Indian Camp

Ernest Hemingway · 1924

Nick, his father, and Uncle George cross the lake before dawn to an Indian camp where a woman has been two days in labor. The story that opens the Nick Adams cycle, and one of the most quietly devastating eight minutes in American fiction.

Performed exactly as Hemingway published it in 1924. We do not alter the author's words.

LISTEN FOR

— Two boats, and the other one always ahead in the mist: Uncle George is apart from Nick and his father from the first paragraph to the last question about him.

— What the doctor says to Nick and what he says to George: the explanation of labor in the shanty, and 'That's one for the medical journal' after.

— The husband in the upper bunk: the text mentions him four times before the lamp is lifted, so count what we are told about him and when.

— Nick's feelings are named only twice: once about his curiosity during the stitches, and once in the boat, in the last sentence.

THE PEOPLE, AS THE BOOK NAMES THEM

Nick	the boy
His Father	the doctor
The Two Indians	one rows Nick and his father; the young Indian rows Uncle George
Uncle George	smoking a cigar in the dark
An Old Woman	in the doorway, holding a lamp
A Young Indian Woman	two days trying to have her baby
Her Husband	in the upper bunk · an ax wound, three days old

THE PLACES

Walloon Lake · St. Ignace

CHAPTERS, WITH THEIR TIMES IN THE VIDEO

0:00	The lake shore, before dawn
0:55	Across the bay
1:30	The Indian camp
1:51	Inside the shanty
4:15	The operation
6:29	The upper bunk
7:10	Daylight, the logging road
8:06	Sunrise, the lake

WORDS AND THINGS, FROM THE MARGIN

Uncle George Hemingway had an uncle George. The doctor is drawn from his father, Dr. Clarence Hemingway, an Oak Park physician.

Bark-peelers Workers who stripped hemlock bark for the tanneries — hemlock tannin cured leather.

An ax wound Three days old. The nearest doctor lives across the lake.

Anaesthetic Ether and chloroform had been in surgical use since the 1840s. The doctor has brought none.

Scrubbing Antiseptic surgery — hands, instruments boiled — dates from Lister, 1867; the doctor observes it even here.

Interne The older spelling of intern — a junior doctor in training.

St. Ignace Across the Straits of Mackinac, on the Upper Peninsula — the nurse would come by ferry; there was no bridge until 1957.

A Caesarian with a jack-knife A jack-knife is a folding pocket knife. Tapered gut leaders are fishing tackle — the fine catgut lengths that join line to hook.

PASSAGES TO HEAR AGAIN

"Oh, Daddy, can't you give her something to make her stop screaming?" asked Nick. "No. I haven't any anaesthetic," his father said. "But her screams are not important. I don't hear them because they are not important."

Inside the shanty; the first thing Nick asks for, and the doctor's whole answer.

"The husband in the upper bunk rolled over against the wall."

The sentence that follows the doctor's answer about the screams.

"He was feeling exalted and talkative as football players are in the dressing room after a game."

After the operation, just before the doctor turns to the upper bunk.

"Is dying hard, Daddy?" "No, I think it's pretty easy, Nick. It all depends."

The last exchange on the logging road, before the boat.

"In the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure that he would never die."

The last sentence.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The doctor tells Nick 'You don't know' and then explains labor. Read his explanation again. Which words in it are about the woman, and which about the baby?
2. What does Uncle George do in this story, from the first paragraph to the last? Make the list, and say where the text puts him each time.
3. Compare what the doctor says about the screams to Nick with what he says to George after the operation. Keep to his own words.
4. The husband in the upper bunk is mentioned four times before the doctor lifts the blanket. Find each one. What is he doing in each?
5. Who laughs in this story, and at what? Who smiles?
6. The doctor says 'Take Nick out of the shanty, George' and the next sentence is 'There was no need of that.' What does the text say Nick saw, and from where?
7. On the walk back Nick asks a run of questions. List them in order with his father's answer to each. Which answer is the longest, and which is a single word?
8. Set the last sentence beside what the text says Nick saw in the upper bunk. What does the story put between them, in order: the road, the questions, the sun, the bass, the water?

"Indian Camp," Transatlantic Review, Paris, April 1924; collected in In Our Time, 1925. Public domain in the United States.
Produced by a human who read the book. With help from computers, like everything these days.
stagedBooks · stagedbooks.com