the strange chief spoke to him in words that I could not understand. All I gathered was that his name was not Martin, who was a small man and a servant, and perhaps known to Louis. But Louis turned on his face and groveled; I could hear his hands claw and scratch on the stones of that place as he answered:

"Aooledalume, 'Nsakumam!" He might have been praying, but I knew better, though it was "Lord have mercy on me" that he said.

It was plain that the two knew each other, with bad blood between them; but all I cared for was that the strange chief had chosen to wipe it away. It was none of my business what his real name was; many Indians have several; besides, I was in the darkness of the blind, and I was sick with weariness. It was by no choice of mine that the tall man took my hand and led me all the next day, while Louis, stone silent, walked behind; but I was, quite suddenly, very happy with him. I say he led me; and we talked as friends talk — it was that which made me ask his name.

It is one I keep silence on," he answered quietly; and once more I was conscious of that aloofness, that domination that had repelled me. "And so will you, O white man I have met in peace!"

I do not know why I could not answer him as he said good-by with that word that lacked the name of God in it. I held out his knife, but he would not take it. He was gone so abruptly that I staggered for want of his hand.

It was when I could see again, and was still thanking the good God for it, that I found Father Moore looking at the tall man's knife. He was holding it over an old sack of painted leather and Louis was glowering at him when I came in on the pair of them.

"Where did you dig up this stone knife?" cried the priest eagerly. "It's very old — very good!"

I nodded. I had got over my amazement at the stone blade.

"I didn't find it; a man gave — " my glance rested on the painted sack in joyful astonishment. On it were picture after picture of the tall man; his outlandish clothing; his splendid bearing; the unforgotten, once-seen outline of his face. "Why, that's the man — " I began, and the priest cut me off dryly.

"Those are pictures, three hundred years old, of the Indians' demi-god and hero, their Glooscap, who left them because the whites came, and is still alive — or they dare to believe so! They say he will return when his hour comes, but till then he keeps silence and will have no man pry after him, or kill on his land. It is rank heresy, but I cannot cure them of it, and almost I — " he checked himself hastily, and tapped the picture-writing. "That pipe and knife," he said irritably, "don't you see what a treasure they are? That they are here?"

"Glooscap!" I stood in a whirl of tardy memories — of the tall man's eyes, of Glooscap whose brother was King of the Wolves, whose servant was the Marten — and my mouth opened foolishly. "It couldn't have been!" I babbled. "The knife belonged to a man who guided me here. He was a tall man, a — a chief — "

Louis interrupted me smoothly, if I had not seen his face before he smiled at the priest.

"The master has had those things for a long time, ever since I knew him. He was very sick and blind coming here, and talked much to himself. There never was any tall man!"

I looked at the things lying on the table, from the priest to the Indian; and I remembered that word concerning silence. Then:

"I suppose there never was," said I.

The Tall Man