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Professional and Moral Training of a Young Boy

The passage from *Indian Camp* describes Nick's initial reaction to entering the shanty where his father is to assist in a woman's delivery. The scene depicted is intense and confusing for young Nick, but he puts on a brave face to appear strong for his father. It is Nick's first time seeing anything like this, as his unfamiliarity contrasts with his father's cool detachment. This passage is a pivotal moment that represents the calm before the storm and is the last moment of Nick's innocence. Nick watches his father to shape his understanding of the world around him. His father operates as someone who has seen medical emergencies many times, and thus, he replaces empathy with an indifferent bedside manner. Nick's father's speech and mannerisms expose his son to rationality and professionalism while also revealing the father's underlying misogyny and racism.

In the passage, Nick absorbs his father's actions and admires the precision with which he preps for the surgery. The ritualistic practices of the doctor began when Nick's father "poured about half the water out of the big kettle into a basin. Into the water left in the kettle he put several things he unwrapped from a handkerchief" (17). Nick sees a practiced and authoritative professional readying his tools. The reverent way that Nick observes his father as he "began to scrub his hands in the basin of hot water with a cake of soap he had brought" (17) shows a keen apprentice trying to learn all the steps of a trade from his master. Even as he prepares, Nick's father continues to educate his son. "While he washed his hands very carefully and thoroughly, he talked" (17).

His father explains to Nick, "What she is going through is called being in labor." (16), but he does not direct this to the woman nor the other members of her family gathered around. He is demonstrating his knowledge by describing the situation to his son. Standing removed from his patient, he demonstrates his competence and authority to his audience. Nick's father provides Nick with significant information about the woman without bothering to learn her name or even speak to her. This detail confirms Nick's father's indifference to this indigenous woman's identity. He sees her merely as someone who is sick and believes he must play the role of the great white saviour.

Nick seems quite aware of the woman's cries and asks his father, "Oh, Daddy, can't you give her something to make her stop screaming?" (16). This shows that Nick also sees his father as the only person in the room who has the power and capacity to bring her some comfort and relief. Nick's father pragmatically replies, "No. I haven't any anesthetic, but her screams are not important. I don't hear them because they're not important" (16). While this might represent a keen focus on the real problem at hand, the dismissive way he explains this to his son is more likely to be subconscious racism and misogyny since this is a woman and a woman of colour at that.

The command, "those must boil" (17), to no one in particular, is for the woman in the kitchen helping with the situation. He never speaks to either woman directly, nor do they ever talk to him, making it clear that they live on entirely different planes of existence. Nick's father speaks only to Nick and sometimes Uncle George, further separating him from the people he has come to help.

The purpose of the journey was for Nick's father to enlighten his son by exposing him to the realities of the world. However, Nick's takeaway from this experience is not just his father's

benevolence but also the deep-seated prejudices he harbours. This realization dawns on Nick, much like the understanding that his father's hands, which he admires for their healing capabilities, are also capable of gory acts.

Works Cited

Hemingway, Ernest. “Indian Camp.” *In Our Time.* Simon & Schuster, 2003, pp. 15-19.