HIGHLIGHTS:

- Mr. Lonesinger was born on the Red Pheasant Reserve in 1888. He attended school and then began farming, married and moved to the Sweet Grass Reserve. He is a good singer and storyteller. (For biography see IH-052, p. 11).
- Story of the wicked old man, a Woods Cree, who turned his Plains Cree son-in-law into a bone spirit, and how his son-in-law got his revenge.

Port Carlton was a very important trading post. Before there were any white men in our land, Indians from all directions would gather at Pay-ho-nanik twice each year to sell pemmican and to buy their winter supply of goods. They camped around the forest in large numbers, and they stayed for days.

From the north had come a Woods Cree known as Wicked Old Man. He had a wife and two daughters, the youngest of which was very beautiful. Each spring and each fall Wicked Old Man
would come with his family to Fort Carlton and camp for days.

The Plains Cree did not like Wicked Old Man as he was mean and wicked, as his name implied. The Plains Cree were in camp at Fort Carlton one fall when the Woods Cree moved in, led by Wicked Old Man. The Plains Cree watched from their camp at the top of the hill as the Woods Cree set up camp below them.

The Wicked Old Man, with his wife and two daughters carrying large bundles on their backs, went to the trading post. They had tanned moose hides and pemmican to trade. Two Plains Cree boys, fascinated by the beauty of Wicked Old Man's youngest daughter, went to the store. They stood around pretending to look at things while Wicked Old Man did his business. These two Plains Cree were cousins, the youngest of which was very handsome and a very neat dresser. He was, in fact, the dandy of the camp. They had not been in the store very long when the older cousin noticed his cousin and Wicked Old Man's youngest daughter smile at each other. This was a sign that they liked each other and were willing to be lovers. The older cousin pretended not to see them smile at each other. Soon after, the Plains Cree boys returned to camp. As they walked home the oldest cousin said, "Wicked Old Man has a pretty young daughter. I could have the older one for a girl friend if I so wished. But no, I am afraid of Wicked Old Man. It is said he has a very strong medicine, and it is bad medicine." Arriving at camp, the boys went their separate ways.

Plains Cree, at the time, lived in buffalo hide lodges.

The Woods Cree from the north, lived in birch bark lodges.

After the younger cousin had eaten his evening meal he remained very quiet. No doubt he thought of the beautiful girl who had smiled at him earlier in the evening. He was an only child and therefore pampered by his parents. He was a spoiled brat. When his father noticed him being so quiet he asked his son, "Is there something wrong? Has anyone said anything out of the way to you?" "No, no," replied the lad, "it is just that I saw a very beautiful girl in the camp of the Woods Cree and would like to marry her. She is the daughter of Wicked Old Man. Wicked Old man has two daughters. It is the youngest one I would like to marry."

It so happened the young man had a very fine hunting horse. The storekeeper had on numerous occasions offered to trade the boy 4 or even 5 horses for the hunting horse. Now the boy asked his father to take his hunting horse and offer it to Wicked Old Man in exchange for the hand of his daughter in marriage. "Hey, hey, hey," said the old man. "I do not like this. Wicked Old Man is a very bad man and people are afraid to have anything to do with him. But if you want it that way, I will take your horse and go see Wicked Old Man."

At that time the best horses were kept close to the
lodges for fear of raiding Blackfeet. The horse, therefore, was right beside the lodges. It was dark when the father of the young Plains Cree boy led the hunting horse to Wicked Old Man's lodge. "Tawow, tawow, relative," said Wicked Old Man, and the Plains Cree walked into his lodge. "First we will smoke," he said. "Then you will state your business. There has got to be a reason for your visit." "Yes," replied the Plains Cree, "first we will smoke, then I will tell you the reason for my visit." And so they talked as they smoked. After they had smoked the Plains Cree said, "Wicked Old Man, outside beside your lodge, I have brought the best hunting horse we have in our camp. Many times we have been offered 4, 5, or even 6 horses for it. He is a fine hunting horse. This horse I offer you if your youngest daughter will become the wife of my son, whom you all saw at the trading post today."

The Woods Cree girl giggled and when the Plains Cree looked her way she was blushing. They refilled the pipe again and had another smoke while Wicked Old Man turned to the Plains Cree and said, "I agree, but on one condition. When we leave, having to go back north, my new son-in-law will come with us. I want to teach him bush-hunting. We love our daughter and want her to stay with us for one winter after her marriage." "I am sure my son will agree to that," said the Plains Cree as he went out the door to go home.

At home, he told his son of the conditions Wicked Old Man had set. "This is what I was afraid of," he said to his son. "Every day you will be made to hunt, skin game, cut wood. Wicked Old Man will do no work and expect you to support him and his family. But if this is what you want, I have no way of stopping you. Early in the morning our band moves to a place called Min-asqwayas where another band will gather to agree on wintering places for the numerous bands. You will stay here for a while and then go north with Wicked Old Man when he is ready to go."

When his only son was younger, the Plains Cree had made him what was called Pah-kay-chi-haywo. It was a dish carved out of wood with designs carved all around it and it was used for gambling. I suppose like the modern day Crown and Anchor. Boys would sit in a circle, spinning the dish for long periods of time and having lots of fun. Now the Plains Cree told his son, "You will leave with us the game, the dish I made for you. You will have no time to play with it. When you go north you will spend your time tanning hides, cutting wood and hunting. Your dish will only get you into trouble," he told his son.

Very early next morning the Plains Cree broke camp and made a move to a place west of Saskatoon called Min-asqwayas. The Cree boy also moved to the lodge of Wicked Old Man and, without his parents' knowledge, took his dish with him.

When the Cree band arrived at Min-asqwayas the cousin of Wicked Old Man's son-in-law went to visit his younger cousin.
When he was told his cousin had married Wicked Old Man's daughter and had gone north, the cousin was very sad and said to his uncle, "We may never see him again. Wicked Old Man is a very bad man. He has bad medicine and it is very strong."

A day or so after the Plains Cree had left Fort Carlton the Woods Cree moved back north, led by Wicked Old Man. When camp was made for a meal, the Plains Cree boy would invite the boys and they would play with his dish. After travelling north for many days, the band camped for several days and the Woods Cree hunted and brought into camp fresh meat. But the Plains Cree boy did not go hunting. He and some Woods Cree boys spent all their time playing with the dish and having lots of fun.

One day the band separated and moved away. The Plains Cree boy and several others had been playing away from the camp, and came home one evening to find all the people gone. The Woods Cree boys knew where to go home, and showed the Plains Cree boy where Wicked Old Man usually spent the winter. The boy went in that direction. He walked and walked and it was very late in the fall; snow or a storm was expected at any time. It grew dusk and then dark. The boy walked on. He was now getting very hungry. Long after dark and having walked a long time, he came to the top of a hill. In the distance and away to the east he could see a campfire. He had found the camp of his father-in-law, Wicked Old Man. He entered the lodge, cold, hungry and tired, but nobody made him welcome. Nobody offered to feed him. He had angered Wicked Old Man for playing with his dish and not doing any work. Wicked Old Man had told his daughter not to feed her husband. He threatened to kill both her and her husband if she gave him anything to eat. "Perhaps," he said, "he can find some way that that dish of his will feed him," and so the boy went to bed hungry. While in bed, hungry, he made up his mind he would take his gun and hunt the next day, then he may soon have plenty to eat. His father had given him a gun.

Next morning Wicked Old Man and his family had breakfast, but for the Plains boy there was no food. So he set out to hunt. There again, he had no luck. He saw plenty of game. When he was about to shoot a moose, a tapping on a tree would scare the moose away. When he was about to shoot a rabbit, someone coughed and the rabbit would scamper away in fright. All day this went on. Once when he was about to shoot a grouse, someone whistled and the grouse flew away. He returned that night a very hungry boy. Again he went to bed hungry. This went on for many days. Once in a while his wife would sneak him a little food, but she was very scared her father would find out and kill them both. And so the boy stayed hungry and was fast losing weight. At last he was so weak he could not comb his own hair. Why he did not go home, south to his parents when he still had the strength, is because the medicine of Wicked Old Man was strong. This was also the reason he could not kill a thing when hunting.

It was now the middle of winter and the Plains Cree boy was so
weak he could not walk. He crawled on his hands and knees when going outside. Finally he was so weak and thin he could not even crawl. When Wicked Old Man saw this one morning he said to his family, "This morning we are going away. This useless man we will leave here. I have made arrangements for him to be picked up later." Before they left his wife made him a bed under a big tree, helped by her sister who felt sorry for the boy. They cut much firewood and placed it where the boy could reach it. They also made him a fire. They left and the boy found himself alone and helpless in the woods. Late that night very fine snow was falling, and the boy kept a small fire burning. When he thought he heard someone shout a war cry in the distance, he listened, thinking help might be on the way. Again he heard the war cry. This time it was very close to him. He knew it could not possibly be the war cry of a brave. It was the war cry of the bone spirit, sent by Wicked Old Man to pick him up. He was not wrong. Next thing, he saw a bone spirit sitting on a long log across the fire from him. After staring at one another for a short time, the bone spirit jumped over the fire and caught the boy by the wrist. The boy remembered no more.

When he came to, he found himself in the camp of the bone spirits. Wicked Old Man had succeeded in turning him into a bone spirit. The bone spirit he was with led him to the door of a very large lodge, where his lips were rubbed with some kind of grease after it had been purified by sweetgrass smoke. He felt much better and a little stronger. Then he heard the bone spirit who had found him say, "Father, I found this boy almost starved to death and brought him home as my adopted brother. Give him more to eat, he is almost starved." "You did the right thing," said the old bone spirit, as he purified more grease and rubbed it on the boy's lips. With each rubbing of grease on his lips, he grew stronger and felt much better. Then he was given a gun, a bone-spirit gun - it was a length of driftwood - and he also was given bone-spirit clothes to wear. As his bone-spirit brother helped him change his clothes, the bone spirit said, "Look Father, he has a dish strapped around his chest." "Do not take it off my son," replied the old bone spirit. "Humans have strong medicine. We cannot afford to do anything against his wishes." So the dish was left there, strapped to the Plains Cree boy's chest. So the boy stayed in the camp of the bone spirits the rest of the winter, and all the next summer. In the fall, the old bone spirit called him over saying, "You may go out at night. Take the new gun we gave you and go where there is no sun, the north. The south is not safe for us bone spirits. Do not go too far in that direction." The boy would go out at night with his bone-spirit gun and sail in the sky over the trees. He would tell the old bone spirit of camps and campfires he had seen in his travels at night.

Meanwhile the parents of the Plains Cree boy arrived at Fort Carlton early in the spring hoping to see their son. They camped with the rest of the band and waited for the Woods
Cree to arrive. They arrived, but Wicked Old Man was not with them. When asked by the Plains Cree why Wicked Old Man did not come, the Woods Cree explained that late last fall Wicked Old Man had moved east to find a wintering place. Perhaps this spring he went to Ah-mah-cao-way-is-pim-oh-in-ihk (Stanley Mission) to do his trading. The parents of the boy and also the cousin were very disappointed at having to go back to the plains without seeing the boy. They had, however, hopes of seeing him in the fall when they returned to Fort Carlton as was their custom. The Woods Cree also moved in.

The young boy felt sure that Wicked Old Man had done something to his cousin and he told his uncle as much. "Uncle," he said, "let us offer the storekeeper four horses to outfit me to go north to look for my cousin. I will find him and bring him back if he is alive. If not, I will at least find out what Wicked Old Man has done to him. Wicked Old Man must have a reason for not wanting to meet us." After being outfitted by the trader, the parents and the cousin set out for the north country to try to find Wicked Old Man. All winter long they moved about in the north without even seeing anyone. They hunted and killed many fur-bearing animals. Towards spring the young cousin said to his uncle, "This morning I will leave on a hunting trip and will not be back till sometime tomorrow. I will take a blanket and some rawhide rope with me." The boy hunted all day, and by nightfall was some distance away from their camp where he prepared to spend the night. He had a small campfire burning when he heard a shot some distance away. Thinking it might be a bone spirit, he became frightened. Again he heard a shot, this time very close to him. Then he heard a familiar sound, "Tut, tut, tut, tut." "My cousin always said 'tut, tut, tut' when he played with his dish," he thought. Then without warning, a bone spirit appeared across the fire from him. "Wicked Old Man must have turned my cousin into a bone spirit," he thought. "This must be him." When he thought the bone spirit was not watching he leaped over the fire in time to catch him by the wrist. The bone spirit was trying in vain to get away but the boy wrapped his blanket around him and tied him up. Then he felt around the bone spirit's chest, and found the dish strapped to his chest. He knew then he had found his cousin.

As it happened, the bone spirits were getting ready to leave, when the old bone spirit said to his adopted son, "You stay awhile son. After the others leave, I want to speak to you." And after the bone spirits left, they were alone. The old bone spirit said to his adopted son, "I have just found out how you became a bone spirit. It was indeed very mean of Wicked Old Man to do that to you. He is misusing the medicine powers we have given him, and now have taken it from him. Someday you will turn into a human and when you do, anything you say will happen to Wicked Old Man and his family. We give you that power. You may now go," said the old bone spirit.

The boy and his bone-spirit cousin stayed all night in the camp and when morning came, the boy carried his cousin on his back and headed back to the camp of his uncle and aunt. His
uncle happened to be outside the lodge when he arrived carrying his bone-spirit cousin. "Uncle," he said, "I have my cousin here with me. Set up the little tent the storekeeper gave us. We will put him there. Also, get out your best medicine."

And for the next few days, they treated the boy with herbs and sweetgrass smoke. In a few days he was eating and was soon able to speak and was gaining weight fast. In time he was back to normal and being himself again.

It was spring again and the four started out for Fort Carlton. "We will cross the river before the ice goes out," they said. Arriving at Fort Carlton they found many Plains Cree already in camp there. They set up camp there, but the son-in-law of Wicked Old Man hid. He did not want people to know he was alive. When his parents and cousin went to the store they had much hide and fur to sell. They settled with the trader who had outfitted them the fall before, since he would not take their horses. When the storekeeper heard the son-in-law of Wicked Old Man was alive, he was surprised. "Wicked Old Man thinks he has killed him," he said. "Hide the boy all summer so that Wicked Old Man will come here this fall. If he does not hide, Wicked Old Man will hear he is alive and will not come this fall." The group then hid themselves all summer. They camped in some hills on the prairie, and when visitors came the boy would hide in some bushes close to their camp. And so they lived. They hunted, made pemmican and tanned hides. They put up berries as they came in season. Then it was fall again and time to go to Fort Carlton.

One day a move was made to Fort Carlton. They timed it so they would arrive very late in the evening. The boy then hid himself in the bushes while his parents set up camp. Later, when it was dark and all was ready, the young boy entered the lodge and told his mother to go over to the lodge of Wicked Old Man and invite them all over for the evening meal. The woman went to the camp of the Woods Cree and entered the lodge of Wicked Old Man and invited them all over to her lodge for a meal of buffalo meat and berries. At once they got ready to leave.

"Find some excuse to hold my wife here for a little while. Tell her you will take her home later."

So Wicked Old Man put on a pretty good show of professed sorrow for his poor son-in-law who had become sick and died in spite of all the things he did for him. His wife also wept as did his daughters. After the meal, Wicked Old Man was in somewhat of a hurry to leave. "We will go home now," he told his family. "It is late." As they were leaving, the woman said to Wicked Old Man's youngest daughter, "Nis-tim, I would like you to stay for a little while - I will walk you home later - as I have a present for you and would also like to have a talk with you." So the girl stayed and they talked of making many pairs of moccasins. Then she presented her daughter-in-law...
with a porcupine tail comb cleaner. She then told her she thought there was no need for her to walk her home, since it was not far and it would be safe to walk home alone. The girl then left the lodge to go home. Just outside the lodge someone put his arms around her from behind and brought her back to the lodge. She tried to fight her way out but in vain. He was stronger and forced her back into the lodge. It was not dark in the lodge and she saw it was her husband. She sat down and wept for joy. She was so happy, she cried hard and long.

Back at the lodge of Wicked Old Man, he waited for his daughter to return. After a while he said to his wife, "Go get your daughter. She is not to spend the night there." The old woman left and returned alone in a short time. "Didn't you bring her?" shouted the Wicked Old Man. "Her husband refuses to let her come," said the old woman. Wicked Old Man became very frightened as he repeated over and over again, "He is alive. He is alive." "You shut up," said his wife. "He is alive and no doubt will take revenge and you will drag me and your oldest daughter into it. You are a coward and this time you have met your match. Running will do no good, Wicked Old Man." No one in Wicked Old Man's lodge slept well that night. From time to time, Wicked Old Man was heard to say, "He is alive."

After they had eaten next morning Wicked Old Man sent his older daughter to go fetch his son-in-law. "And your sister too. I have a present to give them." The girl left and was back soon. "Are they coming?" asked Wicked Old Man. "Yes," replied the girl. "You will be very surprised to see my brother-in-law. He is a handsome man." In a short time a very handsome Plains Cree walked into Wicked Old Man's lodge. He had his wife with him. "My son-in-law," cried Wicked Old Man, "can you find it in your heart to spare my life?" "No," shouted the boy, "you are a coward and a miserable man. Did I beg for mercy when you left your camp for me to starve and freeze to death? Wicked Old Man, you do not deserve any kindness and will not get any." He then told his wife to pick up the present they had come for, and started for their lodge. Near their lodge the boy stopped and asked his wife, "Do you love your father?" "No," she said. "Do you love your mother?" he asked. Again she said, "No." "Do you love your sister?" Again the answer was, "No." The young Plains Cree was remembering what the old bone spirit had told him a long time ago. "Wicked Old Man," he said, "you will become paralyzed, you will not be able to speak. Also, you will not be able to hold your water, and when the snow comes and the cold weather gets here you will freeze to death. As for you my mother-in-law, the same thing will happen to you later on in the winter." Then he and his wife went into his parents lodge. They had not been there long when the older daughter of Wicked Old Man walked in. "Sister, come quick," she said. "You come too, brother-in-law. Our father is sick. He cannot move and continually passes his water." "We will go see your father,"
said the Plains Cree boy to his wife. They could see the old man was sick when they arrived. "He cannot be helped," the young man told his mother-in-law. "This is brought about by the spirits whose power he has abused. Wicked Old Man is paying for his sins." He turned to his wife saying, "Let's go home now."

Wicked Old Man's wife, helped by her older daughter, then picked up and moved north where the condition of the old man grew worse and, when colder weather came, he froze to death. One after another, he, his wife and daughter also became sick and also froze to death.

After Wicked Old Man left Fort Carlton to move north, the Plains Cree boy with his wife and parents and also his cousin were at the store. Then the storekeeper said to him, "Everything that has happened to Wicked Old Man and his family and also what will happen to them...they had it coming. Where you hid all summer," he said to the boy, "is a big hill. I am going to give that hill a name. From now on, it will be now known as Kah-kah-yase Ah-chin-ahs (Cheating Hill)."

Ever since then that hill has been known to the Plains Cree as Kah-kah-yase Ah-chin-ahs. That hill is not far from Asquith, near Saskatoon. There is another hill closer to Saskatoon, that we call Mih-sih-sahk-ah-chin-ahs. To the white men it is called Bull Dog Hill. The white people use that hill to ski in the winter.

That is the end of the story of Wicked Old Man.
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