

Hubert, the Hunter

Joseph Labadie

1933

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 forest;
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 woodland 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 abundantly 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 confidingly.
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 beauteous 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?

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