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LEGEND OF THE INDIANS' BURIED GOLD

"I go 'way. I come back."

These were the parting words of "John," an Indian who, around 1910, visited this section in search of a pot of gold that a faded map his grandmother had left told him was buried on the Shelby Cullom farm near Ryland.

Like a shadow he came, just as mysteriously he left, so Mr. and Mrs. Cullom recall, with whom he conversed at length while he was here. He understood the "white man's" suspicions, and made no move which might excite them.

Evening chores were progressing nicely on the Cullom farm when he appeared. Cows, herded at the pasture gate, chewed their cuds restlessly in the twilight. Strong upon the dewy atmosphere was the odor of hay, newly thrown down from the loft, and meted out into respective hay racks.

Mr. Cullom, busily engaged about the dairy barn, suddenly was interrupted by one of his Negro hired men, who hurried into the building and spoke in a voice pitched high with excitement.

"Boss, dere's a Injun out dere wh-whut wants tuh see yuh," he stammered.

"Oh, go on, John, there're no Indians in this part of the country," Mr. Cullom answered. "Get back to your work."

"But da is, boss. I dun seed him, an' he dun axed fer yuh." The Negro's white eyes showed his earnestness.

Mr. Cullom walked outside. There, a few feet away, stood a huge, broad-shouldered man of around 50. He was dressed in civilian clothes, but his complexion and the cut of his hair showed plainly that he was Indian.

"I come from Tahlequah, Indian Territory," he explained, pronouncing familiarly the name of the city in

Cherokee County, Oklahoma

"I come stay for night."

"We have no room for you to stay," Mr. Cullom told him, thinking of the dinner invitation he and his wife had for that night.

"I stay in barn," the Indian quickly replied.

"No, we have no place for you." Mr. Cullom spoke firmly. The man's great hulk added no little to his suspiciousness.

The Indian glanced about him. Darkies were peering at him from all sides. Then, in as friendly manner as possible, he motioned for Mr. Cullom to follow him.

Behind the barn, he drew a yellowed paper from the small bag he carried.

"This a map," he said. "It tell me where gold my father left here. You let me stay for night, go with me search, I divide."

Mr. Cullom looked at the paper. It was covered with lines and Indian characters. The visitor pointed to a spot plainly drawn near the center.

"There gold," he whispered.

So after a consultation with Mrs. Cullom, the dinner engagement was called off, and the Indian was led to a room. There, he pulled from his pocket a roll of bills.

"Here, you keep for guarantee," he proffered. "I stay here 'till you call. I not go 'way."

But his hosts were convinced of his good intentions, and invited him down on the back porch to eat. When he had finished his repast, which he partook with his fingers, explaining that Theodore Roosevelt had eaten that way while on a visit to Indian Territory, they sat around him in conversation.

He told them in his broken English that his name was John, and that the map had been left his mother, who had died recently, by his grandmother, one of the Cherokees moved from this section to Oklahoma back in the early years of the county. The gold, he said, was too heavy to take along on horseback, so his ancestors had buried it, and had marked the trail to the cache by chopping on white oak and other long-life trees.

He showed a surprising acquaintance with the topography of the county, even mentioning springs and streams, a

knowledge which corroborated his statement that he had studied the map since childhood, while his mother and grandmother pointed.

In discussing the valley in which the Cullom home is located, he informed his listeners that his ancestors had built their tepees nearby, and that they had called this section "Bellfaun," the Indian name for "god of the woods."

"What induced you to come back?" he was asked, after he had mentioned that he had had the map in his possession several years.

"I wait till spirit he move me," the Cherokee explained.

Then he told them of his trip to this part of the country, and that he had gotten off the train at Ryland. The railway schedule of that time conformed to his story.

To the question as to whether he was a single man, he replied affirmatively, but said that his brother was married, and that he had chosen a white woman as his wife. That recollection led him to a tale of land division.

"Indian he say 'Here.' Second Indian he say, 'Here.' White woman she say, 'Here, here, here and here'."

At times while he talked, an old cross-eyed Negro servant at the home stopped near the Indian to stare at him. She did not like his looks and, apparently, that feeling was returned, for John shifted nervously whenever he spied her, evidencing that crossed eyes were an ill omen to his people.

The Cherokee was easily the heaviest sleeper in the Cullom home that night, but he was up with the sun the next morning. An early breakfast, and he and Mr. Cullom were off to hunt the pot of gold that Indian ancestors said was buried generations ago.

Consulting his map at intervals the visitor walked slowly from tree to tree about the immense lawn. Finally, he stopped, grunted, and pointed. There on a huge oak, only a few yards from the house, was an oddly-shaped mark, cut in the trunk so that the bark, during the many years since it was chopped there, had curled in at its edges.

Without more ado, he headed almost directly north, talking freely as he found successive signs of the trail. In a grove of trees still within view of the house, he found a larger mark, plainly the shape of a human foot. There he turned at right angles, continuing until he came to a scrubby

growth of timber. He indicated small mounds in the underbrush, signifying that no trees had been there when the gold was buried, and followed them to the forest beyond.

A few feet in the wood, he came to the largest tree they had encountered on their course, which had led them meanderingly for two or three miles, but never a great distance from the Cullom Home. Marks on this giant were more numerous, of odder shapes, and located nearer the ground.

For a time, the Indian stared in silence. His talkative mood of the early morning was gone.

After several minutes of deep study he said, "I go away. I come back."

That was all. He departed without giving Mr. Cullom even the slightest hint as to what he had read from those characters left by his ancestors.

Perhaps they told him the gods had decreed that it should not be touched again by his people."

Anyway, he faded out of the picture as quietly as he had appeared. No one saw him come; no one saw him go.

But he has not returned, so far as Mr. and Mrs. Cullom know. If he came back and dug up the gold, he concealed all evidence because a close watch for such a move was kept.

As the years pass, perhaps he is waiting for the spirit to move him. Only Indians can tell.

