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Hubert, the Hunter

Joseph Labadie

1933

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dark-eyed brother, swarthy

as a nut,

Straight as the needles of the pine his hair, and
black as the berries of the bramble bush;

Teeth white as the fleckless foam of the sea;

Limbs long, lean, lithe, muscular as a panther;

Plumb as a tamarack, withy as a willow;

The blood of the chase in his vivid veins;

The instincts of aboriginal ancestors in his soul;

A son of his father with his mother's heart.

Pioneer, frontispiece of civilization;

Woodsman with urbanity; urbanite with the smell
of boughs on his clothes;

Sympathetic as a doe; yielding as a mass of moss
when need;

Firm as a white oak stump if requisite.

Tough as a hemlock knot; strong as second-growth
hickory;

A child of nature, lover of freedom, hater of
wrongs;

Hunter, fisher, fellow of the college of field and for-
est;

Keen as a blade of marsh hay;

Generous as a mountain stream —

Hubert by name and intellectual equipment.

He went a hunting one inauspicious day.

Softly as a falling leaf he moved along the wood-
land ways,

With mind bent on taking life,

His sensitive finger on the sensitive trigger,

Anxious to send death to any gamey heart;

His ear alert to every woodland sound;

His eye fixed on every moving thing;

The sigh of every listless breeze thru the saluting
shrubs pumped eager blood thru his veins,

While game gamboled in imagination as abun-
dantly as in urban zoo,

But in the living real it was scarce enuf.

At last, across his untrod way a browsing buck
walked with unwary feet,

Monarch of the mead and forest,

And thru the succulent boughs he nibbled confid-
ingly.

The keen-eyed Sol, with a fingered ray, pointed the
place for the cruel aim.

Quick as tho't the deadly lead tore its savage will
thru tender flesh,

And like a bounding ball the monarch of the glen
made his last long leap into the air,

And, prone as a cloud-crowned pine wind-felled,
lay on the leafy-cushioned ground.

With a hunter's zeal Hubert rushed to slay his
wounded prey,

But met a sight that qualmed his stricken soul!

The dying deer lay like a vanquished foe, tho he
was no foe,

And looked into his animated face with brotherly
eyes,

Kindly, accusingly, sorrowfully,

While gushing blood drenched the drinking
ground.

For the first time, Hubert felt a murderous guilt.

His quickened heart grappled with his conscience
and pained,

Remorseful tears wet his aching face.

Conscious guilt choked; the ending blow could not
be struck!

With sinking soul he stared into those glazing eyes

That spoke accusingly to him in painful eloquence.

Damning guilt drowned his heart in thickening
blood.

Down on his knees he threw himself and plead in
agony for one forgiving look.

The antlered head fell over on the pillowy leaves;

Death tremors convulsed his rhythmic form;
His chilling limbs stretched and quivered;
The spirit left the bleeding carcass.

Who shall say it did not go in quest of other forms
thru which to work its destiny, if destiny there be?

Who shall say this beautiful body housed no sanctified soul?

That it, too, had not drunk life from the common
font of things as all animation?

Who shall say life is not a universal essence, as air,
to all living things,

And Fate a master workman making multiform beings
of the same stuff?

“O God! what have I done!” the better Hubert cried.

“Why have I killed this unoffending creature ?

What harm had he done me?

What need served by parting life and flesh by human
hands?

Whence came the right to take what replacing Nature
denies to me?