

# THE RAVEN MOCKER



By Hugh Pendexter

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**D**OWN the Great War Trail that threaded all the country east of the Mississippi together in peace and war sped Yanegwa, "Big Bear," returning from the home of the Iroquois to the Upper Towns of the Cherokee Nation on the Tennessee. The Upper Towns had expected an embassy of old and experienced warriors to undertake the mission in this Autumn of 1738. But in the great council held at Echota, the capital and peace town, the priests spent a day in studying the great talismanic crystal and reported it was always the figure of the young warrior that floated to the top. So he "went to the water" to purify himself by bathing. For ten days he drank the peace medicine and then got eagle feathers.

Having completed these preliminaries, the belt was put around him and his talk tied up in a bundle, and he set forth with instructions to proceed, if need be, to the ancient home of the Mohawks in the far North, near the place where the sky

vault was constantly rising and falling to crush those who presumed to venture beyond the horizon's rim.

It had not been necessary for him to visit the Mohawk country, however, as representatives of that tribe were gathered at the Great Council Fire of the Five Nations at Onondaga, the League's seat of government. It was the proudest moment of his life when he addressed that illustrious assemblage, Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca, Oneida and Cayuga. No warrior's triumph could equal his thrill of joy as he produced the bag his talk was in and opened it.

When he made the symbolic fire of dry elm, the light of which should be a beacon to all tribes, he felt close kinship with the gods. When he stripped the white hickory bark, that the fire might be moved on it from place to place and illumine all dark corners of the league, the approbation of the silent warriors stole over him like incense. With impressive dignity he presented the wampum, showing one dish

and one spoon, signifying all tribes should eat together in amity. With great eloquence he proclaimed his people's desire to bury the hatchet so deep no warrior of either nation could ever dig it up again.

In concluding he had said:

"Blood has been spilled and must be wiped up clean. Bones have been scattered and must be collected and buried and covered with white bark. Come fearlessly to the Eldest Brother of the Nation (Echota) and you will always find the white benches in place and the great white peace pipe with its seven stems leaning against them. The white wampum now hangs between the Iroquois and my people. The talk I have given I leave with you to give to other tribes, who shall come to learn what means the fire I have lighted."

And he received peace belts in return and set out for home, conscious he had done well and stood high in the esteem of the fierce Northern tribes, kinsmen and ancient enemies of the Cherokee.

His exaltation abided with him till he crossed the Potomac. Now that he was nearing home and bringing momentous news to the elders each eager stride should have added to his climax of joy. But as he pressed on through the blazing glory of Autumnal woods he was dismayed to find a vague unrest disturbing his mind. The War Trail, which his eloquence and bearing had turned into a Path of Peace, began to oppress him. The red blush of the maples suggested blood. He sought to diagnose this morbid fancy, and instantly imagination began working and hinting at an unknowable yet impending evil.

Such a mental attitude was preposterous, reason told him—unless it be the malignant work of a wizard or witch. That it might be the natural reaction from a too long sustained pitch of thought never

entered his calculations. White men as well as red believed in witches and demons. The very fact such notions could enter his head at such a time was proof positive some malicious agency was working against him. But wizards and ghosts usually work through a human medium, and there came a day when he completely surrendered to the strange obsession and left the trail and doubled far back to satisfy himself the Iroquois had not broken the faith by sending warriors after him.

Ordinarily such a fear would be absurd, for the talk given and received at Onondaga was sacred. He was as safe among the Five Nations as in his own home. But evil spirits work through unsuspected channels, and the instinct to guard against a stealthy menace was overwhelming. A second incredible situation developed when, he discovered he was confused as to his exact whereabouts.

Such a ridiculous predicament could only result from the work of the Little People, who live in hollow trees and caves and whose malice is confined, to befuddling tried warriors. He found the trail at sunset and camped for the night, still undecided as to which particular demon the Little Folks were allied with. As he brooded over the enigma a star left its position and streamed away to the horizon, showing it was no star at all, but a Fire Panther. What it boded he could not imagine.

Early next morning he was afoot, the calm of the never-ending forest pressing upon him like the walls of a tent. The occasional chatter of a tree squirrel only accented the silence. Once a chipmunk ran up to him and he saluted it gravely and accepted it as a sign of good luck. For the Chipmunk was friendly to man. He was clawed by a bear in a council of the animals because he had dared to

speak a good word for men, and his stripes are a constant reminder of that loyalty.

Far above the forest crown sounded the faint *dugalu dugalu dugalu* of the white breasted geese migrating south: Big Bear envied them for their ease and swiftness of flight and the wide spaces through which they traveled with never a fear of an ambush.

As he followed his trail of yesterday he marveled at the careless marks his moccasins had left. Now he was moving like a shadow and often examined the priming of his gun. The lofty sentiments expressed at Onondaga seemed to be far back, in the past. He had his bag of peace talk and white wampum, but they were powerless to oust the suspicion that some evil was stalking him. Once a wolf startled him by crossing the trail. He raised his gun and all but fired before recognizing the gray streak. He was very glad his eyes had not completely tricked him, for wolves are the watchdogs of Khanate, the Lucky Hunter, and it spoils a gun to shoot at one.

Middy found his superstitious mind taking a new twist; he was loath to advance, although he had not reached the point where he had quit the trail to double back. The consciousness of danger no longer emanated from the rear, and, seemingly, there was no logic in his tarrying. He recognized this, but decided some sort of an ambush awaited him down the trail. If he waited a bit the ambush would be lifted.

So again he camped with only half a day's journey completed, and that night Waugh, the screech owl, began talking, and with feminine persistency shouted the same message over and over without giving him an opportunity to ask any questions. Other night birds, through whom the ghosts talk, joined in and derided him, but he could discover no clue. A priest would have

learned the truth from them.

On resuming his journey in the morning he took a new tack with his mind. He firmly told himself—"I will think of nothing but my Sister, Little Feather, who dances like the sunbeams and sings like the red bird."

And so long as he crowded his mind with thoughts of Little Feather and her winsome sweetness he was at peace.

But concentration has its limits, and he found himself declaring he was not afraid of any enemy he could see. Nor did he fear death. It was the inexplicable that disturbed him and weakened his blood. He wondered if by chance he had eaten the flesh of a timid animal while among the Iroquois. He knew he would be what he ate. He had seen warriors become slow and clumsy because they partook of waka, the cow.

**A**LL these meditations were abruptly terminated as through an opening in the forest the sun cast a vertical spear of light into the trail, and caused his gaze to become fierce and objective. The dazzling light brought out in strong relief the signs of a trail entering the war path from the west. The marks were fresh and it was following the trail he had made two day's back. By doubling toward the north he had unwittingly placed the tracker before him. He quickened his pace to maintain his advantage.

Doubtless it was a Shawnee, that tribe being implacable in their hate since the Cherokee drove them north of the Ohio and wrested the Kentucky country from them. This evidence of a tangible foe turned Big Bear into a manhunter.

Here was the explanation of his unwillingness to advance a full day's journey yesterday. The Fire Panther was this stealthy assassin. With his mind

satisfied on these points he shifted his gun to his left hand and drew his ax. He preferred the ax, although it came from the storeroom of Bridge, the trader, who had debauched many young braves of the nation with his strong rum. Only one fear now remained; that the newcomer would discover where he left the trail and understand his quarry was behind, not before, him. But the next bend in the ancient path brought him in sight of the tracker.

He glided noiselessly forward, his ax upraised, and sharply yelled—

“*Kul* (Now!)”

With a snarl the figure straightened and wheeled, and Big Bear was nonplussed to recognize a Cherokee from the Lower Towns, who had taken to living at the white man’s fort near the Cherokee settlement on Big Pigeon River.

“The Whistler!” exclaimed Big Bear, his arm falling to his side. “Did you think you were following a Shawnee?”

The Whistler came toward him, saying—

“It is Yanegwa, returned from the Great Council Fire of the Iroquois.”

Big Bear smiled amiably. The Whistler was very welcome, for his presence proved the Fire Panther was a liar and that Wahuhu had nothing but old woman’s talk to tell. Some evil spirit had sought to trap him and had failed. Yet he could not resist jibing—

“The Whistler has lived with the whites so long and drank so much of their strong water his eyes have grown dim, or he would have known a Shawnee would not leave a trail a cow could follow.”

The Whistler drew back his lips in a little snarl, his eyes glowing. He knew his kinsmen viewed him with contempt because of his continued association with the whites. But English rum was fiery and

had bought many a better man than he. As he drew very close Big Bear caught the taint of his breath and stepped back. The delinquent’s presence seemed to poison the cool, clean woods.

“I knew I was following Yanegwa’s trail,” said the Whistler, advancing.

Big Bear laughed.

“Were my people troubled about me? Did they send the brave Whistler to find me? Why was he bending over my tracks as though following a war trail?”

“He followed Yanegwa to kill him!” hissed the Whistler, striking with his knife.

Although taken completely off his guard Big Bear’s instinct of self-preservation asserted itself automatically. The ax he was replacing in his belt was jerked upward a few inches and the knife glanced from the flat side of the head.

Instantly the two clinched, clutching each other’s right wrists. Much rum and soft living, however, had made the Whistler flabby, and as they fell to the ground Big Bear secured the advantage. Even then he would have spared his assailant, thinking him bereft of his senses; but as he loosened his grip the knife leaped upward. At the cost of a slashed wrist Big Bear caught it and violently forced it downward.

Coughing hideously, and done for, the Whistler relaxed. In sorrow and disgust Big Bear stared at the crumpled figure. Far overhead came an eery sound, the note of a raven “diving,” and not at all resembling the raven’s usual cry. Both Indians recognized it as the voice of Kalanu Ahyeliski, the Raven Mocker, that terrible wizard or witch that hovers over the sick and dying to rob them of life. It usually flies through the heavens in fiery shape and all other witches and demons scatter at its approach; jealous yet afraid of it. It was no

Fire Panther that Big Bear had seen, but the Raven Mocker hurrying to be in at a death.

“Kalanu Ahyeliski!” gasped the Whistler, staring wildly up into the forest tops. “Keep it away!”

“I have no medicine,” shivered Big Bear.

“Stay with me, or the Mocker will eat my heart. If you stay it may keep away. If you bury me quick it can not get me.”

“I have no medicine,” repeated Big Bear, fighting mightily to overcome his impulse to flee.

“You come from a great peace talk; that may be medicine. You have floated in the magic crystal; that must be medicine.”

“I can not help you,” shuddered Big Bear.

For he knew the Raven Mocker, being invisible, even then might be standing at his side. He expected to behold the Whistler’s body leap into the air as the demon seized it.

“Stay!” panted The Whistler. “Bridge sent me—to kill you. Little—”

The death rattle cut him short.

Dazed by the horror of it all Big Bear could only remember that the Raven Mocker could not violate a grave. He frantically scooped out a hollow in the forest mold and covered up the dead man. Then he ran as though pursued by a legion of demons. Not till far into the night did his mind clear and permit him to think connectedly. The Whistler’s dying words had lodged fast in his brain and now demanded attention. He reviewed them and found them incredible. Why should Bridge, autocrat though he was, seek the life of a bearer of belts, a man he had scarcely seen? Yet how could a man in his death throes and while the Raven Mocker crouched at his side speak with a forked tongue?

IT WAS early evening when Big Bear halted at the Big Pigeon and gazed long at the Great Smoky range. One peak in particular had his reverence, Kuwahi, “the mulberry place.” There, White Bear, chief of all the bears, lived near the enchanted lake of Atagahi, where wounded bears went to bathe and be cured of their hurts. The Cherokee knew that beyond their physical structure there was little difference between animals and men. In fact, the bear was part human as shown by his habit of standing erect. In the old days they had worked and lived together. Like the Indians the animals had their tribes and elected chiefs. They had their town houses, where they held councils. They shared with man the same destiny in the Twilight Land of Usirahiyi.

On the lower slopes a ribbon of red was crawling upward, writhing like a gigantic snake, where the women and children were burning the dead leaves to get the nuts underneath. Big Bear had been homesick for such sights ever since traveling to the North country. No water could ever taste like the water from the Big Pigeon, no nights so mellow and starry as those over the Great Smoky. And yet the mumbled words of a would-be assassin had poisoned Big Bear’s homecoming.

The sinister problem was ever worrying him. He had nothing Bridge could want. The trader was a friend of officers at the fort and gambled and drank with them and loaned them money. He had nothing in common with the Cherokee Nation, his relations being confined to exchanging poor guns and strong rum for dressed deerskins and other articles of barter.

Big Bear had seen him many times, a heavily built man showing the effects of gross living. But he did not believe Bridge knew him by sight. The trader seldom

visited the Cherokee towns these days, having reached a plane of affluence. He had a plantation and trading house near the fort and transacted his business there. Much of his time was spent in carousing with the officers. No; it could not be as The Whistler had said. The Whistler had lost his reason from fear of the Raven Mocker. He had spoken crazy words.

Determined to accept this conclusion Big Bear resumed his journey, eager to be welcomed by Little Feather. As he ran up the river path he discerned a tall figure approaching at a swift pace. Anywhere between the Ohio and Savannah he would have recognized that loping gait; and he joyously called out:

"The Path Killer! I come, Yanegwa."

The Path Killer fairly skimmed over the trail to embrace him, but Big Bear's heart grew cold with a premonition of disaster as his sworn friend gripped him by the shoulders and spoke never a word of welcome.

"What is it?" whispered Big Bear, pushing his friend back and seeking to read his face through the gloom.

"I prayed the mighty Adawehi would tell you. I can not. Ask me of those you love and I will answer. But it takes the life out of me," choked The Path Killer.

"Little Feather?" muttered Big Bear, the fingers of death squeezing his heart.

The Path Killer took his arm and swung him about and pointed to the west, where a faint touch of pink was left behind by the sun.

"She is there," he whispered.

"She has gone to Usunhiyi," moaned Big Bear.

"To Usunhiyi—  
'Where It Is Ever Growing Dark'—The Twilight Land."

"When did she die?"

"Seven nights ago. Little Feather! Little Feather!" And with a groan of anguish the Path Killer stretched out his arms to the spirit land, where go the dead.

"She was well when I went away. What sickness came to our people?"

The Path Killer became a warrior, burning for vengeance, as he harshly replied:

"She fell or jumped off the high ledge near the fort while escaping from Bridge, the trader. He stole her and took her to his house but she escaped. He and his men gave chase."

"Bridge—sent me—to kill you. Little—"

Big Bear now understood The Whistler's dying words.

He held up his ax and kissed the blade and in a calm voice asked—

"Who were with Bridge?"

"Two officers and two of his workmen. I have killed the workmen. The others are hard to get at."

"May the Raven Mocker be near when they die, which must be very soon," prayed Big Bear over the ax.

"I have stalked them close, but they either stay at the fort or shut themselves up at the plantation," sighed the Path Killer. "They know something is on their trail. They dare not go about. The council would send a force against them but I made the chiefs wait till you could come."

"It is not work for any but Yanegwa, her brother, and the man whose wife she was to be. There shall never be white wampum between me and the white settlers."

THE trader always had considered Indians as inferior animals; to be exploited for gain, or exterminated if they got in the way. That they experienced the

gamut of human emotions never entered his head. Little Feather, an uncommonly attractive Indian girl, had appealed to his brutal fancy the moment his bloodshot gaze beheld her. She had repulsed his brusque advances. But possession had simply meant the taking; so he called in two of his officer cronies to participate in the lark, and gave orders to his henchmen. That the wench should spoil his sport by escaping and falling or jumping to her death was a fault he should always hold against the whole Cherokee Nation. He declared as much over his glass as he sat with his friends and discussed the tragedy.

The finding of one of his employees dead the day following the girl's death turned him into a fiend and he swore in horrible oaths the punishment he would mete out. The discovery of the second dead body ten hours later suggested that some one had started a system of accumulative revenge and weakened his ferocity. He was not accustomed to meet those who struck back.

He drank much raw rum in brooding over the second death and had worked himself into a mental stale bordering on a panic when his two friends rode over from the fort to take action on the double killing. They were for calling out the soldiers and raiding the town. But Bridge dissented.

"That would start another war and stop my profits," he moodily grunted. "Keep quiet. I'll see some of the headmen and fix it up. It'll cost a pretty bale of cloth, but better that than to stir up the whole nation."

"Perhaps they've let enough blood to square it," hopefully suggested Finsin, a rat-eyed heir of a wealthy planter.

"Two dead men ought to be enough for any Injun woman on the continent," growled Bursen, whose impudence and

daring supplied the place of a rich father. "Curse them for a devilish breed! If the Government would pay a decent price for their hair we'd clean them up inside a year. Massachusetts has been paying a hundred pounds for a scalp. Godfrey! What pickings! Put that price on down here, Bridge, and I'll have pounds to your shillings and pay what I owe you to boot."

Bridge studied his glass morosely as he said:

"Wish it could be settled without a fuss. Got to have Injuns to make profits. You'd better quarter a score of your soldiers over here. My men are getting silly—some of them got Injun women who fill them up with their — ghost yams."

"I'll detail some men for outpost duty here," readily agreed Bursen. Then raising his glass he mockingly cried, "Speaking of ghosts, here's to the hussy that was fool enough to prefer the river to your caresses."

"Don't!" shouted the trader. "That is; I'm unstrung."

"I should say you are," jeered Finsin, eyeing him in surprise. "What's a dead Injun?"

Bridge rose and examined the fastenings of the heavily barred shutters. He was conscious of his companions' curious scrutiny as he returned to the table and fell into his chair.

"I'm shut up here alone except when you chaps call," he muttered. "Gits on my nerves—that and the rum. Can't help hearing the Injun women's talk—creepy."

"As to what?" urged Bursen, winking at his companion.

Bridge started to pour out a drink, paused and spilled the liquor on the table and raised a hand for attention. It was a weird night sound.

"Owl," mumbled Finsin. "Think it

was a war whoop?"

"The wench come back to haunt you," maliciously suggested Bursen.

"Neither ghosts nor war whoops can make my hand shake like that," hoarsely assured Bridge, holding up his heavy hand and studying the twitching fingers. "What'n —— do you suppose causes that? I ain't drunk. Ever hear them Injun yarns about the Raven Mocker?"

Bursen laughed loudly and demanded—

"Who hasn't?"

He affected to speak in huge disgust, yet his glance traveled toward the window.

"They have a pleasant trick of eating the heart of the dying. Medicine men coil the great invisible serpent 'round the house to keep them out. Even that isn't a sure remedy."

"Get two serpents," advised Finsin with a maudlin grin.

"Some things about their medicine we whites don't understand," grunted Bridge. "Some things about their Raven Mocker their priests don't understand," added Bursen. "In coiling the serpent the priest must leave an opening between the head and tail where you can go in and out. Otherwise the medicine isn't any good. And there's nothing to stop the Raven Mocker from entering through the gap. I've listened to that rot ever since I came to the Colonies."

"I'm in no mood to talk about it," mumbled Bridge. "Let's have the cards."

"I thank you, but no," refused Bursen, rising and bowing with exaggerated politeness. "Your amiable mood, worthy friend, would give you —— able luck. And I can't afford to lose any more just at present. Wish they'd offer a decent scalp bounty so us poor devils could get in funds. I'm for the fort. Coming,

Finsin?"

Finsin looked longingly at the bottle. Bridge urged him to stay all night, but, not relishing to return alone in the morning, he muttered an oath and staggered to his feet. Bridge hurriedly gulped down a drink and swore he would accompany them and look for a game at the fort, but a recurrence of the night cry suddenly dampened his enthusiasm and he gruffly bade them good night from the table.

After they had gone he felt uneasy and even imagined something was watching him through the oak shutters. He knew such spying was impossible but the notion persisted till he rang for his superintendent to keep him company. The superintendent eagerly assailed the bottle, content to sit in silence while his master brooded over the stubbornness of the Indian character.

"Why the devil don't you say something?" he finally roared. "Where's The Whistler?"

"Dead," was the laconic reply.

"Dead?" faintly screamed Bridge, bouncing to his feet.

"Lor', sir! I didn't 'low you'd be interested. He's only a Injun," meekly replied the superintendent. "Found dead on the Big War Trail. Been buried but some wild things had dug him out."

Bridge sank limply into his chair and endeavored to make his voice sound natural as he said—

"Prob'ly a Shawnee raiding band caught him."

The superintendent shook his head emphatically, saying:

"He had his hair. No Shawnee would 'a' left that. Seems to have been killed by his own knife, jest like he done for hisself. Mebbe he did."

"He didn't bury himself,"



whispered Bridge, wiping the water from his forehead. "What do the Cherokee think?"

The superintendent shifted uneasily; then retorted.

"They's a crazy lot. Wouldn't send a party out to scout around—seem to think the witches done it. Killed him and buried him so the Raven Mocker couldn't git him. They believe all the witches and devils are scared of the Raven Mocker and hate it so they'll bury a man jest out of spite. Now I 'low—"

"Shut up that cursed babbling!" cried Bridge, thumping the table. "Has Yanegwa got back yet?"

"Not yet, sir. He's overdue, too. The Path Killer went to meet him. Path Killer was sweet—er—hum."

"Go on!"

"Well, he was sweet on Yanegwa's sister." This very apologetically.

"Huh!" exclaimed Bridge, his eyes glistening. Leaning over the table he hissed, "Fifty pounds for the Path Killer's head. But it must be done quickly."

"Money's good as earned if he ever shows up," eagerly assured the superintendent. "I'll look for him in the morning. Hark! Some one's coming." And he rose and stepped to the window and threw open the shutter before Bridge could stop him.

Several of the servants were huddled in front of the house holding pine knot torches. Down the trail beyond the cleared ground a voice was softly chanting. The night, the dancing shadows cast by the torches, the fear in his own mind, caused the trader to shiver as though cold. Yet he could not summon the will power to order the shutter closed. He had to stand there and glare out into the darkness and witness what was to happen. The chanting was scarcely audible, no words being

distinguishable. Low and monotonous it kept on, drawing nearer and nearer. Then two vague shapes broke through the darkness and into the rim of the torch zone and came ambling up the driveway.

With a shrill laugh of relief the superintendent informed them:

"The officers, sir, merry from drink. I could tell their hoses anywhere. They've come back to make a night of it. They've stopped singing."

The horses made for the lights and the familiar doorway. The men below began exclaiming in horror and amazement as the torches revealed dead men lurching across the withers of their mounts. As they lifted them to the ground and straightened them out under the window Bridge gave a low cry of abject terror.

The superintendent feebly cried:

"Dead and not scalped—waistcoats cut to ribbons! Oh, Lor'! No witches was 'round to bury 'em in time!"

**A** DELEGATION of chiefs from the Cherokee town visited the fort and petitioned that a band of soldiers be sent with their young men after the marauding Shawnee to punish them for slaying The Whistler and the two officers. The commander assented and dispatched a body of scouts to cooperate with the warriors. But Bridge was confident no Shawnee would be overtaken on the Great War Trail.

So he remained closely guarded in his house, fear and rum his hourly companions. His superintendent obtained a small number of soldiers to reinforce the plantation guards, and these made merry in the cookhouse or boisterously patrolled the grounds at night. The trader sat at the table, sometimes dozing off, more often awake and clutching the bottle and a pistol, and quaking at every sound. The days passed and nothing happened. Inquiries made

through the Indian women frequenting the plantation elicited no news of Yanegwa or the Path Killer. Their tribesmen believed both had been killed, said the women.

The superintendent accepted this theory. The two had been slain by the same warrior, or band, that killed The Whistler and the officers. The Shawnee had hoped to escape suspicion by refraining from scalping their victims. Probably there were but very few in the Shawnee band, and they hoped to hide in the cane and hills and pick off a victim now and then. Two Mohawk braves once remained hidden near one of the Lower Towns for a space of four moons and stealthily killed till the nation believed it to be the work of witches.

Satisfied the Path Killer was dead the superintendent quietly murdered an Indian, represented it was Little Feather's lover, and collected his fifty pounds. Never had the trader paid out money so willingly. He was convinced Big Bear was dead, and the passing of the Path Killer to the Twilight Land rolled a mighty load from his heart. With brutal jocosity he remarked, after paying over the blood price—

"The three of them can talk things over."

"No doubt but what Big Bear's dead," murmured the superintendent.

The trader's eyes took alarm, and he said—

"If he ain't I'll give a hundred pounds for his head."

"I'll fetch in the heads of the whole nation at that rate," cried the superintendent.

**H**IDDEN in a small cave near some falls on the Big Pigeon, where the voice of the Thunderers spoke to them day and night in wise council, Big Bear and his friend essayed to devise a plan whereby they could come upon the trader when he

was alone. Night after night they reconnoitered the house seeking an entrance. To avoid the drunken soldiers was child's play, but to gain admission to the trader's living quarters without a great display of force seemed to be impossible.

There were times when they could have slain at a distance, providing their medicine was strong. These opportunities came each day when the trader stepped to the front door and whistled for his favorite horse. The intelligent animal was allowed to run free, his master's signal always bringing him to the house on the gallop. It was the one trait in the trader's brutal make-up that savored of humanism; he loved the horse.

These were the only occasions when he showed himself, and never then except as he was surrounded by his men and the soldiers. A long shot might bring him down, but such an anonymous killing would not satisfy the Cherokee. Both had sworn on Big Bear's ax that the trader should know his slayer and the cause of his death.

"It is talked in the village that he is killing himself with fear," said the Path Killer.

"Fear is good but he must not die alone," replied Big Bear. "I would not have him die by his own hand. Little Feather's death was clean. His must be bloody."

"When he leaves the house we will follow and catch him unguarded," consoled the Path Killer.

"But he never leaves his house. Each day I fear to hear he has killed himself, or died quietly in bed."

"He must leave some day. He will grow weary of being alone and will start for the fort. He will whistle to his horse and mount it and dart away with his men behind him. Some day he will come to the door, dressed for the trail. We must always

be ready to follow.”

“My brother speaks medicine words,” softly exulted Big Bear. “He will watch the house tonight alone while I find the horse and make friends with him.”

“Adawehi helps us!” cried the Path Killer, his gaze lighting with inspiration. “May your medicine be mighty enough to call the horse to us when his master would ride him to the fort!”

Big Bear shook his head, saying:

“The priests might do it. The old people could do it, but not Yanegwa. He who can drive the Raven Mocker away could do it, but Yanegwa is only a warrior.”

“Yanegwa’s medicine is strong enough to drive the trader from his house,” the Path Killer insisted. “One of the corn women told me last night he is afraid of the Mocker. He does not believe it was a Shawnee who killed the officers. He believes it was a Mocker. All his men know his fears.”

“He hired The Whistler to kill me,” murmured Big Bear, his eyes blank as he groped for the big idea. “It was The Whistler who taught him to call his horse by whistling. He fears the Raven Mocker. *Ku!* I know it now. Our medicine shall drive him into the open. I, Yanegwa, who carried the bundle of peace talk to the Five Nations, say it!”

**S**TRANGE talk was whispered about the plantation, much of which seeped into the master’s apartment and set him to shivering. It was said many Raven Mockers were hovering ’round the place. Their cries could be heard each night. Some life must soon go out to attract such numbers of the wizards. Lesser witches and devils, in the shape of black clouds, had been seen retreating over the Great Smoky Mountains, frightened from their mediocre

mischiefs by the Mockers.

“Such ——— rot,” mumbled Bridge, after pumping his superintendent about the cookhouse gossip. “Keep them women off the plantation. What’s the matter with you? You look silly ’round the gills.”

“It’s their ghost yarns, sir. It’s all I’ve heard for a week.”

“The Path Killer’s spirit after you, eh?” And the trader grinned wolfishly in thinking he had a companion in fear. “What do those women say about the priests keeping the Raven Mockers away? Not that there’s anything in it. Yet we don’t understand just what the priests can do.”

“They coil a big serpent about a house, but have to leave an opening between the head and tail—”

“Shut up! Bursen was talking that guff—the night he was done for. Curse this country and its silly tales! Get things ready for me to go to the fort.”

“Hoke can run things while we’re gone,” eagerly suggested the superintendent, who believed a trip to the fort might ease his thoughts of the Indian he had murdered.

“While we’re gone?” scoffed the trader. “Who the devil are you, anyway? Drinking out the same bottle don’t make us equals, my man. You’ll stick here.”

After the superintendent sullenly took his departure the trader outlined his plans. He would hire a new superintendent, and then go North and keep clear of the witch ridden country. He regretted he had not gone to the fort before. Cautiously unfastening the shutters he peered out at the west and whispered:

“Usunhiyi.

Where\_It\_Is\_Always\_Growing\_Dark—I didn’t send the little fool there. Besides, we were all drunk.”

That night employees, soldiers and

hangers-on heard a Raven Mocker over the house; not one voice, but many. There was no sleep in the help's quarters; there was no sleep in the master's apartment. The weird cries circled the plantation, now sounding in the depths of the forest, now calling from the tilled fields and outhouses. And toward morning it rang with earsplitting violence close to the shuttered window and brought the trader to his feet, the dew of death on his flabby face. Sunrise found him fully dressed but helpless from liquor.

He came to his senses late in the afternoon and remembered the experiences of the night. He could not pass through such another night. Shaking and trembling he dragged himself from bed and rang for the superintendent.

"I'm leaving for the fort as soon as I can get my papers in order. Have the soldiers ready and six of my best woodsmen."

"Shall the men catch your hoss?"

"They'd have a fine run for it. I'll call the horse when I'm ready. Git out!"

The Twilight Land had reluctantly surrendered its last bit of gold and the steel blue of the mountains had changed to sullen gray before the trader finished arranging his papers. Bursen's I.O.U.'s went into the flames as worthless, but Finsin's were saved on the chance his father might pay. Stars gleamed and the dusk was stalking up from the river when the trader descended to the hall and made sure his guard was ready and waiting. As he opened the outer door a nerve-racking cry came from the direction of the Cherokee town. The men heard it without

their usual ribald jest.

The trader raised a silver whistle and blew a signal. The Mocker called again, this time much nearer. In a panic lest the evil voice get between him and the fort Bridge whistled a second time and prolonged the call. A crackling of underbrush and the whinny of his horse answered, and his fear that some harm had befallen the animal subsided. Now the horse was cantering across a field. Once mounted, with the trail open before him, Bridge vowed he would defy the devil himself to overtake him. He snatched up the bridle and saddle from the horse block and called impatiently to the horse. The animal whinnied and pranced about, but seemed reluctant to approach.

"Stand back with those torches! You frighten him," Bridge yelled to the soldiers who held lighted pine knots.

The guard drew off to one side. The horse sprang forward like a bolt. What next happened was never described the same by any two of the onlookers. When the steed raced up to the block Bridge caught him about the neck and lifted the bridle. Then he gave a startled yell and seemed to vault across the animal's withers. Back to the woods galloped the horse.

Some of the men swore they heard the trader cry out the name of Yanegwa. Others were equally positive he shouted the name of Little Feather, who had died to escape him. Only on one point did they agree: that his horse carried him to the edge of the wood and that, inasmuch as his heart was torn out before they could gain his side, a Raven Mocker must have got him.