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*Cover illustration by Chesley Bonestell*

*(Space ship in trouble with meteor swarm; Europa and Jupiter in background)*

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*Miriam Allen deFord, as we pointed out last year when we published her The Last Generation?, is the most versatile professional writer we have ever encountered. There's hardly a field of fiction or non-fiction in which she has not distinguished herself — and yet she manages occasionally to amaze us by displaying still another facet of her creative talent, as in this tender and tragic story based on Indian folklore of the American Northwest. The atmosphere of pioneer Washington comes from the boyhood of the author's husband, the late astronomer Maynard Shipley; and legend and fact fuse in a human story at once touching and a little terrifying — a tale that may save you from ever again speaking too loudly where a tree may hear.*

## *The Daughter of the Tree*

by MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

WHAT WORRIED LEE CHIEFLY was the silence. Back home, in Boston, he had been taught his Longfellow — “the murmuring pines and the hemlocks.” There were pines and hemlocks here, though the forest was mostly spruce and, above all, Douglas fir; but none of them murmured. There were no songbirds, and only once in a while did he hear the rallying call of a quail. He missed even the roar of the Snoqualmie River that had annoyed him so much the first night. Perhaps — he set the tin oven and the pans and canisters on the ground, to rest his shoulders, and took a long drink from his water flask — perhaps he had been a fool not to try to cross that half-made bridge after all.

But he could never have done it. All Watt's gibes and sneers about husky eighteen-year-old boys who couldn't keep their balance could only bring the blood to his face; they could not make him set foot on that swaying contraction with the big gaps between. He had never been able to endure heights: that time when he was a tiny tad and his father had taken him up to Vermont in the summer, he had learned that he grew sick and dizzy when there was no solid ground under him. He would be all right alone. He had a hatchet to cut away the undergrowth if the salmonberry bushes and rhododendrons grew too thick, and if he met a cougar or even a bear, the chances were that it would back away hastily at sight of him. He was not afraid. Only, it was so dreadfully quiet.

To cheer himself up, he began to whistle: "Down went McGinty to the bottom of the sea" — a tune from two years ago, 1890, in Boston, before his father had died and he had been set adrift. It had seemed like a romantic, adventurous dream then, to leave school and use up all that was left of the insurance money to go with Watt Gibson to Seattle. Washington had been a state for only a year; Watt, from his seniority of five years and an uncle who had been West for a decade and had sent for him, had been full of rosy stories of prospects in which money and excitement were inextricably mingled. But the boys had arrived on the heels of a great fire which had left the little city prostrate, with only two business buildings standing: people were living in tents, and there was little work except for skilled carpenters and builders. Then Watt's uncle had joined a party which was going to open up the country east of the Snoqualmie; and Lee, who had seldom been out of a city in his life, was overwhelmed with gratitude at the chance to go with them as cook.

Tramping miles around a gorge, all by himself, until it had narrowed to where he could cross it, and then tramping back again to join the squatters' camp, had been something he had not figured on.

Well, if the others could live that long without bacon and flapjacks, he could live till he got back to them. He stooped and shouldered the heavy kitchen-pack again. There was no least crackling of twigs or swish of air; but as he stepped around the huge trunk of a fir-tree he came face to face with a man, standing silently to await him.

Lee jumped and the tins rattled, but the man simply stood and waited. He was an Indian — one of the Flathead Indians from the big hop-ranch, probably, since in slack seasons they sometimes came into the wilderness for salmonberries and grouse and deer.

"*Klahowya sikh,*" Lee said tentatively. All these Indian tribes of various descent and language spoke Chinook, the trade jargon; so did all the white men who had dealings with them; and Lee had amused himself for nearly two years by learning fluently the weird mixture of English, French, Spanish, and disparate Indian dialects.

"*Klahowya,*" responded the stranger briefly.

Lee was not so glib as he had imagined. The impassive dark face before him almost smiled as he explained laboriously where he was going — not why. Those fellows could cross the Grand Canyon on a plank — they were like cats in their delicate sense of balance.

He learned that it was nearly five miles to the end of the gorge. He had already come at least three, so there would be eight miles back on the other side. It was still early in the day; with luck, he could rejoin his party by dark. If they were hungry, they could make a fire and heat coffee and eat some of

the cold biscuit from breakfast, but though he had the stove and all the kitchenware, he carried nothing edible except salt and baking powder and a stray small tin of flour. He was considerably relieved when the Indian remarked: "*Mesika olo?*"

Yes, he was very hungry, as only a healthy eighteen-year-old can be. The Indian had a pouch full of salmonberries and two quail. They would have a feast.

Gravely, without much conversation, they set up the stove and gathered kindling. Lee made flapjacks while the Indian gutted and spitted the quail. They set to with hearty appetites.

Suddenly, with scarcely a sound, the rhododendron bushes at the right parted, and a girl appeared. The Indian nodded curtly, and the girl smiled shyly, but said not a word. Lee sat with his mouth half-open, staring at her, a forgotten drumstick between his fingers. The girl sank in a graceful heap beside him on the ground, and still without a word prepared to share the food.

In his amazement the boy forgot to eat. He glanced inquiringly at his companion, but the Indian only shook his head very slightly and impassively went on with his meal. Not a sound came from the girl, and she did not seem to notice Lee's covert glances.

She was dressed like an Indian, but she was plainly of full white blood. Her hair, worn in two long plaits, was a soft chestnut brown, and as she stretched out her arm for a flapjack he could see the white above the sunburn. Once she looked full at him, with curiosity equal to his own, and he saw that her eyes were a dark blue.

Then, as silently as she had come, she stood up, raised her hands for a minute above her head, in salutation and apparently in thanks, and quietly slipped away. There was no sound of her going in her buckskin moccasins, and though Lee jumped to his feet and ran a few steps after her, she was nowhere to be seen.

When he came back, the Indian was cleaning up and burying the remains of their meal. He looked amused, but he waited for Lee to speak.

"Who is she?" the boy asked in Chinook.

The Indian was busy lighting his pipe. When it was drawing properly he answered at leisure, in the same language, though not to the point.

"She no can hear," he said, "but if we talk about her when she is here she know, and it make her sad."

"But who *is* she?"

"*Okustie stick*," said the Indian, and puffed away in silence.

"The daughter of the tree." Lee flushed: was the man making game of him? But the Indian gazed at him with sleepy amiability.

A little offended, the boy finished his packing, and prepared to continue his journey. He felt the man's eyes on him, but he did not look in the Indian's direction. When his task was done, he said stiffly: "Thank you for the food. Goodbye, friend," and turned to leave.

The Indian chuckled.

"Wait. I tell you," he proffered dryly.

That was just what Lee wanted. He dropped the pack immediately, and squatted beside the man, with his back against the big fir.

There was a comfortable silence. Then the Indian said, smoking peacefully between the guttural words of the strange language:

"Long time ago I come here, I little boy. Long time ago my father come here sometimes to hunt. Sometimes he give big potlatch, he want much dinner to give his friends. We live then on seashore, we fish. Sometimes we want bear-meat, deer-meat, my father come many miles, hunt here in woods. I little boy, he bring me, teach me how to hunt. So long time before she born, I know that girl's mother."

"She's a white girl, isn't she?" burst from Lee.

The Indian frowned; the order of his narrative had been interrupted.

"Her mother white woman."

"But she looks all white. Is her father an Indian?"

"Her father not Indian, not white man. You listen, no talk. I tell."

Lee settled back. Let the men wait; they would be comfortable enough and glad of the enforced rest after days of blazing trails and chopping underbrush. The Indian, raising an admonitory hand against further interference, continued:

"That girl younger than you. This I tell you happen since I grown man. But begin long time ago, when my father bring me here little boy, teach me how to hunt. When I big, I come by myself. Then white man and white woman come here from far off, live here in woods.

"Pretty soon maybe white man live all around here, chop down trees, build houses. You come today, tomorrow plenty more. Some day no more woods, all houses, all white men. But that time he first white man ever come here, and he bring woman with him.

"Why he come I not know, my father not know. Maybe he do bad things, run away. Maybe he sick, want get well in woods. You come here sick, trees cure you. But no, he strong man, do much work, he not sick. Maybe he crazy, I not know. But he come, and he bring woman.

"He camp first, then he chop trees and build house. House all gone now — trees grow over it. But he build, and he hunt to eat, and woman pick berries. She clear ground and try grow corn — no good. She not woman to do hard work. When I see her I see from her hands she not woman to do work.

"Man very busy, all day, chop trees, build fence, hunt. When day over, he very tired; eat, lie down, sleep. Morning he get up, go to work. Never talk much; very quiet always for woman."

Lee thought of the silence of the woods which had so oppressed him. He imagined a gently bred white woman condemned to this forest forever, and he shuddered.

"Every year, white man go away, back to his own country. So maybe he not do bad things, maybe he come here just because crazy. But he not too crazy, he take care everything all right. He gone maybe two moons.

"Those days, our people keep slaves. He come to us, borrow use of slave to help him carry load. He come back, bring back slave, leave us presents. Sometimes we want things, we tell him, he buy them, bring them to us. Always come back with big load, all he need till next year. While he gone, he leave woman alone in house.

"One day he come our place like that, he talk my father. He say: 'My woman run away.'

"My father say: 'You no find?'

"He say: 'Oh, yes, I find. She run away two time, three time, I think maybe she go crazy.'

"My father say: 'What she do, you think she go crazy?'

"White man say: 'I find her, she make love to fir-tree. She put arms around fir-tree, say to it like to man, "You understand me, you love me."'

"White man laugh, but my father shake head. He know trees good medicine sick people, bad medicine crazy people. You see big tree here?"

Lee nodded. The Indian touched lightly the huge fir-tree against which they were leaning.

"Trees like people, some trees once people, long time ago. This tree, he hear everything we talk. He no can answer, but he hear."

It sounded silly, but in spite of himself a little cold shiver trickled down Lee's spine. The Indian went on gravely:

"You treat woman bad, leave her alone, maybe whip her, maybe speak bad to her, some tree it hear. That tree, it call that woman, it take her away from man, maybe it be her husband."

That was a bit too thick. The boy laughed. The Indian frowned.

"You no laugh. White man, he laugh when my father tell him. He say: 'You crazy too, like my woman.' He go away.

"By and by, I grown man, I go alone hunt in woods. My father old man now, no go with me. We get poor people, leave our home, no more slaves, go work for white man on hop-ranch. Sometimes I remember, like now, when I boy. I come to woods again, live here two, three days. I remember good times I know, forget bad times.

"Every time I come, when I young man, I see white woman here.

"Sometimes her husband work in woods, sometimes he far away in his own country. But always the same — she walk around woods, not afraid of anything. Cougars, bears, deer, she talk to those animals, they never hurt her. Sometimes she sing. Once I see her, long time ago. Somebody kill doe, maybe her man, maybe Indian. Little fawn left, baby, maybe one moon old. She hold little fawn in arms like baby, sing to it. I see that.

"Always too she talk to trees, just like they people. That is bad, talk to trees. They listen, they no can talk, but they hear. One big fir-tree — big like this — I see her put arms around, kiss bark, talk to tree. I see, I run fast. I no want tree punish me, I see it with woman.

"You no believe me, but I tell you.

"Then come long winter, very bad. Plenty snow, very deep. I no can work, I say to boss man I come here to woods, maybe catch something to eat, maybe not. This seventeen year ago, maybe."

Seventeen years. The girl, Lee thought, judging as well as he could, must be about sixteen.

"All day I hunt, no grouse, no quail, no deer, nothing. Snow come down hard, very cold. I come near white man's house — house all gone now, trees grow over it. But house there then. Inside I hear talk. I no want go in, maybe people quarrel, not want stranger hear. I wait outside, I listen.

"White woman she very angry, she cry, she say: 'Put down that axe!' I look through window — just paper over window, and wind tear corner, so I see. White man have axe, she hold his arm, hold on tight.

"He say: 'I stop this nonsense! I put end to that!' I think maybe he going hurt her, I must stop him, but she let go arm, run to door, and he no touch her. He say: 'What you do? Where you go?'

"Then I hear her talk in other woman's voice, not her voice; if I not see, I think other woman in room. Wait. I remember what she say, the words: not Chinook, I say them in *King Chautch le lang*."

The Indian paused a second, as if to recollect with accuracy, then slowly, in his guttural voice, he said in English:

"I'm through with you. I'm going where I'm wanted."

The sound of those slow, badly pronounced words, in the Indian's harsh monotone, sent a tremor of horror through Lee's veins. He was an imaginative boy — an unimaginative one, like Watt Gibson, would have crossed that swaying bridge without a thought — and suddenly he heard that lost, desolate creature, worn to insanity, uttering her dreary challenge. In the silence that followed, he fancied for a second he could hear the girl's light footfall. But when he turned sharply no one was visible.

"So," the Indian went on deliberately, "I know because she speak in other

woman's voice, she truly crazy. I rather stay out in snow than be with crazy woman. I not listen any more, I go."

"And didn't you find out what happened?" Lee cried. "He must have been fixing to chop down that big tree she was so fond of, wasn't he, and she was trying to stop him. Did he cut it down?"

To his embarrassment, he suddenly discovered he had been speaking English, of which the Indian probably knew only a few words. But the man paid no attention to his outburst. He went on placidly.

"I go away, but I not find anything to hunt. Night come, still snow. I very cold, no can make fire in snow. Nothing else to do but pass night next crazy woman. I go back to white man's house.

"No light there. I go to door, to knock, no noise in house. At door I stumble, stoop down. I pick up branch of tree, lie across doorstep. I shake snow off branch, I feel. It is branch of fir-tree. Then I know."

"Know what?"

"I know fir-tree has come for woman. I know it hear her, come for her. I know another thing. I open door. White man is lying on floor. I light lamp, but I know before I look. He is dead."

"Dead?"

"He has been dead four, five hour. I look to see sign how he die, but I know before I look. The back of his head is broken."

"By the axe?"

"Axe is in corner, it is clean. The tree has heard; it has come to get its woman, it has killed him."

"But, good Lord!" Lee burst out. He recollected himself and went on haltingly in Chinook: "Tree no can come in house, kill man."

"Spirit of tree come anywhere, kill anybody. You listen.

"I go back to ranch, but I come here again. I see white woman maybe two, three time before summer. I no tell anybody, not my father, not anybody. I no want tree come, punish me. First time I come back here, next moon, house all clean, dead body buried. Woman, she can do that, work slow in frozen ground. Very cold all time, he keep till she ready. One time I come again, just before summer. I see her, she say: 'You come here again when first snow fall.' I say: 'I come.'

"First snow fall, I tell boss man I no can work, I come here, go to white woman's house. Her house now, man dead. But most time, she live out in woods, with tree. I go in house, she very sick. I see she going die. She have little baby. That girl you see.

"She say: 'I going die, you take baby, take to your wife.' I say: 'I stay. I wait.' I stay maybe two, three day, give her food. Then she die. I dig grave, I bury her. Then I take baby to my wife.



"She daughter of the tree. Tree hear too much, so she no can hear, no can speak. But very good baby, very quiet. She live with us, like our daughter. Very pretty, very good, but no can talk. When she grown girl, she run away. I know where she go. I come here, I get her, I bring her back. By and by she run away again.

"Now all winter, she stay our camp. She help my wife, she work hop-ranch, she very good girl. But come spring, she run away, stay till first snow. I no follow her now, I know where she go. I come here, sometimes I see her, sometimes no. She live here, live on berries, wash in river, sleep on ground. She stay with her father."

Instinctively Lee edged away from the giant fir-tree against which he had been leaning. The Indian almost smiled.

"Not this tree. I no lean on that tree. That tree far off in woods. White man ever cut that tree, maybe he be sorry. Maybe tree kill him when it fall."

"The whole thing's impossible!" exclaimed Lee, a little too loudly. Then he switched again to Chinook: "She grown girl. She safe in woods?"

"She safe," said the Indian grimly. "My wife see she safe in camp, her father see she safe in woods. I think maybe she never love man. She only half like you and me."

Lee glanced at him dubiously. The girl was very pretty.

The Indian stood up. Doubtless he was due at the hop-ranch at Snoqualmie by morning.

"You get back your friends, maybe tonight. Full moon tonight, very easy." He raised a hand in farewell. "*Klahowya sikh's.*"

"*Klahowya,*" responded Lee. Then, already a few steps off, already wondering with a quickened pulse if the girl might not emerge from the bushes again when the man was out of sight, he called back:

"I no believe. White woman kill man. Girl his baby."

Or yours, he thought to himself.

The Indian turned too, and smiled condescendingly. He had lived with white men: he knew how their minds worked.

"Girl not his baby," he said dispassionately. "Girl not my baby, too. I no touch woman belong to tree. You young man, you no child, you not talk like child. That girl not baby any man.

"She born ten full moons after man die, when snow begin to fall. She daughter of the tree."

Lee smiled too, and shook his head stubbornly. The Indian shrugged his shoulders and turned to go. The boy watched him disappear among the trees; then he adjusted his heavy pack and started to trudge on down the trail. It was true, as Watt had told him; these Indians had the minds of children,

once you got them off the beaten track of everyday practicalities. Of all the fantastic yarns!

There was a slight rustle to his left, in the underbrush. Looking up sharply, Lee caught a glimpse of long chestnut hair.

Aha, he thought, so she did notice me! He had plenty of time; the day was young yet. Deliberately he laid down the pack, tied his handkerchief to a branch to mark the spot, and plunged off the trail.

She was fleet-footed than he, and the woods were her familiar territory. But she kept sufficiently in sight and sound to lure him on. Suddenly she paused, not fifty feet away; and there was invitation in her eyes.

"Wait!" he called, forgetting that she could not hear him. There was no other sound; the trees stood about him like solemn guardians. He began to run.

He found himself sprawled ridiculously on the hard ground, his knees scraped, his left hand bleeding.

Stiffly he got to his feet again. There lay the fallen branch that had tripped him.

He stooped and picked it up. For a long minute he stared at it. The trees around him, he saw at a glance, were spruce, with a few pines.

The branch he held in his hand was fir.

The girl had disappeared. Around him was only silence.

Shivering in the warm sunshine, Lee limped back to the trail. As quickly as he could, he shouldered his pack and faced toward the camp. All he wanted in the world was to be with Watt and the others just as soon as his hurrying legs could make it.

